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Fable and Fact in Spring and Autumn
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I. FABLE

It is widely believed that in the Spring and Autumn period, during the 7th century BC, the state of Chí, under its ruler Hwán-gūng and his minister Gwǎn Jùng, made itself the leader of the other states. This idea is based on several Warring States sources. First comes the Dzwǒ Jwàn, which was written in the 4th century BC. In Handout #1 are all the Dzwǒ Jwàn entries concerning Gwǎn Jùng. They represent him as a wise advisor, urging that needy states be assisted, and that all be treated kindly.

The process of strengthening Chí is described in another 4th century Warring States source, the Chí statecraft text called the Gwǎndž. Chapters 18-20 of that work give much detail about Gwǎn Jùng's economic and military reforms. It tells how, after years of preparation, Chí set out from a position of strength to dominate the other states. This is what I call the Fable.

I will now proceed to refute the Fable.

Let us look at the actual record of the time, as preserved in the Chūn/Chyōu, the chronicle of Chí's neighbor Lǔ, which covers the period from 722 to 481. There we find that both during and after the reign of Hwán-gūng, Chí shows no sign of military improvement or relative superiority. During the reign of Hwán-gūng, Chí took part in 27 military actions. In 18 of them, or 67%, it used allies. It acted by itself in only 9 of them, or 33% of the time.

When it did act by itself, the results were trifling. This is what they achieved:

- 4 statelets were extinguished
- 2 attacks were made on the Rúng barbarians
- Relief of Syíng when attacked by Dí barbarians
- 1 incident where Chí officers occupying Swèi are killed by the people
- 1 victory in a battle on Chí territory with the medium-sized state of Wèi

I would comment: If Gwǎn Jùng had done what the Gwǎndž says he did, Chí would have had a military edge over her neighbors. Obviously, it had no such edge. Nor did that edge appear after Hwán-gūng's reign. In that period, Chí 6 times attacked the small state of Jyǔ, but without success. It 18 times attacked the medium state of Lǔ, but without result. Chí did take a Lǔ border town as a residence for the exiled Lǔ ruler Jāu-gūng, but returned it after Jāu-gūng had died. Later, Chí took two towns from Lǔ, but soon returned them. This is not the record of a great military power.

So, the Gwǎndž story proves to be a myth. Why was it invented?

For one thing, it is a self-serving myth. The early 4th century Dzwǒ Jwàn writers, who portray Gwǎn Jùng as a kindly advisor, themselves recommended kindly policy toward other states. The later 4th century Gwǎndž experts were advising the current ruler of Chí precisely on ways to organize his state to use human and natural resources more efficiently. To show that these things had been done earlier tended to give force to their recommendations.

As for the new mass army, its real birth was also in the 4th century, and also in Chí. The art of leading that kind of army is found in the 4th century Sūndž, a text associated with Sūn Bìn. It was Sūn Bìn who had been chief of staff at the Battle of Mǎ-líng in 0343. In that battle, the Chí army defeated the Ngwèi army, in the enemy's territory. This achievement so encouraged the Chí ruler that in the next year he took for himself the Jōu title King.

If the logistics, the bureaucratic support, and the field tactics, of the mass army had been worked out 300 years earlier, and in Chí, there would have been no need to do it all over again, in the same state, in the 4th century. The claim that it WAS done earlier is a backward projection of the 4th century reality.

The claim that new ideas had precedents in the past was a common rhetorical strategy in the Warring States period. The Myth of Chí strengthening in the 7th century turns out to be merely one more example of that strategy.

II. FACT

Looking at the Chūn/Chyōu has been useful to dispel the myth of 7th century state strengthening. We might then read it to see what WAS going on in Spring and Autumn. For an overview of military potential in the period, I refer to my article, *Military Capacity in Spring and Autumn*, which is listed at the end of the handout. It shows what the old elite chariot force could and could not do. That force was weaker, but also more mobile, than the heavy infantry army of the later Warring States period. That difference affected the conduct of all Spring and Autumn battles. By following the Chūn/Chyōu, we can to a considerable extent appreciate the tactics of those armies, and the strategies of their rulers. They were different in many ways from what we read in such 4th century texts as the *Dzwo Jwan* or the *Sundz*.

Beside these general points, there is a matter of special interest which is my subject for the rest of this paper. This is not the domination of the Bà or Hegemon. As I have shown in another article, this too is a myth of the *Dzwo Jwan*, or more exactly, three successive myths of the *Dzwo Jwan*. I will focus instead on a series of 16 covenants or *mving*, which are distinguished in the Chūn/Chyōu by the special name *tung-mving*. What is a *tung-mving*?

The commentators have little to say. The *Dzwo Jwan* explains it as “those with whom a ruler had made a covenant” (1/1:5). The later *Gungyang* says that those making the covenant “had a common desire” (3:16:4), but that could be said of any covenant. The still later *Gulyang* says that they “had a common purpose to honor Jōu.” The real purpose of the *tung-mving* covenants is clear from the military history of the period: it was to join in resisting the southern state of Chǔ. From early in Spring and Autumn, Chǔ had sought to drive a wedge between the states in the Yellow River Valley, and to reach the River itself, by taking Jvng, which lay between the eastern and western states. No one northern state was strong enough to resist Chǔ. Their only hope was to combine forces.

It was by combining forces against a Chǔ invasion of the north in 0632, that Jīn, Chín, and Chí were together able to inflict a major defeat on Chǔ at the famous Battle of Chvngpú. The defeat was so severe that the Chǔ leader was executed on his return home, and for 8 years thereafter, Chǔ attempted no military enterprise outside its own borders. But Chǔ was only stopped for a time. It later returned to the attack, and the problem which Chǔ posed for the north thus continued. The *tung-mving* were one way that this ongoing problem was dealt with.

For some details of the 16 *tung-mving*, see the summary in **Handout #2**; a full account is available in my article, *The League of the North*. It is notable that the *tung-mving* were not used for the greatest successes of the northern states: the invasion of Chǔ under Chí Hwán-gvng in 0656, or the defeat of Chǔ in the north under Jīn Wvng-gvng in 0632. The *tung-mving* became effective later on, when they were revived under Jīn leadership, after those two leaders were dead. They were a sort of substitute for the charismatic leadership of able figures. Finally, in 0546, a peace agreement was made with Chǔ. To be sure, Chǔ did once return to the attack, but restored up the two border states it had conquered when forced to do so by the last of the *tung-mving*, in 0529. With that last *tung-mving*, what had begun as a military agreement achieved a certain diplomatic power.

III. CONCLUSION

First, I should emphasize that the *tung-mving* are unusual. The typical Spring and Autumn covenant was an agreement to join in attacking another state, but once that was done, the covenant had achieved its purpose. Nothing remained. No permanent alliances were made between states during the entire Spring and Autumn period. Only in the *tung-mving* was there a sense of an ongoing need, a collective security interest which could at least briefly override the desire of each state to conquer its neighbor.

Is there a moral to this tale? As for the implication of the Spring and Autumn diplomatic facts with which I have tried to acquaint you, the political scientists are in the best position to say, and I will leave that task to them.

In terms of historical method, I think it is obvious that contemporary sources are better than later histories, as evidence for past realities. But though it may be obvious, it may need to be repeated from time to time. That point is my final conclusion. The *Dzwo Jwan* has long been the preferred source for Spring and Autumn. It is easily shown to be fallible in that role, however enjoyable the stories in it may be as fiction.

The real history of the Spring and Autumn period is available to us through the contemporary Chūn/Chyōu, along with inscriptions and archaeological evidence. That history is available to anyone who cares to approach it from those sources. The field at present is not crowded, and I would like to point out that it offers many exciting opportunities for new investigation.