

Ngwèi Syāng-wáng 魏襄王

E Bruce Brooks 白牧之

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

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Said Lyáng Hwèi-wáng to Mencius in 0320, “In the east, we were defeated by Chí, and my eldest son died there.” Hwèi-wáng was succeeded by another son, one not brought up to be ruler: Syāng-wáng (r 0319-0296). He is the only Warring States ruler for whom we have much firsthand information, and I here follow him for a few pages.

Syāng-wáng figures only rarely in later anecdotes. One turns on his stubbornness and lack of consideration for the people on the occasion of his father’s death:

JGT #308 (early Hàn). Lyáng Hwèi-wáng had died, and the date for his burial had been set. There was a great rain and snow, which reached as high as the eye of an ox, and damaged the city walls. They were planning to make a raised way [to transport the coffin] for the burial, and many of the officials protested to the Heir Apparent, The snow is so severe, and yet the arrangement for the burial are going forward; the people will surely be injured by it, and we are also afraid that the funds in the treasury will not suffice for it; we beg that the funeral be postponed to another day. The Heir Apparent said, To be the son of a man, and for the hardships of the people and the cost to the treasury, to fail to carry out the proper mourning for the Former King, would not be right. Say you no more of it. The officials did not dare to speak, but they reported it to the Chancellor. The Chancellor said, I have no basis to speak of it; it can only be Master Hwèi.

Master Hwèi proceeds to talk Syāng-wáng out of his determination. The story itself assumes Syāng-wáng’s pertinacity and disregard of the public interest.

Mencius left us an eyewitness portrait of Syāng-wáng, from an 0319 interview, held while Syāng-wáng was still in his formal mourning period:

MC 1A6 (0319). . . . When I looked at him from a distance, he did not seem like a ruler of men, and when I came closer, I saw nothing to be in awe of. He asked abruptly, How can the world be settled? I replied, It will be settled by unification. [He asked], Who can unify it? I answered, One who is not fond of killing men can unify it. [He asked], Who will give it to him? I answered, Nobody in the world will *not* give it to him. Does the King know about new sprouts? In the seventh and eighth months, when it is dry, the sprouts wither. But then clouds gather densely, rain falls torrentially, and the sprouts stand up vigorously. When that happens, who could prevent them? Now, among all the world’s Shepherds of Men, not one but is fond of killing. If there were one who were not fond of killing, then the people of the world would stretch their necks and look toward him. Were it truly like this, the people would turn to him like water flowing downward, torrentially, and who could prevent them?

Mencius seems to have sensed that Syāng-wáng was not very receptive to this idea. We will later see that Syāng-wáng’s courtiers had their own complaints.

Another story shows Syāng-wáng not as inattentive to the advice of his officials, but rather as imperceptive about their different qualities:

LSCC 16/5:5 (c0214). Ngwèi Syāng-wáng was drinking with his officials. The wine was sweet, and the King made invocation for his officials, that they have their wish. Shǐ Chǐ arose and replied, Of the officials, some are worthy and some are not. If the worthy have their wishes, well enough. But if the others have their wish, that would not do. The King said, They are all as good officials as [the early Ngwèi minister] Syī-mǎn Bàu. Shǐ Chǐ replied, Under Ngwèi, the allotment of land was 100 acres; only Yè [the area governed by Syī-mǎn Bàu] had 200 acres. Therefore the land was poor. The Jāng River flowed beside, but Syī-mǎn Bàu did not know how to make use of it; this was his stupidity. If he knew but did not speak of it, that was his disloyalty. Ignorance and disloyalty are not to be emulated. The King had nothing with which to respond.

The story ends with Shǐ Chǐ undertaking the irrigation project. The moral (that valuable public works arouse resentment in the ignorant public) is standard Legalism. The background *assumption* of the story is Syāng-wáng's lack of discernment.

The Ngwèi Chronicle. The Dzwǒ Jwàn, and the Chūn/Chyōu included within it, aroused immediate interest in Ngwèi shortly after its presentation in Chí (c0312). From the DJ, Syāng-wáng's staff extracted for study all the Yì oracles, a task often repeated since that time. Impressed with the CC, Syāng-wáng commissioned a similar chronicle of Ngwèi, which we know as the Bamboo Annals.¹ It reached back beyond CC, into the mythic regions which had been tapped by the Tyén clan of Chí, with their claim of Yellow Emperor ancestry.² For Syāng-wáng's own reign, though, the entries are more likely to be factual. The ones bearing on war and statecraft are these:

- 0315. The Lord of J̀ng sent Hán Ch̀n to return J̀n-yáng and Syàng.
- 0313. Chín took our Jyāu . . .
- 0312. Hán Míng led a host and attacked [our] Syāng-chyōu. The King of Chín came to a meeting [with the King] at Pú-fǎn Pass.
- 0311. Chúlǐ Jí of Chín besieged Pú, but did not take it.
- 0310. Shù Jāng of Chǔ led a host and came to meet with us; they encamped at Syāng-chyōu.
- 0307. Gūngsūn Ywǎn of Chín led a host and attacked us; he besieged Pí-sh̀. Dí Jīng led [our] host and went to aid Pí-sh̀ . . .
- 0306. We walled Pí-sh̀.
- 0304. Wú Dý of Chǔ led a host and with Chín attacked J̀ng and besieged Lún-sh̀. Dí Jāng went to aid J̀ng; he encamped at Nán-chyǎw.
- 0303. Chín took our Pú-fǎn, J̀n-yáng, and F̀ng-gǔ.
- 0301. Went to aid Jūng-shān.
- 0300. The Lord of Sywē came to meet with the King at Fù-chyōu. Chǔ entered Yūng-sh̀, but the Chǔ men were defeated.

This is not a distinguished record of conquests and charismatic personal leadership.

¹Of the two versions of the BA, I here use the one reconstituted from early quotations.

²And was surely meant to counter it. For the Chí myth, see Mattos **Huángdì**.

Instead, Syāng-wáng seems to have preferred to daydream about the famous exploits of ancient kings. The Shān Jīng, written slightly earlier,³ purported to give information about routes to the west. There was now composed for Syāng-wáng a symbolic tale of travel, inspired by that of Chóng-ǎr of Jīn (from the DJ). Chóng-ǎr in exile had traveled through many states, sometimes receiving homage from them; later, as the ruler of Jīn, he dominated much of the territory he had passed through. With topographical details from the Shān Jīng, the Ngwèi courtiers elaborated the myth of the western travels of Mù, the last admirable King of Jōu. This tale was called the Mù Tyēndž Jwàn (the Story of Mù, the Son of Heaven). Mù-wáng represents Syāng-wáng, and his travels symbolize the universal sovereignty of Ngwèi (the successor of Jīn), which (in imitation of Chóng-ǎr of Jīn) was gained, not by fighting, but by visiting. The destination is of particular interest. Here is a subhuman creature who is mentioned in passing in the Shān Jīng, namely, the Queen of the West 西王母.⁴

SHJ 2C12 (c0318). 350 leagues to the west is Mount Jade. This is where the Queen of the West dwells. The Queen of the West has human form, with a leopard tail and the teeth of a tiger; she is skilled at whistling. In her tangled hair she wears a tiara; she has charge of Heavenly Disasters and the [stars of the] Five Injuries.

The authors of the Mù Tyēndž Jwàn combed the Queen's hair, downplayed her teeth, changed her whistling to song, and let her represent the far non-Sinitic lands.

On his way to see her, the Emperor passes through other symbolic territory. First, he encounters the patron deity of the Sinitic area, the Yellow River:

MTZJ 1 (c0310). On the cyclical day wù/yín (#15) the Emperor went west to the Yáng-yw Mountains, the chief abode of Wú-yí, Chief of the River 河伯; this is the Hú-dzūng clan. Bwó-yáu of the Hú-dzūng clan welcomed the Emperor at Yēn-rán Mountain, offering as presents a length of brocade and a jade disk⁵. . . The Emperor ordered Ji-fū to receive them . . . The Emperor, clad in his great robes . . . holding his jade disk and facing south, took his place at Hán-syà. Dzŷng Jù assisted him; his officers laid out the sacrificial animals. The Emperor then presented the Hú-dzūng disk to the Ancestor of the River. Bwó-yáu of the Hú-dzūng clan received it, and facing west, submerged the disk in the River; he bowed twice and touched his head to the ground. Jù then submerged the ox, horse, sheep, and pig. The Ancestor of the River then appeared, and commanded the august Emperor; the god spoke to him directly: “Mù-mǎn, forever shall you reign and prosper. The Emperor bowed twice to the south. The Ancestor of the River again addressed him; the God said, Mù-mǎn, I will show you the precious things of Mount Chūn, and proclaim to you the palaces of Kūnlún, with level ground in all directions, watered by seventy springs. Do you straightway go to Kūnlún Height to behold the treasures of Mount Chūn.” The bestowing voice grew faint, and the Emperor received the command, facing south and bowing twice . . .

By the God of the River, the Emperor has been admitted to sacred Kūnlún.

³The early part of the Shān/Hǎi Jīng (SHJ); see Brooks **Shān**.

⁴Not “Queen Mother;” the semantics of 母 are used up in translating 王 as “Queen.”

⁵A flat circular jade disk with a hole in the center, symbolizing unbroken regard.

This gives authority over the homeland of the Yellow Emperor, the ancestor of the Sinitic race, formerly claimed by the Tyén of Chí, but now appropriated by Ngwèi. The Emperor proceeds to take administrative charge of Kūnlún:

MTZJ 2 (c0310). On the auspicious day syīn/yǒu (#58) the Emperor ascended Kūn-lún Mountain, and from there viewed the palace of the Yellow Emperor. He also heaped up earth over the grave, as a guide to future generations. On gwěi/hài (#60) the Emperor made ready his offerings, all complete, and sacrificed them to Kūnlún Mountain. On jyǎ/dž (#01) the Emperor proceeded north, and lodged at Pearl Lake, to fish in its waters. It is said that the area of Pearl Lake is 30 leagues it has reeds, rushes . . . He then offered a white jade. . . . presented to the Emperor three hundred horses for food, and three thousand sheep and cattle. The Emperor . . . [enfiefed an unknown person at Kūn-lún] to have custody of the Palace of the Yellow Emperor, to the south, to be in charge of the Red River, and to the north to be in charge of the treasures of Mount Chūn . . .

And at the outermost limit of his travels, the Emperor at last meets the Queen:⁶

MTZJ 3 (c0310). On the auspicious day jyǎ/dž (#1) the Emperor was the guest of the Queen of the West. Holding a white scepter and a dark jade disk he met the Queen of the West, and presented her with a hundred lengths of brocade and three hundred lengths of fine silk. The Queen of the West bowed twice and accepted them.. On yī/chǒu (#02) the Emperor feasted the Queen of the West beside Emerald Pond. The Queen of the West sang a song for the Emperor:

The white clouds are in the Heavens,
and the mountain peaks emerge from them.
The road is very long,
and mountains and rivers lie between,
I hope that you will not die,
and so be able to come again.

The Emperor said in reply:

I now return to the eastern lands,
to reign in peace over all the Syà.⁷
When my myriad people are peaceful and orderly,
I shall look forward to seeing you.
Three years from this day,
I shall return to your wilderness.

The Emperor then rode up to the top of Yěn Mountain and engraved a record on the rock face of Mount Yěn, and planted it with sophora trees; at the top it said, “The Mountain of the Queen of the West.”

In Chapter 4, the Emperor returns to his capital by another route, thus completing his symbolic circuit. The territory of the tale is western, but the symbols are inclusive: they comprise the whole Sinitic heartland (as ruled by the God of the Yellow River), and all of the Sinitic peoples (considered as the descendants of the Yellow Emperor). At every level, it magnificently surpasses the old tale of Chūng-ǎr’s wanderings.

⁶For her further development as a goddess of the afterlife see Loewe **Ways** 86-126.

⁷One name used at this time for the Sinitic peoples.

At about this time (0310), the Bamboo Annals records the death of Jāng Yí, a native of Ngwèi, who was probably the chief minister in Ngwèi.⁸

Another major Ngwèi figure at this time was the general Dí Jāng, who in 0311 had attacked little Wèi 衛; in 0307 he went to the defense of the town of Pí-shì 皮氏, which Chín had attacked. In 0304 he went to the rescue of neighboring Hán, which was beset by a Chín/Chǔ joint force. The implied policy is to intervene locally in order to maintain a balance of military power. The BA does not name the general who went to the aid of Jūngshān in 0301, seemingly in pursuance of the same policy.

A quite different policy preoccupation is implied by the treatise Shī Chūn 師春 or Master of the Cosmos, also composed by Syāng-wáng's courtiers: it consists of a collection of all the Yì oracles from the newly available Dzwǒ Jwàn.

That something was gained by diplomacy is implied by the tale of Jāu Mǎu 昭卯 (HFZ 33/1:3), who averted threats by Chín and Hán, and later by Chí and Chǔ, but received only a trifling reward. The point of the tale is Syāng-wáng's niggardliness.

At some unknown time, a fifth chapter was added to the Mù Tyēndž Jwàn. It censures The Emperor's excesses (after lavishly portraying them), and sees Heaven's disapproval in the severe cold in which many of the courtiers die. The Emperor first expresses his grief for the people, and then repents of his extravagant ways:

MTZJ 5 (c0309, excerpt).

I travel in Yellow Bamboo land;
it suffers under grievous cold;
God has stopped the Nine Paths.
Alas, my Princes and my Lords,
my hundred nobles and officers –
Hold in awe my myriad people,
morning and evening, do not burden them.
There is a stork, all brilliant white,
with fluttering wings it flies away;
Alas, my Princes and my Lords,
Seek not your duties to evade:
Few are those who dwell in joy;
Better to improve their lot,
with music and with ritual.

The Emperor said, I, the One Man, have been extravagant, and have not held
in awe my myriad people . . .

This is no longer the adroit Emperor of the previous chapters, but a chastened figure, subject to the remonstrances of his loyal ministers. He thinks too little of his people. Mencius, looking forward from the year 0319, would probably have agreed.

⁸The nonquotation BA puts his death in 0312, and under 0313 records his being made minister: 魏以張儀爲相. This may reflect later tradition in which Jāng Yí had previously served Chín and Chí; the late Mencians (MC 3B2, c0270) already complain of the fame of the diplomats Gūngsūn Yēn and Jāng Yì as great men. Yí was probably the model for the fictional Sū Chín, whose doings delighted the Hán public. Untangling these stories from any scraps of fact they may contain is one of Sinology's neglected tasks. For Jāng Yí, see Brooks **Jāng**.

Later, it seems that Syāng-wáng's favorite concubine died. A new tale was written:

MTZJ 6 (c0305). On jyǎ/shēn (#21), the Emperor sent north and ascended the height of Dà-běi' after his descent, he took his rest beneath two cypress trees. The Emperor still continually troubled his heart with longing for his concubine Shǜng-jì, and now his tears flowed down. An officer of the Seven Regiments, Yāu Yǜ, presented a remonstrance to the Emperor, saying "Since ancient times there have been death and life; how should it be only Her Ladyship? The Emperor's unhappiness comes from his constantly thinking about her. But constant thought can be excessive. Let him not forget to consider the new."⁹ The Emperor still sorrowed for her, and his tears flowed again, but on that same day, he ceased . . .

A HFZ story (30B2:12) about an escaped convict from Wèi 衛 who treated the illness of Syāng-wáng's "Queen" 后 offers some corroboration. (In the story, Syāng-wáng at first protected the fugitive, but later surrendered him to the ruler of tiny Wèi).

Syāng-wáng's courtiers were now faced with a problem: how to end the Chronicle? It was said of Chí Hwán-gūng that he had "nine times united the feudal lords." The Ngwèi courtiers must have been looking for a similar event. And so when a minor lord came to visit, and in that same year a Chǔ attack was repulsed, we have this BA entry:

- 0300. The Lord of Sywē came to meet with the King at Fù-chyōu.
Chǔ entered Yūng-shì, but the Chǔ men were defeated.

The visit echoed the assemblies of Chí Hwán-gūng, and the defeat of Chǔ suggested the cardinal achievement of Jìn Wǜn-gūng: the 0632 repulse of Chǔ at Chǜng-pú.¹⁰ These were the defining moments in the careers of the famous Hegemons of old times. The nervous Ngwèi courtiers, undoubtedly with relief, brought their book to an end (its last entry marks the date of its closing as 0299), and presented it to Syāng-wáng.

Syāng-wáng died three years later. With him were buried the texts above quoted,¹¹ and others besides. Syāng-wáng read too much to be a great leader, or to figure very decisively in his own chronicle. When his tomb was looted in the 3c, the recovered Mù Tyēndž Jwàn soon achieved a place in the escape literature of that time. Since it had had that function for its first patron, this second literary life was only appropriate.

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⁹To take a new concubine; more generally, to think of the future and not the past.

¹⁰For the real story behind these Spring and Autumn events, see Brooks **League**.

¹¹Had the Bamboo Annals been a real state chronicle, and not a piece of court ingenuity, it would never have been buried with Syāng-wáng or any other Ngwèi ruler.