

## 16. The Chín Interlude

Back in 0342, the ruler of Chí had announced a new world order by assuming the Jōu title “King.” Others soon followed. The Chín ruler who came to the throne in 0331 became a “King” in 0324; we know him as Hwèi-wáng. Then came Wǔ-wáng (0310), Jāu-syāng-wáng (306), Syàu-wǎn-wáng (0250), and Jwāng-syāng-wáng (0249). In Jwāng-syāng-wáng’s first year, Lǚ Bù-wéi, in command of a Chín force, conquered the last Jōu territory at Lwò-yáng, and Jōu was no longer even a symbolic political presence.

After his conquest of the Jōu remnant, Lǚ Bù-wéi remained as minister, and became a literary figure. He and his staff put together a text, the Annals of Master Lǚ (Lǚ-shī Chūn/Chyōu, LSCC). It was modeled on a section of the Chí statecraft text Gwāndž, which specified each month’s agricultural work. For the eighth month, LSCC reminded people to get the winter wheat crop in. It then further observed:

**LSCC 8/1:5.** In this month, day and night are equal . . . The Yáng force daily weakens, and waters begin to dry. When day and night are equal, unify weights and measures, adjust steelyard and balance weights . . .

The unification of weights and measures was one of the things Chín would be especially noted for. The twelve chapters of the LSCC were finished in 0241, the sixth year of the new Emperor’s reign, and were presented to the throne. Then a great scandal developed. Lǚ Bù-wéi was dismissed and banished; he did not even live to reach his place of banishment.

Backward Chín had an advantage in *being* backward. It was not hobbled by old ideas: it could innovate. If someone’s idea was too radical for his own state, Chín would hire him and adopt that idea. This flood of new thinking made Chín strong. Some newcomers came to a bad end. Consider Shāng Yāng of Wèi who began his Chín career in 0342 by leading an attack on Ngwèi. As Minister, he rewrote the Chín laws on military lines: total obedience and the death penalty for all offenses. He was torn apart by chariots. Lǚ Bù-wéi we know.

Lǚ Bù-wéi’s successor, Lǚ Sž, was a native of Chǔ who had been a student of Sywǎndž. Seeing where the world was headed, he abandoned the Confucian path and went to Chín after 0250. In 0246 began the reign of the king who would finally bring the process to its conclusion. Six other states were in contention. In 0230 Chín defeated Hán. Jāu was destroyed in 0228; some Jāu forces escaped to Yēn. Ngwèi fell in 0225, and Chǔ in 0224. A Chǔ remnant under Syāng Yēn regrouped south of the Yángdž; they were wiped out in 0223. Yēn with its Jāu refugees fell in 0222. Chí surrendered without a battle in 0221. The Six States were no more, and all the world belonged to Chín.

When Lǚ Sž became Minister under the First Emperor, he extended the Chín laws, and rationalized the government system. How did that system work?

Like every state, whatever its ideology, Chín needed a reliable civil service. In the diary of a Chín law official named Syǐ 喜, we have an inside look at how Chín produced them. Here are some of the events recorded in that diary:

- 0262. Syǐ is born
- 0257. [Chín] attacked Hándān [in Jàu]
- 0250. Wǎn-wáng succeeds as King of Chín; dies the same year
- 0249. Jwāng-wáng succeeds as King of Chín
- 0246. “Present” King succeeds; Syǐ [in his 17th year] has a tutor
- 0244. Syǐ [at 19] is appointed recorder 史
- 0243. Syǐ [at 20] is appointed senior recorder 令史 at Añ-lù
- 0241. Syǐ [at 22] is appointed senior recorder at Yēn
- 0235. Syǐ [at 28] is appointed hearing officer 治獄
- 0234. With the army
- 0232. With the Píng-yáng Army
- 0231. Father dies; Syǐ [at 32] divines about his own future life
- 0217. 30th year [of the King; there is no entry after this year]

The technique of literacy is here divorced from ideology. No long years memorizing the classics. Instead, functional here-and-now literacy, gained by two years under a tutor. Syǐ gets a minor appointment, and year by year moves up the ladder until he reaches the rank of hearing officer; a judge of civil matters under the new Chín laws. Then he is with the army, helping to apply Chín law to cases arising in the conquered territory, a more sensitive and thus a more responsible position. Then a matter of filial piety (filial piety was rigidly enforced under the Chín laws): his father dies, and Syǐ, at a still young 32, takes thought for his future. The Unification of 0221 occurs, with no special notice in the diary. Syǐ himself dies, or so we infer from the fact that the diary simply ends, in the 4th year of the new Empire. Syǐ was then 45.

We possess few pictures of the authors of any of the early Chinese texts. But here is Syǐ, in his narrow grave, with his law texts scattered around him.



Unification produced a discussion about the form of the state. The ritualized Confucians, with their devotion to an imagined antiquity, and their respect for traditional modes of behavior, recommended a redivision into separate states, with the Emperor’s children as local Kings. But that issue had been decided, and Syǐ’s diary shows us how. The newly conquered lands would be governed, along central lines, by centrally-appointed officials like Syǐ.

The option of a non-central government, with many states *indirectly* ruled by a King, did arise after the 0221 unification. Lǐ Sǐ made this response:

The sons and younger brothers enfeoffed by the Jōu Kings Wǎn and Wǔ were numerous, and later they became estranged, attacking each other as though they were enemies. The lords even invaded each other's territories, and put each other to death, and the Jōu rulers could neither restrain nor prevent them. Now, all within the Seas is subject to His Highness' divine and undivided rule. Let all be made administrative regions and districts, and let those who have earned merit be richly rewarded from revenues. This will be fully adequate and easily instituted. But let the lands under Heaven have no divergent intentions; this is the way to secure peace. Setting up feudal lords would not be suitable.

And the Emperor agreed:

The First Emperor said, That the world has suffered endlessly from war is because there were Lords and Kings. Thanks to the favor of the Ancestors, the world is at last stable. To again establish separate states would be merely sowing weapons of war. And if we should then seek to pacify them, how could it but be difficult? The Chamberlain is correct.

And so Chín organized its domain into 36 administrative regions.

The First Emperor did not see himself as the latest in a long line of emperors. He saw himself as making a new beginning. He scorned the Jōu title King, and chose instead the divine term Dì ("Divinity"). His title "First August Emperor" (Shǐ Hwáng-dì), proclaimed a departure from earlier precedent. His successor would be the Second Emperor, and so on, into the indefinite future.

The Lǚ Bù-wéi group, which had continued to be active after the disgrace and death of their leader, presented to the Emperor an addition to the LSCC. Among other things, that group opposed the concept of a perpetual empire. They saw Chín as one phase in a recurring cycle of Five Phases:

When a new Emperor is about to rise, Heaven First displays omens among those below. In the time of the Yellow Emperor, Heaven displayed great worms and crickets, and the Yellow Emperor said, The force of Earth is dominant. Earth being dominant, for his color he honored yellow, and in his actions he imitated earth. Then in the time of Yǔ . . .

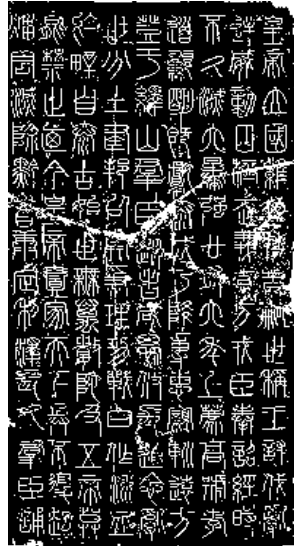
The group also sought to diminish the influence of Legalism, a doctrine which thinks the worst of people, but may be wrong in doing so. They told this story:

A man had lost his ax. He suspected his neighbor's son. Looking at his walk, it was that of an ax thief; his expression was that of an ax thief; his words were those of an ax thief; his whole bearing and demeanor were nothing but those of an ax thief. Then while cleaning out a drain, he found his ax. The next day, when he again looked at his neighbor's son, his movement and demeanor were nothing like those of an ax thief.

The neighbor's son had not changed; *he* had changed, and the change had no other reason than his own predilection.

This was an indirect, but nevertheless a very daring, attack on Minister Lǐ Sǐ. The Lǚ Bù-wéi group survived it, and they and their text would be heard from, just one more time.

Though rejecting a multi-state arrangement, of the kind represented by the Jōu model and favored by the Confucians, Chín liked to portray itself as a benevolent, indeed, a Confucian, new order. Here is part of one inscription:<sup>1</sup>



Long ago, in days of old,  
 He came unto the Royal Throne.  
 He smote the fractious and perverse,  
 His awe was felt on every hand,  
 Warlike and just, upright and firm.  
 His orders the generals received,  
 And in no very lengthy time  
 They had destroyed the Cruel Six.  
 In his six-and-twentieth year,  
 He offering makes to Those Above,  
 Resplendent in filiality.  
 And as he offers up his deed,  
 So there descends a special grace;  
 He tours in person the distant lands.  
 To Mount Yì he now ascends,  
 His ministers and retinue  
 All thinking how to make it long.

The Cruel Six were the states Chín had destroyed between 0230 and 0221. Thus did court Confucians contribute their image-making skills to the regime.

They also taught their ancient texts – specifically, their Confucian texts. That would become an ideological challenge of a more serious kind.

<sup>1</sup>For a study of all these inscriptions, see Kern **Stele**.

In 0213, the special position given to these texts drew a protest from Lǐ Sǐ:

Of old, the world was in disorder and no one was able to unify it, hence the various lords arose. In their words they extolled the past to the detriment of the present, and elaborated empty expressions to the confusion of the truth. All valued what they had privately studied, in opposition to what their superiors had established. Now, His Majesty possesses all the world; he has separated white from black and has attained sole authority, yet private students join together in opposing the institutions of Legalist doctrine. I have heard that when an order is handed down, they discuss it in terms of their private views. At home, their hearts are opposed; in public, they argue in the byways. They gain reputation by opposing the ruler, achieve prominence with eccentric opinions, and foster sedition by leading the multitude astray. If this is not prohibited, the ruler's power will decline above, and factions will form below. The best course will be to prohibit it.

Your subject requests that all who possess literary documents, the Shī and Shū, or the sayings of the Hundred Schools, be made to dispose of them. If within thirty days of this order, they have not disposed of them, they are to be branded and sent to labor on the walls. Writings not to be disposed of are those on medicine, divination, or forestry. Any who wish to study these subjects may take the officials as their teachers.<sup>2</sup>

The proposal was accepted. It referred only to the spread of earlier thought beyond the court. The court scholars themselves were exempt; they are referred to by Lǐ Sǐ as “teachers” of the texts. But the times were not favorable. The suppression became more general, and threatened the exemption which had been granted to the court scholars. These now took steps to preserve their texts.

Fú Shǐng, a specialist in the Shū, buried his texts. Shī specialists, who by then had come to differ in their interpretations, kept theirs hidden in memory.<sup>3</sup> Some of these hidden texts were later recovered. But at the time, they were lost. And so the Confucian textual tradition entered its darkest period.

So did the Chín Dynasty. The First Emperor died unexpectedly, on his way back from a visit to yet another sacred mountain. An immediate palace coup replaced Fú-sū, his designated heir, with the less able, more pliant Hú-hà, who began to reign as Second Emperor. A new minister, Jâu Gāu, was appointed. He exercised a virtually absolute rule, and proceeded to get rid of everyone who was suspected of loyalty to the previous regime.

The Ordos region had been reconquered by the general Míng Tyén in 0215. He built a military road to that area, and linked up previous walls to form the first Great Wall. He and the other generals were now executed, and the Ordos was reoccupied by its former inhabitants. All the ground gained had been lost.

No one was exempt. No previous gain, military or civil, was now secure.

<sup>2</sup>For a later, more draconic, version of this proposal, see Brooks **Dual**.

<sup>3</sup>See Brooks **Shān**.

Lǐ SĪ, the architect of Chín on its civilian side, was arrested, tortured until he confessed to planning rebellion, and then executed. The Shǐ J ì imagines this touching scene, as he and his son are led out to die:

In the seventh month of the [Second Emperor's] second year, Lǐ SĪ was sentenced to the Five Punishments, and to be cut in two in the Syén-yáng marketplace. SĪ emerged from prison, he and his middle son being both in custody; He turned around and said to his son, "If I wanted to go with you again with our yellow dog, out the east gate of Shàng-Tsài, to catch the wily rabbits, how could I manage to do that?" And father and son wept together.

His family was exterminated unto the third degree of relationship.

Such was the new order of things, as of the year 0208.

The Lǚ Bù-wéi group lost no time in flattering the new Emperor. To the previous Annals, they added another six chapters, to present to that Emperor. But what topic should they take up? The construction of the First Emperor's gigantic mausoleum, the one that tourists now visit, was underway. Gangs of forced laborers were executed if they were late for their assigned term of duty. Against that, the new LSCC chapters protested, with fables about easy-going but successful work projects. That implied advice was not heeded.

The only really safe topic was agriculture, and so the last of the new chapters claimed to be a treatise by Shǔn Núng, the God of Agriculture. It was a brilliant choice. Shǔn Núng was not part of the forbidden *Confucian* lore of antiquity. He represented instead a less tainted, a more acceptable, antiquity. The final argument of the Lǚ-shì Chūn/Chyōu, like its first, was seasonability.

This small extract (LSCC 26/6:8) is in poetry:

When equal weights are hulled,  
the seasonable will yield more rice;  
When equal amounts are consumed,  
the seasonable will satisfy hunger . . .

They got away with it; we still have the text. But that last attempt to argue for a more peaceful political order went nowhere.

The Second Emperor's reign ended in a cascade of disasters. The former states, and even some towns, declared their independence of Chín rule. The larger states emerged as rivals to succeed Chín, and establish the next Empire. Chief among those rival states was southern Chǔ, which for centuries had been the great enemy of the north, and which now resumed that role.

The final showdown was thus at hand, between Chǔ in the south and a newcomer, Hàn, in the north. Under its revived Kingship, Chǔ soon gathered many of the disaffected to its cause. General warfare was not long in coming.

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The Confucian texts were buried or invisible. They might easily have been lost forever. How they survived, as the Chinese storytellers say (下回分解), "the next chapter will explain."