The Syi-gung Transition

A. Taeko Brooks, University of Massachusetts - Amherst

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/a_brooks/15/
The Syī-gūng 僧公 Transition
A Taeko Brooks 白妙子
University of Massachusetts at Amherst
WSWG Note 134 (16 Apr 1997)

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-Lū rulers need not be a coded message from some later moral arbiter, but may simply reflect the information available to the Lū 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 僧公 (r 0659-0627), within Kennedy’s “gradually widening horizon” – a change, part of which indeed entailed a wider geographical awareness, in the position of Lū 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 Chì 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 Chū was pressing northward, and the large states Chì and Jīn took the lead in resisting that pressure.³ With its own interest thus overborne by a perceived Sinitic common interest, Lū lost much of the diplomatic and military leeway it had previously had.

Society. Internal social pressures also affected the Lū rulership. Syī-gūng had filled major military and diplomatic roles himself or delegated them to his brothers (gūngdz 子; sons of the previous ruler); Gūngdz Swēi 公子緯 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 孫 and others) became prominent at court; in 0517, about a century later, following a failed attempt by the center to reassert itself, the Jī 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 Lū capital was rebuilt in 0640 (Syī 20) “along new lines” (syīn 新). The CC first mentions distant western Chīn 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 Jōū King, see Brooks Hegemon.
Diplomatic Awareness. Kennedy notes Lú’s diplomatic opening toward the west; Lú’s earlier orientation had been toward the south (the Sž river, its major waterway, flowed south to the Hwái), and specifically toward Chú. Chú (then called Jing) is first mentioned in the CC in 0684 as attacking Tsài (south of Lú). In 0678 it attacked Jvng (west of Lú). In 0671 it sent an envoy to Lú, and in 0666 it again invaded Jvng. In 0632, in the major battle at Chvngpu, Lú was allied with Chú, not with the northern states Chí, Jin, and Chín. This southward focus continued: Lú Syâng-gung (r 0572-0542) personally visited Chú, and on his return built a palace in the Chú style. By contrast, Yên, the large state lying north of Chí, is not mentioned until 0544, and then only as a place of refuge for a Chí nobleman. The rest of the CC mentions contacts between Chí and Yên, but no diplomatic contact between Lú and Yên.

The early southern focus of Lú is still visible in later historical memory. The only figure in the Lú elite lore tradition who predates Syâng-gung (apart from the legendary Bwó-yí and Shú-chî) is the Chú minister Lingyín Dz-wvín (mentioned in Jwâng 28, 0626), whereas the first northern figure on the list is known only from that reign (Nîng Wîdz, in Syî 28, 0632). No figure known to be in the Lú lore repertoire is from Jîn. It was in Syî-gung’s time that Lú’s later sense of past personages took its first shape.

Cultural Contacts. The verb chî “ask for,” used of a covenant (1 case) or a borrowed host (5 cases), is first found in the CC during Syî-gung’s reign (earlier entries use only the verb chêu “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 Lú then, such as buildings (palace, shrine, and Great Shrine), and sacrifices, and bone divination; the last three first appeared in 0629 (Syî 31). These novelties suggest borrowing from the northern states; in the case of bone divination, from Shâng culture as preserved in Sûng. Bone divination may have been encountered on the occasion of a diplomatic contact with Sûng. 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, Lú was beginning to function as a culturally northern state.

Jû-hou 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 Syî-gung’s time, and was useful since from the 2 or 3 of earlier times, there were as many as 12 participants at meetings in Syî-gung’s time. The usage also recurs in later reigns.

---
1 Kennedy Interpretation 96f.
2 Recorded as “Northern Yên” to distinguish it from another Yên further south.
3 A study of part of this inventory, see Brooks Lore.
4 Syî-gung himself was among those personages. An exaggerated account of his military exploits in Hwái is given in Shî 299, probably based on CC 5/16:5, when Syî-gung was indeed in the Hwái area, but only as the leader of one force in an allied army under Chí Hwán-gung. Syî-gung is specified in the final celebratory poem (Shî 300C5-6, as “son of Jwâng-gung”) of the four “Odes of Lú,” Shî 297-300). The Mâu commentary makes him the subject of all four.
5 Under the next reign, that of Chvng-gung, it is used three times, but not in reference to an earlier list. These meetings were at Hû, a Jvng town here Lú rulers had met with Jîn or Chí. All Chvng-gung events at Hû use jû-hou, for a reason that now seems to be lost.
Sense of Time. From Syī-gung 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 nāt ७० “thereupon,” (first used in 0629, Syī 31) and a greater use of swèિ “subsequently” (first in 0704, Hwaın 8, but 32% of all uses in Syī-gung’s reign). Causation appears at this time, with the only use of shǐ १ “cause to do” (0646, Syī 14); all other uses of this word mean “send on a mission.” The term gù ५ “cause, reason” is used for the first and only time in 0543 (Syāng 31), in the phrase Sūng dzāi gù ५ “because of the calamity in Sūng.” As to causation, in Syī-gung’s reign we find for the first time entries reporting an interrupted or failed outcome, several with the verb jī १ “reaching to the point of” – the unsuccessful pursuit of a Chī force in 0634 (Syī 26: “[but] did not catch up to them”), or the unaccepted sacrifice of 0629 (Syī 31). 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-gung a distinctive quality. Among them are: (1) a dry climate phase, leading to northern pressure on the Sinitic states; (2) northward pressure from Chū; (3) a concerted response from the Sinitic states, which involved Lū more closely in northern culture and in northern political initiatives; 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 Lū, and others enforced by the larger situation.

Syī-gung’s reign marks the end of the period when Lū could pursue a relatively independent policy within its immediate region, and the beginning of a period dominated by Jìn: a period in which the identity and historical memory of Lū, as one of the Sinitic group of states, took a more definite shape. 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.

Works Cited
A Taeko Brooks. The League of the North. WSP v1 (2010) 204-213
George A Kennedy. The Interpretation of the Ch’un-ch’iu. JAOS v62 #1 (1942) 40-48; in Selected Works, Far Eastern (1964) 79-103

9 For coverb jī in the CC text, see Brooks Distancing.
10 For the future of one such response, over the next period, see Brooks League.
11 For that dynamic, see again Brooks Lore.