

The Syī-gūng 僖公 Transition

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Abstract. George Kennedy inaugurated the rational study of the Chūn/Chyōu (CC) by suggesting that the completeness of CC data for the deaths of non-Lǚ rulers need not be a coded message from some later moral arbiter, but may simply reflect the information available to the Lǚ court, and that this in turn might depend on the quality of interstate communications.¹ I here develop this suggestion, and argue for a turning point under Syī-gūng 僖公 (r 0659-0627), within Kennedy’s “gradually widening horizon” – a change, part of which indeed entailed a wider geographical awareness, in the position of Lǚ as one of the Spring and Autumn states.

Environment. CC flood and drought entries suggest a pattern of alternating wet and dry climate periods, with a dry phase beginning in 0663, peaking in 0639, and ending in 0602.² Syī-gūng’s reign falls within this dry period. With it came increased activity of the Dí 狄 peoples, who made incursions into Jīn and Chí between 0652 and 0612. Climate change may have been pushing an ecological zone, and its way of life, further south. The resulting threat may have tended to bring the Sinitic states together.

Military Collaboration. At the same time, the large southern state of Chǔ was pressing northward, and the large states Chí and Jīn took the lead in resisting that pressure.³ With its own interest thus overborne by a perceived Sinitic common interest, Lǚ lost much of the diplomatic and military leeway it had previously had.

Society. Internal social pressures also affected the Lǚ rulership. Syī-gūng had filled major military and diplomatic roles himself or delegated them to his brothers (gūngdǐ 公子; sons of the previous ruler); Gūngdǐ Swèi 公子遂 was the chief court figure in Syī-gūng’s reign and into the next. But three clans deriving from Syī-gūng’s grandfather Hwán-gūng were beginning to be important. Beginning with the next reign, men of these clans (the Jīsūn 季孫 and others) became prominent at court; in 0517, about a century later, following a failed attempt by the center to reassert itself, the Jì clan sent Jāu-gūng into exile. The political periphery increasingly dominated.

Roads. The growing external knowledge noted by Kennedy implies better road communications. The CC first mentions central Jīn in 0657 (Syī 2). The southern gate of the Lǚ capital was rebuilt in 0640 (Syī 20) “along new lines” (syīn 新). The CC first mentions distant western Chín in 0632 (Syī 28) – eight years after that rebuilding.

¹Kennedy **Interpretation**.

²For the detailed argument, see Brooks **Climate**.

³Due to the military power of those states; see further Brooks **League**. For the myth that such leadership was explicitly delegated by the Jōu King, see Brooks **Hegemon**.

Diplomatic Awareness. Kennedy notes Lǚ's diplomatic opening toward the west.⁴ Lǚ's earlier orientation had been toward the south (the S_z 泗 river, its major waterway, flowed south to the Hwái), and specifically toward Chǔ. Chǔ (then called Jīng 荆) is first mentioned in the CC in 0684 as attacking Tsài (south of Lǚ). In 0678 it attacked Jǜng (west of Lǚ). In 0671 it sent an envoy to Lǚ, and in 0666 it again invaded Jǜng. In 0632, in the major battle at Chǜngpú 郟濮, Lǚ was allied with Chǔ, not with the northern states Chí, Jīn, and Chín. This southward focus continued: Lǚ Syāng-gūng (r 0572-0542) personally visited Chǔ, and on his return built a palace in the Chǔ style. By contrast, Yēn 燕, the large state lying north of Chí, is not mentioned until 0544,⁵ and then only as a place of refuge for a Chí nobleman. The rest of the CC mentions contacts between Chí and Yēn, but no diplomatic contact between Lǚ and Yēn.

The early southern focus of Lǚ is still visible in later historical memory. The only figure in the Lǚ elite lore tradition⁶ who *predates* Syī-gūng (apart from the legendary Bwó-yí and Shú-chí) is the Chǔ minister Lǜngyǐn Dǜ-wǎn (mentioned in Jwāng 28, 0666), whereas the first *northern* figure on the list is known only *from* that reign (Níng Wǜdǜ, in Syī 28, 0632). No figure known to be in the Lǚ lore repertoire is from Jīn. It was in Syī-gūng's time that Lǚ's later sense of past personages took its first shape.⁷

Cultural Contacts. The verb chǐ 乞 “ask for,” used of a covenant (1 case) or a borrowed host 師 (5 cases), is first found in the CC during Syī-gūng's reign (earlier entries use only the verb chyóu 求 “seek,” and only for such ceremonial items as a chariot, a wife, or a burial gift). In this reign also, the CC first records cultural features which may have been introduced to Lǚ then, such as buildings (palace 宮, shrine 廟, and Great Shrine 大廟), the border 郊 and sān-wàng 三望 sacrifices, and bone divination 卜; the last three first appeared in 0629 (Syī 31). These novelties suggest borrowing from the northern states; in the case of bone divination, from Shāng culture as preserved in Sùng. Bone divination may have been encountered on the occasion of a diplomatic contact with Sùng. Such occasions occurred in winter 0638 and in winter 0633; of the two, the latter (as nearer to 0629) is perhaps the more likely. Through these local borrowings, Lǚ was beginning to function as a *culturally northern* state.

Jū-hóu 諸侯 in the CC refers to those present at a previous meeting; it is clerical shorthand for “the said lords.” It first occurs in Syī-gūng's time, and was useful since from the 2 or 3 of earlier times, there were as many as 12 participants at meetings in Syī-gūng's time. The usage also recurs in later reigns.⁸

⁴Kennedy **Interpretation** 96f.

⁵Recorded as “Northern Yēn” 北燕, to distinguish it from another Yēn further south.

⁶For a study of part of this inventory, see Brooks **Lore**.

⁷Syī-gūng himself was among those personages. An exaggerated account of his military exploits in Hwái is given in Shī 299, probably based on CC 5/16:5, when Syī-gūng was indeed in the Hwái area, but only as the leader of one force in an allied army under Chí Hwán-gūng. Syī-gūng is specified in the final celebratory poem (Shī 300C5-6, as “son of Jwāng-gūng”) of the four “Odes of Lǚ,” Shī 297-300). The Máu commentary makes him the subject of all four.

⁸Under the next reign, that of Chǜng-gūng, it is used three times, but not in reference to a earlier list. These meetings were at Hù 扈, a Jǜng town here Lǚ rulers had met with Jīn or Chí. All Chǜng-gūng events at Hù use jū-hóu, for a reason that now seems to be lost.

Sense of Time. From Syī-gūng on, we see in the CC entries a shift in the sense of time and time transitions. One mark of a heightened sense of time sequence is nǎi 乃 “thereupon,” (first used in 0629, Syī 31) and a greater use of swèi 遂 “subsequently” (first in 0704, Hwán 8, but 32% of all uses in Syī-gūng’s reign). Causation appears at this time, with the only use of shǐ 使 as “cause to do” (0646, Syī 14); all other uses of this word mean “send on a mission.” The term gù 故 “cause, reason” is used for the first and only time in 0543 (Syāng 31), in the phrase Sùng dzāi gù 宋災故 “because of the calamity in Sùng.” As to causation, in Syī-gūng’s reign we find for the first time entries reporting an *interrupted* or *failed* outcome, several with the verb jí 及 “reaching to the point of” – the unsuccessful pursuit of a Chí force in 0634 (Syī 26: 弗及 “[but] did not catch up to them”), or the unaccepted sacrifice of 0629 (Syī 31).⁹ Apart from an increase in narrative vividness, these examples attest a greater awareness of time sequences, and of connections or failed connections between them. The pressure of political and military events, a need for concrete results, and thus a greater demand for accountable performance, may be reflected in these usages.

Summary. Several factors give the reign of Syī-gūng a distinctive quality. Among them are: (1) a dry climate phase, leading to northern pressure on the Sinitic states; (2) northward pressure from Chǔ; (3) a concerted response from the Sinitic states, which involved Lǚ more closely in northern culture and in northern political initiatives;¹⁰ in this situation (4) the stronger rulers gained a new role in coordinating responses, and in each state, able figures outside the ruler lineage had wider opportunities. The results were (5) dispersion of power within states, (6) a sharper sense of time and urgency, (7) a keener awareness of outcomes, successful and otherwise, and (8) more frequent interstate contacts, some initiated by Lǚ, and others enforced by the larger situation.

Syī-gūng’s reign marks the end of the period when Lǚ could pursue a relatively independent policy within its immediate region, and the beginning of a period dominated by Jīn: a period in which the identity and historical memory of Lǚ, as one of the Sinitic group of states, took a more definite shape.¹¹ Externally, it coincided with the emergence of a mature Chinese multi-state system, a century after the Jōu system (whatever its nature) had been disarticulated by the Jōu collapse.

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⁹For *coverb* jí in the CC text, see Brooks **Distancing**.

¹⁰For the future of one such response, over the next period, see Brooks **League**.

¹¹For that dynamic, see again Brooks **Lore**.