The Career of Sywândź 荀子
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Abstract. Sywândź’s life is hard to read from his works because of posthumous additions and later editorial rearrangement. I here attempt to discern a factual core.

Information Outside the Writings

Prodigy. We start with a problem in reading SJ 74. It says that Sywândź “at 50 first came to Chí as a wandering scholar” (年五十始來游學於齊, 5/2348). The 始 “first” shows that the visit was notably late, not early. 游學 is to be read in a sense analogous to 游說 “traveling persuader.” as an expert, not a student. Lyóu Syång’s 劉向 collation note (Yên 1/332f) rearranges the SJ 74 account, and adds the term syóu-tsát 秀才, not in the sense of GZ 20 (talented above one’s station; Rickett 1/326; c0300), but in the Han sense of Jyă Yí 資賀 at 18 (SJ 84, 5/2491). Ying Shâu (Fício-sú Túng, c200) later altered 五十 to 十五, completing Sywândź’s transformation into a prodigy. This image has been embraced by later writers. But what we know about Ji-syä suggests that it was not a teaching institution; it figures in SJ 74 as a government theory institute. And from which Ji-syä incumbent did Sywândź learn ritual (SZ 19) and music (SZ 20)? Lyóu Syång (adding 秀才) and Ying Shâu (changing 五十 to 十五) seem to advance increasingly legendary claims about Sywândź. The earlier evidence thus tells us that Sywândź came to Chí at a notably mature age, as an already seasoned scholar.

Early Years. Sywândź was from Jâu, one of three successor states of Jîn; his surname 荀² links him with a great family of Jîn. Frequent references to poverty in his writings suggest that the family in his day was not prosperous, though on the record he was able to travel. If not in Ji-syä, where did he study? His identification with the Confucius tradition suggests early study outside his native Jâu, where those teachings seem not to have taken root. Lû is the obvious possibility, but there is no sign of relation to the Analects school of Lû, which in any case had by c0305 taken an antiwar position (LY 15:1-2) and soon lost political favor in Lû (see Brooks Analects 145).

¹Knoblock Xunzi 1/4: “We do know that he was precocious and traveled from his native Zhao to Qi when only fifteen to pursue his studies in the intellectual center of ancient China, the Jixia Academy.” See now also Goldin Rituals xiii-xiv; Sato Order 46-48.

²The form 孫子 also occurs, as in Lyóu Syång’s collation note. It has been said to be an avoidance of Hán Sywâñ-dî’s name 孫, but the usual substitution (Ch’în Ywâñ 130) is 荀. There may be a dialect factor: like other Warring States word pairs, 荀 and 彈 differ by presence or absence of medial -i-. Sywândź’s interviews with Chîn figures have 孫子, perhaps implying a Western amanuensis; SJ 74 (which has 荀) is familiar with Chí thought, and may reflect Eastern pronunciation; Lyóu Syång’s note may then simply be using Western pronunciation.
In one Shī transmission genealogy, Sywندz is listed after Master Gǐnmǒu of Lǔ, perhaps the court music master of Lǔ; he may then have been Sywندz’s teacher. This agrees with Sywندz’s frequent use of the Shī and his seeming familiarity with the associated dances. Ritual performance was central to Sywندz.

**Positions.** After noting that Sywندz was fifty when he first came to Chí, SJ 74 lists Chí philosophers Dżōu Yên 謝 and Dżōu ShwCorreo 谷 and notes that Tyén Pyén 田勝 (also from Chí) and the others (including Shvn Dáu 慎到 from Jáu) had earlier died, so Sywندz was the eldest member, and “thrice served as libationer.” Presumably at some annual ceremony; but, encountering opposition, he went to Chí as Director (Líng 御) of Lán-líng under the patronage of the Chí magnate Chǔ-shǐn 楚申 君. This was at earliest in spring 0254 (the Lán-líng area was conquered by Chí in winter 0255/54). Then Sywندz’s stints as Libationer were in 0256, 0255, and 0254, and he went to Chí in 0257. If he was then 50, his birthdate was 0307, but “50” may well be a round number; for reasons later to appear, I assume a birthdate of 0310. His Chí patron Chǔ-shǐn 楚申 楚申 詹 lost his life, and Sywندz his position, in the rulership transition of 0238, when Sywندz was c72. He was buried in Lán-líng. We thus reach a life span c0310-c0235, and an age at death of c75.

**Information From the Writings**

These were collated in c015 by Lýơ Syàng, who reduced 322 pyēn to 32. This implies wide circulation, and attests Sywندz’s influence in Hàn, which increases the likelihood that his posthumous school added new material to keep his image current. It is widely agreed that material at both ends of our Sywندz text is in fact spurious. Any given chapter is also liable to contain later additions by Sywندz or his editors.

The questionable writings are SZ 1-2 and 25-32. SZ 25-32 present Sywندz as a Chí literary figure (the fū 詩, in SZ 26 is a Chí literary form). Sywندz in retirement may have dallied with poetry, but so may his successors at Lán-líng. The Chǔ-Chyǒu 謝丘 and the Yǐ are mentioned rarely in the inner chapters (8:7 and 5:6), but more often in the outer ones (1:8, 1:10, 27:49, 27:80 and 27:38, 27:49, 27:81), perhaps an adaptation to an already emerging canon. Meditation as part of self-cultivation in SZ 2 goes beyond anything which is warranted by the material in the probably genuine SZ 3-24.

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3Given as an alternate (—) in JDSW 1/19b; the names are 子夏, 香, 龍, 晉, 陈仲子. 顧, 龍 子, 孫卿子, 大毛公; see also Karlgren Early 12-13 and Brooks Fōuchyǒu Bwó.

4That the text was to some extent arranged already in the time of Sǐmǎ Tān is suggested by his statement 美著著臺灣而卒 (SJ 5/2348:8); the present Sywندz wordcount is 75,815. Lýơ Syàng probably combined shorter pieces to make some of the present long chapters.

5Karlgren Early 18, 32-33

6But as an afterthought, which Knoblock (2/284 n57) plausibly regards an interpolation; more specifically, a Hàn syncretic harmonization following MC 3B9 and especially 4B21.

7The 謝, 龍, 龍, 吳 are listed in the Gw옧n 토 text 六傳 (c0290; Gw옧n 188). The Yǐ, which is also ignored in the Mencian writings, steadily rose in Confucian esteem during Hàn, at the 051 Shǐ-chyǒw Gv conference it finally (if briefly) was put at the head of the canon. Lýơ Syàng makes Sywndo a student of the Yǐ, but this is apparently just his imagination.

8For the ongoing vogue of meditationist statecraft, see the Mǎwángdwěi Hwáng/Lâu texts.
At an estimated rate of 1 second per word (Brooks Interviews 149). The average length of a genuine Mencius interview (which perhaps preserves only the high spots) is 2-75 minutes.

In a label rejected by Knoblock as a later addition (2/243 n25).10  

In S 2:2, as here, Sywndź uses it in the opening of an argument about virtue; elsewhere, he associates it with commoners (8:7) or the deluded (19:1d, 20:6, 22:6d). Note his use of Dāu at the end of this address, to describe his own teachings.

If he regards the two events as connected, doubt is thrown on his 0264 suggestion.

For Knoblock’s note that SZ 8 contains a “wide variety” of material, see 2/253.

This consideration eliminates 0260 (Knoblock 1/23-24) and 0257 (Chyen Mü 1/570).
Why the meeting? In 0250, Jàu was besieging Yën, and Chû was poised to take the second step in conquering Lû and vicinity, including former Sûng, which it would do in 0249. Chû, displaced from the west in 0278, hoped to supplant Chî as the chief eastern power, and needed allies against Chîn; this is why Chû rescued Jàu in 0257. In this context, Chû (or its strategic brain, Chûn-shên Jûyûn) would have found Jàu’s eastern adventure contrary to its own eastern plans, and unhelpful in containing Chîn. A mission to Jàu in 0250, staking out interests and suggesting how Jàu might use its diminished but considerable military strength, would have made sense for Chû.

SZ 15:2, a question from the disciple Chîn Szàn 蒙 стран, refers to the preceding discussion and is plausible as coming at or after the Jàu meeting, still in 0250.

SZ 15:4-6 are miscellaneous military remarks, which might have been written at any time, but also make sense as a supplement to the discussion. The emphasis (15:6b) on holding and not merely annexing would be appropriate to the Chû intention to annex Lû and its neighbors in 0249. A date of 0250 thus seems appropriate here also.

SZ 15:3, a question from Lî Sz 李斯, shows his preference for Chîn’s ways over those of Syûndž; it might have been written to account for his 0247 departure to serve Chîn, surely an embarrassment to Syûndž. Thus suggests a date of c0246. Since Lî Sz had a second son old enough to hunt with while at his native Shâng-tsû, he must have been at least 30 when he came to study with Syûndž (at latest, 0248), implying a birthdate of c0278. He died in Chîn in 0208, at the age of c70.

The above are the passages in which Syûndž’s own name appears. Missing from them is a record of the contact which presumably preceded his being given the post of governor at Làn-lîng. That missing interview, or its substance, may be preserved in:

SZ 9:1. Someone asks17 how Syûndž would govern. His Jî-syà appointment had involved no governmental responsibilities, and he had never held a government post, so the question makes sense in 0254. So does the fit of the 9:1 recommendations (he would enforce ideological purity) with what happened to the Analects and the Mencian and Mician schools after 0249: all of them somehow ceased to issue texts, and all significant opposition to Syûndž’s doctrines came to an end.18

CONTEXTUALLY LOCATABLE WRITINGS

SZ 20 樂論 “On Music” responds to the Micians, who thought court music performances wasteful. Of the three Mician tracts on this subject, only the first (c0320) is extant; the two lost tracts are inferentially dated to c0295 and c0270. Only the last could be contemporary with Syûndž. SZ 20, which speaks as though in response to a recent statement by the Micians, can plausibly be placed in that period, c0270.

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16A roughly similar conclusion as to birthdate (c0280) is reached by Bodde First 56-57, 80.
17The phrase 侍問 does not imply a student question; in 15:1 it is used of the King of Jàu.
18Brooks Ethical 101f, 117.
19Refugees from the Analects and probably the northern Mencian schools went north to Chî, where they continued to issue texts, whence the Chî Analects with its two extra chapters, and the four chapters which Jàu Chî removed, as inferior in quality, from the Mencius text.
SZ 19:1, 2d-11. Several points in this chapter (“On Ritual”) seem to have provoked reactions in c0270, or to echo enmities of that time. Mwò are distinguished from Rú in 19:1d, and the Mician terms for an unknown person (疏 and 疑) are used, pejoratively, in 19:4a. The three-year mourning is explained in 19:4b, and continues to 19:9c, which explains the logic of mourning only one year for near kin: the seasonal cycle is complete and normal life may be resumed. This is exactly the argument which is rejected in LY 17:19 (c0270). The LY passage also reacts to MZ 48:8, and in turn is ridiculed by MZ 48:12. LY 17:9 protests against excessive attention to “jade and silk” in ritual, or to “bells and drums” in music. SZ 19:5 and 19:7 go into great detail on ritual clothing, and the final section, 19:11, adds notes on “bells and drums.” The material thus has several connections with c0270. The phrase “the Way of Man” links 19:2d with 19:4, 9c, and 11, but not with 19:2a-c, for which see below.

SZ 23. LY 17:2a (c0270) is a statement on human nature, which was disputed between Sywándž (SZ 23) and the Mencians (MC 6A1-8). That dispute, and at least the relevant part of SZ 23, may plausibly be assigned to the same general period, c0270.

SZ 17:11-12. These appear to be an editorial addition to the basic Heaven tract (17:1-10; see below). The persons mentioned (Shvn Dúu, Láudž, Mwódž, Súng KENV) represent the Legalist, Dáuist, and Mician statecraft theories; each is shown to be partial, and of itself inadequate as a principle of government. The list is different from, but its purport is not in principle greatly different from, the partly overlapping list in 18:1, but criticism of Láudž, which might have been less wise after Sywándž’s move to Chû in 0254, suggests that this list is earlier than that in 18:1-7, and I thus suggest a tentative date of c0270. For SZ 18:1-7, see next.

SZ 18:1-7. This chapter (“Corrections to [Other People’s] Theories”) is composite; the use of different incipits (and the lack of names of opponents) marks 18:1-7 as one group, and 18:8-10 (explicitly against Súng KENV) as another. The first group is itself a mixture. 18:1 opposes the secrecy theory of the 04c Shvn Bù-hài. 18:2 takes up the regicide question aired in the spurious MC 1B8 (c0285). 18:3 opposes the views on punishment of Jí-syá thinker Shvn Dáu. 18:5 opposes the abdication theory put into practice by the King of Yén in 0316, with bad results, but advocated by the Mencians in MC 4 and 5; their example of Yâu and Shún is opposed in SZ 18:5. 18:6 defends the moral influence of the ruler. 18:7 argues that grave robbing does not impugn lavish burials (opposed by Mician tracts of c0378, c0357, and c0330). Sywándž’s view was ridiculed by the Shí-quotting, grave-robbing Rú of JZ 26:4, perhaps c0260. Then SZ 18:1-7 should be somewhat earlier, perhaps c0265.

SZ 17:1-10 天論 “On Heaven.” Only this part of the chapter reads like a consecutive treatise; it ends with a long poetic section (17:10). It praises the power of Heaven, but denies that its workings have anything to do with man. Cosmological theories were central to Chi thought. Being appointed in 0257 to give the Jí-syá a more Confucian tone, Sywándž seems to have moved to assert his position against this Chi worldview. This he might well have done after his first annual presidency, in 0256.

20Brooks Analects 258, 261.
The Career of Sywndź

**SZ 19:2a-c** introduces the concept of 紅 (Grand Unity) as the goal of a ritually perfect culture; it is probably a gesture toward the Chû god of that name, who figures as the first deity in the Chû text Nine Songs, and in the 生 (Sacrifice) text appended to one of the Gwôdyên DDJ florilegia, apparently in substitution for the DDJ 25 cosmology. This material may have been added to SZ 19 (otherwise a consecutive treatise) to adjust it for a Chû readership, soon after his appointment at Lân-ling, perhaps c.0253.

**SZ 21:1-5a.** 21:4 is a version of the “partial understanding” philosophers we met in 17:12. Its enemies list is only partly the same. It pairs Jwâng Jâu with Hwèrdź, and faults Jâu for overemphasizing Heaven and slighting man. Jwângdz/Hwèrdź passages which might have provoked this by recommending a Heavenly viewpoint are JZ 18:2, where Jwângdz [sic] scandalizes Hwèrdź by not mourning for his wife; and JZ 5:6, where he tells Hwèrdź that humans can be without human emotions (the preceding JZ 5:5 recommends Heavenly Food). These passages cannot be precisely dated as of this writing. But the substitution of Jwângdz as an opponent marks this list as probably later than that of 17:11-12, in which Lâudź (0286) was prominent.

This part of SZ 21 focuses on the mind. It has contacts with the Gwândź meditation chapters, the last of which, GZ 38 些, has a completion date after 0250. Statecraft with a Dâuist tone (and the relaxation of opposition to Lâudź) might have been agreeable to Kâu-lyê-wâng (r 0262-0245), who may have studied the DDJ under the Gwôdyên Tutor, and whose military policies reflect a caution which it may not be an exaggeration to call Dâuist. A plausible date for this part of SZ 21 is then c.0248.

**SZ 18:8-10** explicitly oppose Sûng Kìng, who recommended not reacting to insult as a cure for war. Humility in war also figures in GZ 38:4 (mid 03c). This and the relation to the war issue which Sywndź took up in 0250 (and the fact that Sûng Kìng is singled out for special opposition, whereas in 17:10 he figures merely as another Mician) suggests a date of c.0250.

[To be continued; Summary at end includes only passages here discussed]

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**21**For details, see Brooks *Meditation.*

**22**See Brooks *Tutor.* The Tutor returned to Chû in 0286, and was probably appointed Tutor soon after that, by the then reigning Chû King Chîng-syâng-wâng (r 0298-0263); he was buried near the old Chû capital, and thus before 0278, perhaps c.0280. The age of Kâu-lyê-wâng at his accession in 0262 is not known, but only he was available to be instructed by a tutor appointed after his father’s accession in 0298.
Summary Chronology

Most dates are circa; Sywndž’s age is given at right:

- 0310 Born (Jāu) into elite but not affluent circumstances
- 0290 Studied with Gvnnmóudž, the ritual master of Lū 20
- 0286 Lāudž dies in Lū 25
- 0286 Chí conquers Sùng, next door to weak Lū 24
- 0285 Allies, including Chí and Chū, eject Chí from Sùng 25
- 0284 Chí Mīn-wāng dies in far-off Jyw 26
- 0283 Chí Syāng-wāng succeeds to the rulership of devastated Chí 27
- 0280 SZ 16:4, Sywndž’s presentation to minister of Chí Syāng-wāng 30
- 0270 SZ 20, an objection to the Mician disapproval of music 40
- 0270 SZ 19:1, 2d-11, an objection to Mician mourning practices 40
- 0270 SZ 17:11-12, Objections to several named statecraft theorists 40
- 0265 SZ 18:1-7, Opposition to several unnamed statecraft theorists 45
- 0264 SZ 8:2, Sywndž’s presentation to Fañ Swē, minister of Chín 46
- 0264 SZ 8:2, Sywndž’s presentation to King Jáu of Chín 46
- 0257 Sywndž goes to Chí as senior stipendiary at J-sya in Chí 53
- 0256 SZ 17:1-10, a refutation of Chí cosmological theories 54
- 0254 Chí conquers half of Lū/Sùng; Sywndž becomes its governor 56
- 0254 SZ 9:1 outlines Sywndž’s program as governor 56
- 0253 SZ 19:2a-c reformulates ritual theory in Chí terms 57
- 0252 SZ 21:1-5a faults the otherworldliness of Jwāngdz 58
- 0250 SZ 15:1-2, 4-6, Sywndž included in military mission to Jáu 60
- 0250 SZ 18:8-10, denunciation of antiwar theorist Sùng Kṅg 60
- 0249 Chí completes its conquest; Lū is exterminated as a state 61
  Sywndž shuts down Analects and Mician and Mencian schools
- 0248 SZ 21:1-5a recommends a Dāuist theory of rulership 62
- 0246 SZ 15:3 interpolated to explain the departure of Lī Sž to Chín 72
- 0238 King of Chí dies, as does Sywndž’s patron Chín-hsvn Jywñ 72
  Sywndž relieved of his position as governor at Lán-líng
- 0235 Sywndž dies and is buried at Lán-líng 75

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