

Introduction

In the Spring and Autumn period (08th to 06th centuries), the old chariot force, consisting of hereditary warriors, each one supported by a landholding, reached the limits of its possible expansion, with the enterprise of unifying all the states by conquest, in imitation of the Jōu Dynasty (11th to 08th centuries) still unrealized. What followed was a radical transformation of the states into centralized resource bureaucracies which could maintain the new infantry army. This military transformation defines the Warring States period (05c to 03c).

Three great states produced all we have of Warring States military doctrine. Chí in the east was the first to field a fully effective infantry army, inflicting a major defeat on central Ngwèi¹ in 0343. This led the Chí ruler to assume the title King, previously reserved for the descendants of the Jōu rulers. The ruler of Ngwèi followed suit by proclaiming himself King in 0334. Chín in the west, the eventual victor, took that step in 0324. Chín also doubled its size, and its war capacity, by incorporating the non-Sinitic territory of Shú. By the end of Warring States, Chín had emerged as the strongest state, the inevitable unifier. That unification was completed by the surrender of the last Chí ruler in 0221.²

The Warring States military texts are six in number, if we include the military chapters of the huge Chí statecraft compilation called Gwǎndž, and the three military chapters of the Chín compilation Shāng-jywn Shū; or seven, if we note that the last of them, the Wèi Lyáudž was composed in two parts: the first in Ngwèi, and the second when its author had gone to Chín. Two of them, the Sūndž and the Wúdž, were regarded as classics as early as the year 0250. The important thing for the modern reader is the order of composition, and this book arranges them (as nearly as reader convenience allows) in that order.

Stories grew up about their authors, especially the authors of the Sūndž and the Wúdž, and both these works were immensely expanded in the Hàn Dynasty. These later myths and fabrications do not here concern us. Below is a minimal introduction to each work which is here included or extracted.

Sūndž. This a series of notes and tracts was written over many decades. The earliest (where the army is learning to do what the old chariot force could not, such as cross a swamp) are unattributed. From some point, they are ascribed to Sūndž (“Master Sūn”), meaning Sūn Bīn, the architect of the 0343 Chí victory. The last chapters do not address the military man, but rather the ruler of Chí, and mark the completion of the work. For one later addition, see below.

¹Now pronounced “Wèi,” but this leads to confusion with another state of Wèi.

²For a detailed account of the historical background, see Brooks **Emergence**.

Wúdǔ. This work is ascribed to Wú Chǐ, supposedly a man of Lǔ, but is addressed to early rulers of Ngwèi, its first part (Wúdǔ A) to Wǎn-hóu, and its second (Wúdǔ B) to the earlier Wǔ-hóu; there were also extensions in Hàn, which are here ignored. In between the two, the sponsors of the Sūndǔ, feeling a need to keep their text current with new ideas, added a 13th chapter, on spies.

Shāng-jyǔn Shū. An accretional text from Chín, supposed to preserve the statecraft of Wèi Yāng, who had led Chín troops in a victory over Ngwèi, and was enfeoffed as the Lord of Shāng (Shāng-jyǔn). As minister of Chín, he put in force a draconic new law code. Its three oldest chapters, SJS 10-12, address military matters. The oldest, SJS 10, is an essay to which were later added bits of the Sūndǔ, to make it more impressive for its readers.

Shǎndǔ. A collection of Chǐ statecraft material, from the 04c to the 02c, giving details on how the countryside was organized to support Chǐ armies. Chapters here excerpted are relatively early.

Sǎmǎ Fǎ (“The Laws of the Marshal”) is a strange Chǐ text, written in part to justify war to the Confucians, and showing that war is basically benevolent.

Wèi Lyáudǔ. Wèi Lyáu is unknown, but on the evidence of the text bearing his name, he was first an advisor to the ruler of Ngwèi, but later went to Chín, where he found a more accepting audience, and composed the last 00 chapters. His career thus parallels that of Wèi Yāng, who also had first served Ngwèi, but finding its ruler unresponsive, had also gone instead to Chín. Chín was a very backward state, and began its rise to power by learning from others. By the end of the Warring States, Chín was instead exporting doctrine to the east.

The Chinese texts are provided for those who can make use of them; the translations and notes are meant to be freestanding for other readers. The military canon (which came to include seven texts, including one of Táng date) exists in two Sùng editions, one compiled under Imperial auspices, and the other privately. The Imperial compilation was standard, and the other one became scarce. Those using the Hong Kong concordance to the military texts are warned that the compilers, perhaps attracted by its “rare book” status, relied on the private version at points where it is inferior, most importantly Sūndǔ 9. We ignore these bibliophilic excursions; our text is that of the Imperial edition.

The usual modern version of the Sūndǔ includes the work of eleven commentators, from the dynastic founder Tsáu Tsáu to several Táng and Sùng figures, some of them now unknown. Besides Tsáu Tsáu, for whose authority in military matters it is not necessary to argue, we find that the most insightful are the Táng poet Dù Mù, also a specialist in military affairs, and the Sùng poet Méi Yáu-chǎn. We cite them here and there to show what later military thinkers felt it worthwhile to add to an established classic from a thousand years earlier.