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The Historical Value of the Chun/Chyou

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The Historical Value of the Chūn/Chyōu

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Abstract. The Spring and Autumn *period* (late 08th to early 05th centuries) is of interest in its own right, and for Chinese historiography in general. I here argue that the Chūn/Chyōu (CC) or “Spring and Autumn” *text*, ostensibly a Lǚ court chronicle, is the best, and the only primary, source for the period.¹ I also dispute the competing claim of the Dzwǒ Jwàn (DJ), which some view as a fuller, and a more accurate, account of the Spring and Autumn centuries.²

Speeches. Entries in the CC chronicle are terse.³ The DJ, however, in its comments on the CC, and even more in the narratives which some believe are based on archival records,⁴ uses extended prose of a type not otherwise known before the 04th century, the time when many scholars agree it was compiled.⁵ What could be the precedent for these DJ speeches? For the speeches recorded on inscriptions, it suffices to suppose a court scribe at a stylized court session. In length and type, and in their setting, the DJ speeches depart radically from this precedent. For the DJ speeches 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, beside every roadside *between* battles, and up certain trees during the wanderings of Chūng-ǎr 重耳. Some DJ speeches cannot have been *overheard*, let alone *transcribed*, at the time. They appear to be on the same level of reality as the dramatic but surely invented speeches in the Shǐ Jì, and to serve a similar narrative function.

¹CC is commented on by DJ, Gūngyáng Jwàn, and Gǔlyáng Jwàn, and so is presumptively older than those texts. The idea that Confucius wrote CC as a set of coded moral judgements appears as early as the DJ (Chǐng 14:4; see also MC 3B9, from c0253); it has tended to discredit CC as a historical source. That the CC is merely the chronicle of Lǚ was discussed by Gù Jyě-gāng and Chyén Sywǎn-túng in 1925 (GSB 1/275f). The judgement theory of CC was refuted by Kennedy **Interpretation** (1942); the reinstatement attempted in Gassmann **Cheng** (1988) seems to me to prove the opposite. For judgements made by the Lǚ court *of the time*, which are thus quite 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 current position is that taken by 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 the opinions of Kamata (who suggested c0320) and Yǎng (0403/0389). For a closer estimate, based on parallel development in other 04c texts, see now Brooks **Heaven**.

Grammar. The CC shows subtle grammatical evolution over its three-century time depth, whereas the grammar of the DJ is largely homogeneous. One change in grammar within CC is the ratio between postverbal and preverbal placement of certain types of adverb, such as the phrase *dě Jīn* 自晉 “from Jīn” (or another state). These adverbs of “place from which” prefer the *postverbal* position in the early CC, but have become commoner in *preverbal* position at the end of the work. This seems to be part of a long-term tendency in Chinese, in which all postverbal elements save verb objects (except where the verb object is included in a coverb phrase, in which case they too are affected) tend to migrate to preverbal position. This is a typological process rather than a lexical detail. The process has continued since the Spring and Autumn period. It is almost complete in Mandarin (some grammarians of modern Chinese even deny the existence of postverbal adverbs altogether).⁶ The CC thus has the linguistic character of a text compiled over a considerable time, and reflecting gradual deep changes in language structure. The DJ, except for its quotations, suggests no such evolutionary picture; it has the linguistic character of a text which was composed at essentially one stage in the larger evolution.

Name and Title Conventions

Clan Names. Relatives of the Lǚ ruler are first referred to in the CC as *Gūngdǔ* “ruler’s son” or *Gūngsūn* “ruler’s descendant” plus a personal name. Only years later do the descendants of these people acquire a more distinctive clan name such as *Dzàng* or *Jīsūn*. I believe this plausibly reflects the actual origin of Lǚ clans in Spring and Autumn times, and shows how the clans gradually became established. DJ does not follow CC practice. Instead, it consistently refers to these people by *what will become* their eventual clan name. The DJ thus seems to be unaware of the probable evolution of Lǚ clan structures, and refers to persons in a *historically retrospective* way.

Posthumous Epithets. Close study of the CC shows that Lǚ rulers were given a posthumous epithet after death but before burial. In the CC, the notices of their burial, and any subsequent references to them, exclusively use that posthumous epithet, which was presumably a term of sacrificial address. This is a perfectly intelligible ritual convention. By contrast, the DJ refers to some Lǚ rulers by their posthumous epithets *before those epithets would have been given*: at their birth (*Yīn-gūng* and *Hwán-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 must represent instead *retrospective* usage, the usage of people for whom the posthumous name was the customary identification. In short, they represent the usage of later historians. We ourselves are thoroughly accustomed to this convention, but that does not make it less anachronistic in a text which claims to reflect the Spring and Autumn period itself.

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 seems more realistic to regard certain modern expressions of place (from, to, or at which), degree, and duration as fossilized postverbal adverbs surviving from an earlier stage of the language. Classical and mediaeval Chinese texts generally show the continued vitality of postverbal adverbs. I am grateful to E Bruce Brooks for this information.

Jū-hóu 諸侯. In the inscriptions of the period, this term refers to Spring and Autumn rulers generally: the nominal feudatories of Jōu.⁷ In the CC, 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 who were 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. The DJ does not confine itself to the meaning or the chronological range of the CC usage. There can be no quarrel with DJ usage as such, but it is obvious that it here diverges from one of its presumptive sources: the archives of Lǚ.

Historiography

The Bà Theory. Like the Bamboo Annals, which supposedly represents the state of Jìn, the CC does not mention any formal conferral of hegemony on Jìn,⁸ though to judge from the detailed CC entries for that year (5/28:1-20), Lǚ 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, Lǚ 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) a series 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 this bà theory not as part of the actual history of Spring and Autumn, but as a retrospective historical construct, a construct which seems to have been fashioned by the theorists and 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): 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, at 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 organized and newly militant steppe cultures to the north. The DJ is apparently projecting this polarized 04c situation onto the more ethnically diverse, and more geographically mixed, Spring and Autumn age. That is, it is not giving a factual account of the Spring and Autumn centuries as such; rather, it is imposing a later perception, a perception contemporary with the DJ itself, on those earlier centuries.

⁷I am grateful to several members of the WSW E-mail discussion list for information on inscriptional occurrences of the term jū-hóu.

⁸Late 04c Jìn (as reflected in the Bamboo Annals) had a quite different theory about the origin of Jìn hegemony; see Brooks **Hegemon**.

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 seems to have been (1) written in a relatively consistent linguistic medium, (2) over a relatively short time period, and specifically (3) later than the Spring and Autumn period. It presents the Spring and Autumn centuries in terms which were meaningful to a concerned 04th century reader. It addresses theory issues, such as the center/periphery polarity and the hegemon concept, which were major concerns of the 04th century, but seem to have been unknown earlier. The DJ thus emerges as a work of its own time, and that time seems to be the 04th century.⁹

The DJ view has become the standard interpretation of Spring and Autumn history. Historians will always have to take account of it as such. But for a true understanding of the Spring and Autumn centuries as they appeared to the people who lived in them, I suggest that the CC must be our preferred source.

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⁹See n2 above, and Goldin **Emmentaler**.