

James D. SELLMANN: *Timing and Rulership in Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* (Lüshi chunqiu). Albany: State University of New York 2002. 265 S. ISBN 0791452328. Paperback, US\$21.95.

The *Lüshi chunqiu* (LSCQ) is arguably the single most heterogeneous book of pre-Han China. Likely conceived as a sort of *Fürstenspiegel* for the education of the young King Zheng (the future Qin Shihuang; reg. 256–210 BC), it anthologizes material representing all major currents of early Chinese thought on politics and rulership. But its putative author, Lü Buwei (ob. 235 BC), and his collaborators did not assemble the text haphazardly. In *Timing and Rulership in Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* (Lüshi chunqiu), James D. Sellmann persuasively argues that the LSCQ is bound together by concern with time and timing. Sellmann's is an engaging and interesting study of a fascinating work, and should appeal to all interested in philosophy and intellectual history of the times around and during Qin rule, with special appeal for anyone interested in applied eclecticism.

In his first chapter, Sellmann gives an introduction to the text of the LSCQ and its provenance. Organized in three parts, the LSCQ was assembled by a large group of scholars under Lü's oversight and direction. Sellmann demonstrates that the work is united by a concern with "proper timing" (4). Thus, while eclectic in makeup, it comprises a single text, albeit one that is not "linear and systematic in the development of its thesis" (17).

Sellmann's second chapter is primarily a discussion of the "Shier ji" that comprise the first and longest section of the LSCQ. The "Shier ji" follow the annual cycle of the four seasons, and for each, Sellmann describes a thematic focus corresponding to one or more schools of early Chinese thought. These sections are united by their interest in proper timing, particularly for the sovereign in his development of self and governance, and for his vital role in the great dance of the Seasons.

The spring section corresponds to the politically-engaged forms of Daoism. Although the LSCQ presents the ruler with a wide variety of examples for human conduct and its management, the book propounds, in this section particularly, not a "science" but rather a hands-off "art" of rulership, outlining general approaches to ruling" (32). The Daoist section of the "Shier ji" also treats self-cultivation—especially that of the sovereign, which, properly pursued, leads to effective governance. Part and parcel of this governance is the ruler's "impartiality" (*gong*) (37), gained through cultivation and a resulting "self-integration" (39).

The summer corresponds to the Ruists and their preoccupations: ritual, music, and study, particularly as substantiated around the person of a ruler who cultivates self and governance. The result of his successful cultivation is a ruler who is exemplar for the ruled; the result of proper governance is an orderly and employed populace.

Militarist concerns correspond to the autumn season, and the dying-off in the fall has its analogy in human affairs. It is then that, "the ruler must use regulations, punishments, and especially punitive expeditions to weed out and prune off those undesirable elements that arise in the process of ruling the empire" (56). Force is brought to bear in a context of "just military actions" (57), validated through appeal to precedent and human nature.

"The early winter season is chiefly devoted to matters of 'storage,' both of harvest grain and burial of the dead" (59). Winter is the time of Mohists and Legalists.

Proper utilization of resources relates closely to matters of storage, and also falls into this section. These tasks require preparation and qualified officials, both of which concerns correspond to winter as well.

Sellmann's third chapter, "An Emergent Social Order," treats the *LSCQ*'s perspective on the origins, development, and organization of human society. Sellmann begins by summarizing the three primary pre-Qin theories of "the origin of the state": "divine," "organic," and "instrumental" (70). These three positions suppose that human society arises from a supernatural act, from the intrinsically social nature of human beings, or is invented by people for the benefit of its members, respectively. Divine origin is dismissed in short order simply as something that "is not a consideration in mainstream pre-Qin thought" (70).

Organic theories are a different matter entirely, and although they are not explicitly enunciated in early texts, Sellmann shows these positions to be of great importance in early Chinese thought. For the Ruists, political bodies have an organic model in the family. Daoist political organicism is reflected in three ways: first, Daoism assumes a ruler and thus a state to be ruled; second, there is the notion that some sort of good society once existed, implying that social groups are natural and not intrinsically bad; third is the idea that human society arises from actions of sages that mirror nature. There is also organicism in the Agriculturist's notion that farming is an innate human tendency. This leads to a theoretical "system of mutual accountability based on small groups of families assigned to farm certain fields" (76), later taken up by the Legalists.

The instrumentalist argument is based on the usefulness of human society to its members. According to Sellmann, there are two versions of instrumentalism in early China: one Militarist, one Legalist. The two approaches share the common belief that human nature is "aggressively antisocial" (83). The Militarist position assumes that people exist in a condition of conflict, forming groups in order to fight; culture and law are achieved in tandem with military development. The Legalists are a diverse group, but generally hold that since humans are by nature antisocial, they require a ruler and laws to maintain order. The ruler brings order to unruly desires and enables people to live together peaceably. Other versions of instrumentalism point to other ways in which organized and regulated society profits its members as the impetus for forming societies.

Sellmann proposes that the *LSCQ* propounds a hybrid "Organic Instrumentalist Position" (89). Of particular importance and interest to the text are the correlative theories of Yin-Yang and Wuxing, dynastic cycles, and "the awareness that the art of rulership perseveres through historical change" (91). Choosing the crème de la crème of the various schools of thought, the compilers developed a method of leadership that focuses on a ruler's application of these theories in order to simultaneously care for his subjects and to establish his own success.

The fourth chapter of Sellmann's book treats "proper timing" in three spheres: the "environmental," "historical political," and "interpersonal" (117). In the environmental sphere, the ruler is responsible for the integration of action throughout the realm—particularly ritual action—with the times and seasons. Agriculture is an important model for the active cultivation of proper timing in the activities of oneself and of others. An adept ruler not only stimulates his people to take advantage of nature through proper timing, but can also develop the ability to actually control the weather by perceiving and exploiting "determinate 'causes'" (125). A skilled ruler acts as a crux to bring the timing of the realm into coordination with the external world, all the way up to the level of the cosmos.

In the realm of “moral and interpersonal relations” (139), it is the encounter between people—especially between ruler and minister—that determines success or failure. Such timing is created, not awaited or received. Since the ruler’s responsibility is for the whole realm, the consequences are correspondingly broad. Timing is important at the personal level as well, be it in successful self-cultivation or in seizing the day to marshal the people toward removing a despot from power. Sellmann ends this section, and this chapter, with a discussion of the relation between the *Yijing* 易 and the *LSCQ*, especially the role of timing in the former as it relates to the same in the latter.

The fifth and final chapter is quite different from the preceding four. Here, Sellmann does not simply analyze the contents of the *LSCQ*. Instead, he explores its principles by application for philosophical issues in modern social, political, and ethical thought. He examines some current major theories about time and compares them to the ideas found in the *LSCQ*, particularly the notion that time is essentially created. Sellmann also extracts a new notion of the individual human being: that of a dynamic being existing in an integrated relationship with the larger world.

Sellmann proposes an “organic contract theory” (169) to explain why humans form social groups and how they should behave in these. His theory is “organic” in that it posits an innately sociable human being; thus, social and political bodies are outgrowths of human nature. At the same time, membership in a society constitutes a “contract,” in that it necessitates mutual obligations between the society and its members, and between the members themselves. The author further proposes what he calls “A social role ethic” (176). This ethic takes the family as both a model and a starting-point, in that family members have particular roles that are to a great extent predetermined, vary with the passage of time, and that also impose responsibilities and modes of conduct upon the occupants of those roles.

Sellmann’s book is, in general, intellectually ambitious and successful. His hypothesis that themes of time bind the *LSCQ* together, despite a great diversity of material and philosophy, is convincing. The nature of the work—not to mention the nature of humanistic intellectual enterprise generally—means that no single understanding need exclude other interpretive possibilities. With this caveat, it is clear that Sellmann carries his point effectively. In doing so, he displays an evident mastery of the whole text, no mean feat when treating a work of such richness and complexity.

There are some minor shortcomings in this work. Perhaps the most significant of these is Sellmann’s tendency to reduce complex positions to shorthand descriptors. When these are the familiar rubrics of Daoist, Ruist, Mohist, etc., the result is easy to understand, though the discussion at points comes a bit too close to a telegraphic “two parts Daoist, one part Ruist” analysis. But when Sellmann indulges a penchant for the jargon of philosophy, it can obscure the analysis—at least for a generalist. Also, the body of the book gives no Chinese characters (a limited number can be found in the appendices); it would be helpful if the characters for names, terms, etc., were given in the text or in a glossary. But these small weaknesses do not detract significantly from this fine work.

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