

The Historical Value of the Chūn/Chyōu 春秋

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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 proper primary source for the period.¹ I also dispute the competing claim of the Dzwǒ Jwàn (DJ), which some view as not only a fuller, but a superior, account.²

Speeches. Entries in the CC chronicle are terse.³ They do not greatly diverge from the mostly terse and court-centered nature of early inscriptions. 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 differences? For speeches recorded on inscriptions, it suffices to suppose a court scribe at a stylized court session. In length and type, 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 permissive 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 (Chíng 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 Jyé-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. See further the CC entry in CCT.

⁴The most extreme current position is that taken by Pines **Foundations**, which holds that not only the substance of the DJ accounts, but the wording of its speeches, has transcriptional veracity. It is more often conceded that the DJ speeches are invented.

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 Yáng (0403/0389). For a closer estimate, based on parallel development in other 04c texts, see now Brooks **Heaven**.

