

Defining Moments

Spring and Autumn history is not all of a piece. There were decisive events, and there were also slow developments. In these five chapters, we look at some of the decisive events, and at the end, suggest a meaningful periodization for Spring and Autumn history as a whole.

The first essay asks: Why did the Lǚ chronicle exist? Despite some claims of ancient and modern times (the first of them is from the early 03rd century), it appears that no state except Lǚ kept this kind of consecutive record of events. Why the CC chronicle began, and how it proceeded once it had at last begun, are briefly considered. The creation of the Lǚ chronicle is a momentous event: the beginning of consecutive historical self-consciousness in China.

Not everything in the period was a matter of armed conflict, or at any rate, not all the armed conflict arose out of territorial ambition of the usual type. The second essay shows Lǚ trying to uniformize and indeed define its territory, in competition with its indigenous inhabitants.

The third essay notes a climate factor in the appearance and disappearance of military pressure from the Dí people. Such factors were unknown to the writers of the later Dzwǒ Jwàn text. To discover them is one of the pleasures of not reading Spring and Autumn history through Warring States blinders.

The fourth essay takes up the pivotal reign of Syī-gūng (0659-0727), which in many ways marks a transition in the relation of Lǚ to other post-Jōu states. Among the momentous events of that reign was the Battle of Chýngpú (0632), when Jin took the lead in organizing the northern states against the military threat from non-Sinitic Chǔ

The fifth essay looks at the larger history of the response to that threat, going back to the days of Chí Hwán-gūng, and the emergence of a concept of cooperation among the northern states; the túng-mvng or solidarity covenants. The leadership of Jin from 0632 is only one aspect of that development. The collective effort was finally successful, if only with the help of non-Sinitic Wú, which appeared partway through the period as a new and potent rival to Chǔ.

We may also ask: What was the dynamic of the whole Spring and Autumn period? How can we best understand that period as such? We suggest the northern struggle against Chǔ as the basis for a periodization of Spring and Autumn history. It amounts to a war between Sinitic and non-Sinitic peoples, which decided whether the language in which the period was later discussed would be Chinese or something else.