
Review

Reviewed Work(s): Timing and Rulership in Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals (Lüshi chunqiu) by James D. Sellman

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Wild Kids is an absurd but frank, humorous, and ironic *Bildungsroman* in which the characters all refuse to grow up. Through his funny and disturbing portraits of teenagers, Chang documents the loss of innocence, inviting us to re-think what it means to be alive (and wild) in a society of spiritual vacuum and cultural bankruptcy. It offers an enjoyable reading experience, and an insight into the adolescent world. Although there will undoubtedly be a limit to the number of Big Head Spring-like stories, for now Chang's mischievous and cunning narration offers us an original appetizer outside of the critical realist main course and a fashionable choice for the ever-changing fin-de-siècle Taiwan. I very much look forward to hearing more of Big Head Spring's adventures and seeing more of Chang's books becoming available to an English audience.

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James D. Sellman, *Timing and Rulership in Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals (Lüshi chunqiu)*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2002.

Lüshi chunqiu (呂氏春秋 hereafter LSCQ) is one of the most fascinating products of pre-imperial Chinese thought. It was produced in the 240s-230s BCE at the court of Qin, under the auspices of the energetic chancellor Lü Buwei 呂不韋, whose aim was to summarize and synthesize intellectual developments of the preceding centuries, supplying thereby the soon-to-be-established unified empire with appropriate ideological guidelines. These efforts yielded an impressive 160 chapters-long treatise that became an important milestone in the history of Chinese thought.

Despite its key standing in the genesis of Chinese intellectual tradition, the LSCQ until recently was not at the focus of scholarly attention in the West. Like many other multi-authored compilations of pre-imperial thinkers, such as the *Guanzi* 管子, *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 or the *Liji* 禮記, the LSCQ was studied much less than those works that could have been attributed to a putative author or a "school" of thought. In the seminal studies of Benjamin Schwartz (*The World of Thought in Ancient China*, 1985) and Angus C. Graham (*Disputers of the Tao*, 1989), for instance, the LSCQ merits only a few references, mostly in the context of the evolution of correlative thinking and cosmological theories. Political and ethical views of the LSCQ authors were largely neglected despite their pivotal place in this compendium.

Fortunately, the situation began changing in the recent years. In 2000 Stanford University Press published a path-breaking complete translation of the LSCQ by Jeffrey Riegel and John Knoblock (*The Annals of Lü Buwei*); two years later SUNY Press printed James D. Sellman's *Timing and Rulership*, a first English monograph dedicated entirely to the LSCQ. Sellman's book summarizes two decades of his research on the LSCQ, which yielded more LSCQ-related publication than anything published in English heretofore. The contribution of Sellman's monograph to scholars, and particularly to students of the text is, therefore, undeniable. Despite several weaknesses of *Timing and Rulership*, outlined below, its publication is most welcome news for all those who deal with pre-imperial intellectual history.

To understand the book's problems we should remember that dealing with the LSCQ is a formidable task in general, and it was further aggravated due to the virtual absence of previous studies and translations (Sellman completed his book prior to the publication of Riegel's and Knoblock's magnum opus). The author had therefore to deal with two somewhat contradictory tasks. On the one hand he had to introduce to many of his readers the basic contents of the LSCQ; on the other hand, a more sophisticated audience expected from him a novel analysis of

the text, which would elucidate the place of the LSCQ in late Zhanguo intellectual discourse. This immanent contradiction between the genres of textbook and novel research might have brought about most of the book's drawbacks.

Sellman's major achievement lies in his ability to discern a unifying thread in the LSCQ compilation. He shows that this compendium is not a mere hodgepodge of diverse documents representing various trends in pre-imperial thought, but rather a sophisticated synthesis of divergent views. Sellman suggests that the unifying principle of the editors' selection from the broad pool of the ideas of the "Hundred Schools" (*bai jia* 百家) is the emphasis on proper timing as the precondition for political and personal success. The concept of timely action (*shi* 時) permeates the text, and is reflected both in its content and its structure. The backbone of the LSCQ, the so-called "Shi er ji" 十二紀 section presents a neat cosmological model, according to which the ruler must plan his activities in strict correspondence to seasonal changes. Sellman shows that timely arrangement of the "Shi er ji" section determines the nature of its intellectual synthesis: the recommendations of each intellectual current (or "school") are applicable at a particular season, and will be beneficent, if implemented at a proper time. The emphasis on timely action is present elsewhere in the LSCQ: its historical anecdotes teach the importance of proper timing in political life, and the concept of social order in general is presented in close connection with the idea of "changing with the times." Sellman furthermore intriguingly analyses the notion of human nature/character (*xing* 性) in the text as primarily a developmental process; achievement of proper timing becomes in the eyes of the LSCQ authors the crucial part of a person's self-cultivation.

Sellman's insightful discussion of the notion of proper timing in the LSCQ is definitely the strongest aspect of his monograph. Unfortunately, several conceptual and methodological problems temper this scholarly success. One of the major flaws of *Timing and Rulership* is its failure, despite the author's keen attempts, properly to locate the LSCQ on the map of pre-imperial intellectual developments. Had the author systematically surveyed different concepts of timely action and "changing with the times" in Zhanguo texts, he could have presented a more refined picture of the LSCQ intellectual synthesis. Instead, however, Sellman confines himself to brief and frequently inadequate discussion of selected "schools" of thought, routinely concluding that a certain chapter of the LSCQ "blends the ideas of *dao*jia and *ru*jia," or of "Mengzi and *fajia*," or of "Mohists and Xunzi" etc. (pp. 48, 55, 62, 63, 87, 124 *et saepe*). This way of presentation may help those who need an introduction to every single chapter or section of the LSCQ, but it often obliterates the more complicated general picture. This picture will remain incomplete until the author takes into consideration not only the ideas endorsed by the LSCQ authors, but also those that were edited out in the process of compilation.

To illustrate this point, let us focus on Sellman's discussion of the emergent social order (chapter 3). Sellman argues that "the LSCQ treatises describe human society as an emergent order" and that they "contain sound historical awareness" regarding the development of the state (p. 67). This "emergent organic instrumental approach," as Sellman calls it, combines the "*dao*jia, *ru*jia, and *wuxing* elements" with ideas exposed in "the *Moz*i, *Xun*zi, *The Book of Lord Shang* (*Shang jun shu*) and military treatises" (p. 68). Sellman surveys different notions of the emergence of the state in the texts of various "schools" and shows how the LSCQ chapters amalgamated these approaches. He ends with the conclusion that the book merely unified distinct views into "a coherent 'organic instrumental' understanding of the state" that served "as a guideline for both Qin and Han literature and their social and political institutions" (p. 114).

The major problem with Sellman's attempt to summarize pre-imperial discussions of state formation is his teleologically-inspired choice of the approaches surveyed. Sellman concentrates on those views that are supposedly reflected in the LSCQ, neglecting other important theories that had been rejected or neglected by the LSCQ authors. He argues that "there are three explanations concerning the origin of the state: divine creation, natural organic generation, and

instrumentalism," and that since the notion of divine creation "is not a consideration in mainstream pre-Qin thought," Zhanguo approaches are divided into "organic theory," "instrumental theory" or the combination of the two (pp. 70-71); Sellman then identifies elements of each of these theories in the LSCQ.

Putting aside for the time being Sellman's erroneous statement that Zhanguo thought lacked the notion of divine creation of political institutions,¹ let us focus on what he calls "organic" and "instrumentalist" approaches toward state formation. By employing these labels borrowed from the history of Western thought Sellman leads the reader away from the pivotal aspects of Zhanguo polemics. State formation became one of the most hotly debated issues in middle to late Zhanguo texts. Thinkers frequently constructed narratives of the emergence of the state in order to bolster their arguments about how political institutions in the present ought to function. When such texts as the *Shang jun shu* 商君書, *Han Feizi* 韓非子 and the "Jun chen" 君臣 chapter of the *Guanzi* present an evolutionary theory of the gradual sophistication of social institutions, they accentuate the need to reform these institutions in the present to match the changing circumstances. Alternatively, when thinkers as Xunzi 荀子 present their so-called "instrumentalist" model, their aim is to convince the readers that basic state institutions, and particularly the position of a ruler, are eternal and hence unchangeable. Mozi's 墨子 view of state formation, which curiously resembles "social contract" theory, is intrinsically linked to his goal to present a unified state apparatus as the one possible alternative to the current age of disintegration and disorder. Against this view, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 presents a radically different concept according to which the emergence of the state was a result of the sages' malicious conspiracy that destroyed the primeval idyll and brought humanity to its disastrous state of mutual strife, oppression and endless violence.²

Which of these contradictory explanations were adopted by the LSCQ authors and compiler(s)? We may immediately discern the absence of any radical anti-state polemics characteristic of the *Zhuangzi*. Nor is an evolutionary model present. While the LSCQ recognizes the need of changing with the times, it generally refrains from presenting an evolutionary model of change. The idea that the state was created at a certain stage of human history is mentioned only once in passing in the "Dang bing" chapter, which focuses on the justification of violence and war rather than on the issue of social institutions.³ Never again does the LSCQ raise the issue of the emergence of the state; its existence is justified, much as in the *Xunzi*, as a response to basic human needs, the only reasonable way of human beings to deal with nature.⁴ The LSCQ authors pay little if any attention to the question of why and how the state appeared: its existence is natural, reasonable and hence beyond discussion.

By omitting all those models that presented state formation as either evolution or degradation of human society, the LSCQ authors radically de-historicized the state, in direct contradiction to

¹For the Zhanguo notion of the divine creation of the state, see Michael J. Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 101-105; and his earlier discussion, "Sages, Ministers, and Rebels: Narratives From Early China Concerning the Initial Creation of the State," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 58, 2 (1998), 436-441. This important study, as many others, was not noticed by Sellman.

²This discussion is based on Yuri Pines and Gideon Shelach, "Using the Past to Serve the Present: Comparative Perspectives on Chinese and Western Theories of the Origins of the State", forthcoming in the conference volume "Genesis and Regeneration" (Jerusalem, Israeli National Academy of Sciences, 2000); for an alternative reconstruction of Zhanguo discourse, see Puett's *Ambivalence*, 92-140; and his "Sages."

³Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, comp., *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋 (Shanghai: Xuelin, 1990), "Dang bing" 蕩兵, 7.2: 383.

⁴See *Lüshi chunqiu*, "Shi jun" 恃君, 20.1: 1321-22.

Sellman's arguments. Their choice to present the state as a given and unshakeable reality preceded the emergence of a similar, largely a-historical, concept of the state that dominated Chinese thought from the Han period on, perhaps reflecting an end of the search for an ideal state formation in the late Zhanguo period. Sellman's insufficiently systematic treatment of Zhanguo narratives results therefore in a skewed picture of the LSCQ, and obliterates its highly selective approach toward the Zhanguo intellectual legacy.

Aside from insufficient attention to the particulars of Zhanguo discourse, Sellman's study suffers from inaccurate and fairly outdated presentation of sociopolitical context for the ideas and views presented in the LSCQ. While some of Sellman's problematic statements, such as his discussion of pre-Zhanguo "feudal" society or an erroneous attribution of the introduction of iron to the seventh-to-sixth centuries BCE (p. 77), are marginal to the overall argument and may be ignored, other misrepresentations have more serious consequences. Particularly annoying is Sellman's depiction of the *shi* 士 stratum as "scholar-knights [who] were the leaders of the commoners" (p. 221, n. 123). This designation is doubly misleading. First, *shi* were not a professional but a social group, whose original position was as the lowest segment of the hereditary aristocracy (below the high-ranking nobles, the *dafu* 大夫, but above the commoners). Second, by the late Zhanguo period the *shi* largely converged with the high-ranking nobility, and the term *shi* became a general designation for the elite, which, albeit open, remained clearly distinguishable from commoners. By the third century BCE, as the distinctions between *dafu* and *shi* had diminished, the term *dafu* became increasingly marginal in contemporary texts. Remarkably, it never appears in the LSCQ except in reference to historical personalities. This avoidance of the term with its clear hereditary connotations is not coincidental, and it may reflect one of the major agendas of the LSCQ authors, which remained unnoticed by Sellman.

Even a cursory reading of the LSCQ indicates its position as a manifesto of the late Zhanguo *shi*. The respect shown the *shi* in the text is not confined to mere attempts to convince a ruler to employ proper personnel, as suggested by Sellman (pp. 62-65). The LSCQ actually goes much further in lauding outstanding *shi*, whom "a ruler of a state cannot obtain as friends, and the Son of Heaven cannot obtain as ministers."⁵ The text repeatedly emphasizes the importance of *shi* to the destiny of the state; rulers are advised never to behave arrogantly towards *shi*, and to tolerate the haughty behavior of their aides, never forgetting that *shi* are their teachers, and not mere servants.⁶

The LSCQ panegyrics for outstanding *shi* continue a tendency of the late fourth century BCE texts, such as *Mengzi* 孟子 and the *Yu cong* 語叢 slips from Guodian 郭店, which assert the independent position of the *shi* versus the rulers. This arrogance of the *shi* was bitterly criticized in other late Zhanguo texts, such as *Shang jun shu*, *Han Feizi* and several chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.⁷ Han Feizi in particular might have hinted at some of the LSCQ authors in his philippics against talkative and useless *shi*.⁸ That such critical views are absent from the LSCQ suggests that the authors of this text had other agenda than merely preparing "a political handbook" for managing

⁵國君不得而友，天子不得而臣。(Lüshi chungiu, "Shi jie" 士節, 12.2: 622-623). A more extreme passage claims that as for the great *shi*, "the Five Emperors could not obtain them as friends, the Three Kings could not obtain them as teachers; only when they cast aside their emperors' and kings' airs could they approach and be able to obtain [these *shi*]" (五帝弗得而友，三王弗得而師，去其帝王之色，則近可得之。"Xia xian" 下賢, 15.3: 879).

⁶See Lüshi chungiu, "Zun shi" 尊師, 4.3: 204-6; "Jie li" 介立, 12.3 627-28; "Bu qin" 不侵, 12.5: 640-41; "Xia xian" 15.3: 878-880; "Shun shuo" 順說, 15.5: 905-906; "Jiao zi" 驕恣, 20.7: 1404-1405.

⁷For the assertive attitude of Zhanguo *shi* toward the ruler's authority and for the subsequent anti-*shi* reaction, see Yuri Pines, "Friends or Foes: Changing Concepts of Ruler-Minister Relations and the Notion of Loyalty in Pre-Imperial China," *Monumenta Serica* 50 (2002, forthcoming).

⁸See *Han Feizi*, "Wu du" 49: 442-456.

“administrative affairs” (p. 17). The book should be better understood as a negotiation between the Qin establishment headed by Lü Buwei, who might have indeed ordered a kind of “political handbook” to be prepared, and Lü’s “guests,” the “plain-clothed” (*buyi* 布衣) *shi*, who seized an opportunity to bolster their social standing and to convince the patron of their importance and indispensability. This crucial aspect of the text is all but overlooked by Sellman.

Aside from the substantial problems outlined above, *Timing and Rulership* suffers from several methodological weaknesses. One might have expected from Sellman a more serious approach to secondary studies. All too often the author employs a straw man strategy arguing against “some scholars,” without further specification (e.g., pp. 7, 16, 19 ff.). Elsewhere Sellman claims that the concept of proper timing in the LSCQ “has been undervalued or ignored in the Chinese, Japanese and European commentarial literature” (p. 4). This sweeping statement does justice neither to Chinese studies, nor, particularly, to Japanese research. As the latter is not mentioned either in the bibliography or in the notes, his criticism is therefore even less understandable.⁹

Even when the author’s polemics are addressed to a specific scholar, the choice of the opponents is strange. Most of critical remarks in *Timing and Rulership* refer to studies produced more than half a century ago, such as works by Hu Shi (“*Du Lüshi chunqiu*” 讀呂氏春秋, written in the 1920s), Hsiao Kung-chuan (*A History of Chinese Political Thought*, written in 1945), Burton Watson (*Early Chinese Literature*, 1962), and, most curiously, *Notes on Chinese Literature* by Alexander Wylie (1815-1887). With all due respect to these studies, one wonders whether nothing has changed since then in the field of Sinology in general and in studies of the LSCQ in particular.

Sellman’s problems are exacerbated by his neglect of numerous modern studies that could have greatly benefited his research. Works by Mark Lewis, Martin Kern, Michael Puett, Randal Peerenboom, Chinese studies by Liu Zehua 劉澤華 and Yang Kuan 楊寬, not to mention Japanese works by Numajiri Masataka 沼尻正隆 and others—all these could have allowed the author to avoid many pitfalls and update his analysis. New archeological discoveries, particularly the Guodian texts, some of which are highly relevant for Sellman’s discussion of human nature/character (*xing* 性) and of proper timing, were similarly ignored. Even if the draft of the monograph was prepared before the publication of some of these works, their importance might have merited substantial, even if last-minute, revision of significant portions of Sellman’s arguments. In particular, as his “Introduction” had been completely superseded by Riegel and Knoblock, Sellman’s work became somewhat outdated from the very moment of its publication.

The final problem of *Timing and Rulership* is an intolerable amount of typos and misspellings, the most annoying of which is the constant reference to the thinker Zou Yan 鄒衍 as Zuo Yan. A brief list of the most problematic misspellings or inconsistent transliterations contains “Loyang” instead of Luoyang (p. 9), “Shantung” instead of Shandong (12), “Cheng” instead of Zheng 鄭 (129); “Mu Mu” instead of Mo Mu 嫫母 (141); “Lisilan” instead of “Li su lan” 离俗覽 (throughout the book). Some of the translations are similarly problematic: *Lü shi* 呂氏 of the LSCQ means Mr. Lü and not “the Lü clan estate” (12); *bu yi* 布衣 refers to linen and not to “cotton” clothes (p. 109—cotton was introduced to China many centuries later). The absence of glossary and the regrettably scarce use of Chinese characters further impair the reading of the book.

Despite these critical remarks, Sellman’s book is a laudable addition to the library of those who deal with ancient Chinese thought. Sellman succeeded in introducing a largely neglected text to the Western audience, and if his monograph inspires further research of the LSCQ, then

⁹Many relevant Chinese and Japanese studies of the LSCQ are conveniently collected in bibliographical section of Knoblock’s and Riegel’s *Annals*. Japanese research of the LSCQ yielded among others a special journal, *Ryōshi shunjiū kenkyū* 呂氏春秋研究, which was published between 1987 and 1992 and collected almost forty articles about the LSCQ (I am indebted to Sato Masayuki 佐藤將之 for his help in obtaining this information).

the publication will achieve its major goal.

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Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China, by Alan J. Berkowitz. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000. Pp. 296.

As the author points out at the very outset of this book, "reclusion has been a nuclear component of the traditional Chinese cultural tableau since time immemorial" (xi). So indispensable it is, in fact, that almost any scholar-official in the Chinese tradition would use reclusion for the expression of his lofty intent, either whether sincerely or hypocritically. Even Sir Zheng, Jia Baoyu's "rankcareer-worm" (*ludu*) father in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, desired for reclusion in a "natural setting" that he contrived to squeeze by forceunnaturally squeezed into his luxurious household. Both, the omnipresence of reclusion in the Chinese tradition and its the murky features implications caused by such its omnipresence, beg for closer examination and delineation of the nature of this intellectual practice. Alan J. Berkowitz's *Patterns of Disengagement* offers us the first systematic study of reclusion in a Western language. This meticulous work "looks primarily at the formulation and portrayal of actual reclusion, at individual practitioners and patterns of substantive reclusion, at the views of medieval chroniclers of reclusion, and at the distinctive nature of the practice in early and early-medieval China" (xii).

Although reclusion in most civilizations indicates withdrawal into a life of seclusion, often within a religious context, reclusion in traditional China "usually meant withdrawal from active participation in an official career in the state bureaucracy" (p. 2). Hence the "touchstone of the man in reclusion was conduct and personal integrity manifested in the unflinching eschewal of official position" (xi). Such unflinching eschewal of official position entails what Berkowitz terms as "actual reclusion" or "substantive reclusion," vis-à-vis opposed to "abstract reclusion" that often serves as didactic rhetoric rather than a chosen way of life. Berkowitz's examination of reclusion is therefore first and foremost a test to the practitioner's strength of character, placed within the social, political, intellectual, religious and literary context of his time. Thus, Berkowitz offers us more than the his title has promised—a history that focuses on reclusion but stretches into every aspect of the intellectual life of early and early-medieval China.

The time scheme that Berkowitz sets up for his study also follows up the inner evolution of reclusion. Some scholars believes that "by the end of the Han dynasty most of the major aspects of the Chinese eremitic tradition had already taken shape." Berkowitz argues, however, that "it is only with the Han that we find the beginnings of reclusion, and that it is during the Six Dynasties that the characteristic pattern of substantive reclusion in Cchina is firmly established" (p. 8). In other words, this study, though ending up with the Six Dynasties, presents a rather complete picture of the reclusion in the Chinese tradition.

The entire book is divided into seven chapters, discussing the formulation and portrayal of reclusion in a chronological order. Chapter One, "The Portrayal of Reclusion in Early China: Patterns and Thematic Archetypes," identifies the pre-Han period as the formative stage of reclusion. During this period, the didactic nature and unreliable information of the portrayals of reclusion obscured the actualities of the lives of early practitioners. On the other hand, this process of "eroding away" individuality from the individualspractitioners also tended to increase their individuals' thematic roles in the development of Chinese tradition. And in turn it the