

The Hermeneutics of Emmentaler

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AAS (Chicago, 22 Mar 2001)

The date of the Dzwǒ Jwàn is a significant scholarly issue for two reasons. First, the Dzwǒ Jwàn is a monumental work,¹ covering a period that is among the most poorly understood in all of Chinese history. Scholars are eager to know more about how they can use this source. Second, there are few internal clues in the text that researchers can exploit to establish firm absolute dates. To be sure, passages are routinely provided with specific dates, but therein lies the problem: there is usually no external confirmation, so it is not clear whether the accounts are contemporaneous with the events they describe, or whether they were written at a later time. Compounding this ambiguity is the possibility that the text may quote or incorporate genuine ancient documents.

There are two general camps, which, for the sake of convenience, I shall call “Chūn/Chyōu” and “Jàn-gwó.” The “Chūn/Chyōu” view is that the Dzwǒ Jwàn is a primary document from Chūn/Chyōu times and thus can be used as a source for Chūn/Chyōu history. In practice, this point of view comes in two forms: a strong form claiming that the entire text – or at least the overwhelming majority of it, excluding specified interpolations – dates from the Chūn/Chyōu; and a weak form claiming that the received text may be the product of a Warring States redactor, but that the text still contains large sections of genuine Chūn/Chyōu material. The “Jàn-gwó” view, by contrast, holds that the text was compiled in Warring States times and conveys a retrospective and romanticized image of Chūn/Chyōu history. According to this view, the Dzwǒ Jwàn is still vitally important to the intellectual history of the Warring States and Imperial eras, but is not much more appropriate as a source for Chūn/Chyōu history than, say, the Sān-gwó Yěn-yì for the Three Kingdoms.

Any interpretation of the Dzwǒ Jwàn must deal with a substantial number of passages that can only be considered “errors.” These include: prognostications that history does not confirm until long after the end of the Chūn/Chyōu period; prognostications that history subsequently refutes – again, long after the end of the Chūn/Chyōu period;² mistaken astronomical information that must reflect later calculations rather than contemporary observations; and outright anachronisms.³

¹Now transmitted as a commentary to the Springs and Autumns (Chūn/Chyōu), but probably an independent text in its original form; see Lǚ **Dzwǒ-shì** 471-478.

²On prognostication in the Dzwǒ Jwàn generally, see Jāng **Shūfǎ** 40-60, Kalinowski **Rhétorique**, and Katô **Shunjū**.

³For example, scholars have long doubted the account in Jāu 29 (0513) of the casting of the iron “penal tripod.” See Wagner **Iron** 57f (where the event is misdated to 0512).

These issues have been discussed by eminent scholars, so I need not rehearse the details here. Yáng Bwó-jywn concludes on the basis of the prognostications that the text must have been compiled between the years 0403 and 0389, and other studies of the same evidence have yielded dates even later than that.⁴ The magnitude of the error in certain astronomical data, similarly, suggests a date of c0365.⁵

I think such passages are devastating to the “Chūn/Chyōu” view. Taken singly, any one of them might be dismissed as inconclusive, but collectively, they are compelling because they all point in the same direction. Moreover, it is sometimes forgotten that these are the only passages in the entire text that can be dated directly. The point is not that there happen to be a few odd passages incompatible with the “Chūn/Chyōu” theory. *All* the datable passages in the text are from no earlier than the fourth century, whereas no proponent of the “Chūn/Chyōu” view has ever identified a single passage that must antedate the Warring States. The score is about 20-0.⁶

“Chūn/Chyōu” advocates usually sidestep this problem by declaring these passages to be interpolations, and then dispensing with them entirely.⁷ This is what I mean by the “hermeneutics of Emmentaler.” As more and more of these alleged interpolations are discovered and removed from consideration, the image of the text that emerges is that of a great wheel of Swiss cheese, with Jàn-gwó bubbles and Chūn/Chyōu interstices. One cannot identify a passage as an “interpolation” simply because it is inconvenient to one’s theories about the date and composition of a text. There must be some linguistic or philological protocol. But these are rarely offered, nor are we often told how and why a later writer goes about surreptitiously interpolating things like prognostications that history eventually proves untrue.

These points are well known, and yet “Chūn/Chyōu” advocates exist,⁸ so their sense must be that the *overall* quality of the text still evokes the Chūn/Chyōu, at least to the extent that the “error” passages may be disregarded as careless Warring States packaging. This would be a weak form of the Chūn/Chyōu view. My sense is that the ambience of the text is redolent of the Warring States. The language sounds like archaizing fourth-century writing, not like seventh-century writing. Though I can offer no irrefragable supporting arguments, there is one inadequately appreciated datum, namely the prevalence of the word *dào* 道 in the Dzwǒ Jwàn as an ethical term. This is rare in literature before the Warring States. There are sporadic occurrences – one in the “Jywnshì” for example (我道惟寧王德廷), and Shī 245 refers to the *dào* of Lord Millet (“Lord Millet’s reaping had the *dào* of assisting [the vegetation]”) – but in the Dzwǒ Jwàn this sense is attested far more than sporadically.

⁴Yáng **Chǐngshū** 212-230. Nyóu **Nyéndài** 19f surveys nine other Chinese views; all are within a few decades of Yáng’s range. Nyóu himself proposes a range of c0375/c0355.

⁵See Kamada **Saden** 327-330; the most detailed study remains Shinjō **Temmongaku**.

⁶Yuri Pines (WSW 8 Aug 2001) cites two mistaken predictions: Syī 23 (Jìn will be the last of the Jì states to perish), and Syāng 31 (Jìng will enjoy several generations of good fortune) that imply a date before the 04c. Pines himself suggests a latest plausible date of c0450.

⁷For an example, see Pines **Foundations** 221-226 and 233-246.

⁸See, in addition to Pines, Hú **Lùngǎu** 21-76.

The Fraser-Lockhart index lists dozens of references for *dào* under such categories as “good government, the way, path of duty, reason, principle, general rule.” And we know now from the Gwōdyèn manuscripts (among other texts) that the *dào* was a crucial ethical and political concept in fourth-century philosophy,⁹ but there is not much evidence that it enjoyed this status before then.¹⁰ If the Dzwǒ Jwàn is indeed a Chūn/Chyōu text, its use of the term would qualify at least as idiosyncratic – and probably as revolutionary.

Next, there are certain bizarre features of the narrative in Dzwǒ Jwàn that are not easily compatible with the “Chūn/Chyōu” thesis. Take the character of Lord Mù of Chín. In the Battle of Hán 韓 (Syī 15), for example, he is portrayed as a paragon of virtue and forbearance; he attacks Jìn only in order to punish its treacherous ruler, Yíwú. After capturing Yíwú (otherwise known as Lord Hwèi of Jìn; r 0650-0637), he spares his prisoner and eventually returns him to his homeland. In the aftermath of his victory, Lord Mù continues to treat the nation of Jìn kindly, because his quarrel has been not with its people, but with its lord. His troops, moreover, are said to be possessed of great fighting spirit, and he commands them with insight and aplomb. Above all, *he listens to his advisors*.¹¹

Eighteen years later, in the Battle of Yáu 郟 (Syī 32-33), Lord Mù plans an unsound campaign of conquest despite the pointed remonstrances of his ministers. Now he exemplifies all the commonplace characteristics of a doomed ruler in the Dzwǒ Jwàn: he is overconfident, has no sense of ritual, and is greedy for territory. Of course, his forces are smashed and he is humiliated.¹²

Lord Mù was hardly a sage – this is the same Lord Mù who forced the three good Džjyǵ brothers to be buried alive with him when he died¹³ – but there is no hint in the account of the Battle of Hán that he was the kind of ruler who would ignore the counsel of sage ministers in a vain attempt to seize a few scraps of territory. It is remarkable that the same man should make all the shortsighted mistakes that, eighteen years earlier, he so wisely identified and so admirably avoided.

I think this difficulty is a consequence of the competing constraints on the author or authors of the Dzwǒ Jwàn: the philosophical theory that Heaven always helps the virtuous defeat the iniquitous; and the historical fact that Chín defeated Jìn in 0645, but was defeated by the same enemy in 0627. In the Battle of Hán, the author is compelled to portray Lord Mù as a moral hero and Yíwú as a tyrant. The Battle of Yáu is written as simply another episode in the ongoing struggle between right and wrong – but this time, Lord Mù must be depicted as the personification of impropriety. Neither of these passages tells us very much about the real Lord Mù.

⁹See Goldin **After** 43f, Cook **Debate**, and Dīng **Sžsyǵng** 242-267.

¹⁰Eno **Cook** 145 n10. Wú **Chyén** discusses many of the extended senses of *dào* in the Dzwǒ Jwàn but does not attempt to show that they are attested in earlier material.

¹¹DJ Syī 15 (0645).

¹²DJ Syī 32 (0628) and Syī 33 (0627).

¹³DJ Wǵn 6 (0621); see also Shī 131, which commemorates the event, and is analyzed in Goldin **Culture** 19f.

One final, general comment about the battle scenes in the Dzwǒ Jwàn: they read like the nostalgic chimeras of later ages, not like forthright contemporary accounts. They are all about heroism, honor, and Heaven-ordained victory or defeat; they glorify individual valor and condemn ignominious folly, with little consideration of practical concerns such as strategy and logistics. Moreover, they never convey the horrors and atrocities of war: the reader is spared the gruesome sight of civilians raped and slaughtered, the screams of tortured prisoners, or even the inevitable stench of corpses decaying on the battlefield.

In conclusion, the Dzwǒ Jwàn espouses fourth-century ideas in fourth-century language, and every datable passage in it must be assigned to the fourth century. I believe it is a fourth-century text.

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