Translator’s summary: The Gongyang commentators, following, perhaps, the original chronicler, seem ill-disposed toward Duke Huan, owing to his possessing a greater ambition than his brother Duke Yin. Huan’s questionable deeds are highlighted (perhaps even fabricated, in the case of his policy toward the state of Song), whereas Yin’s were suppressed.

The First Year of Duke Huan’s Reign (711 BCE)

It was the year one, in the spring, during the King’s first month. The Duke succeeded to the throne. Ordinarily, when one inherits the throne from a murdered predecessor, it is not said that he “succeeds to the throne.” Why is the phrase “succeeded to the throne” used here? To emphasize the fact that succeeding to the throne had always been his wish.1

During the third month, the Duke met with the Earl of Zheng at Chui.2

The Earl of Zheng borrowed Xutian for a carved jade disc. What is meant by “borrowed” for a carved jade disc? It means “exchanged” for it. If it means “exchanged,” then why does it say “borrowed”? It says “borrowed,” to preserve a sense of form. Why the need for a sense of form? Because as long as the Son of Heaven was alive, then the feudal lords could not rightly dispose of territory. What is meant by “Xutian”? Xutian was a town where the lords of the state of Lu would stay whenever they went to pay visits at court. All the feudal lords would occasionally pay visits to the Son of Heaven at court, and they would all, in the districts surrounding the Son of Heaven’s capital, maintain towns where they could stay during their court visits. Since the town in question was

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1 Huan’s ambition contrasts, perhaps sardonically, with Yin’s lack of it.
2 Chui was in the state of Wei and was mentioned in year eight of the previous reign.
3 Yue was apparently near Chui.
where the lords of Lu would stay during their court visits, then why is it called “Xutian”? It is so named, in order to avoid even the suggestion that the lords of Lu were taking land from the house of Zhou. Precisely how does the name “Xutian” satisfy the need to avoid the taboo subject of taking land from the House of Zhou? Naming it “Xutian” effectively disguises the town as belonging instead to the state of Xu. How can it be said that it belonged to the state of Xu? Well, it was close to Xu. As for this “town,” why is it called Xutian, meaning “Xu Fields”? Places with more field than town are called fields; places with more town than field are called towns.

In the summer, during the fourth month, on the ding wei day, the Duke met up with the Earl of Zheng and made a pact with him at Yue.³

In the autumn, there was flooding. Why record this? To make note of a natural disaster.

In the winter, it was the tenth month.

The Second Year of Duke Huan’s Reign (710 BCE)

It was the year two, in the spring, during the King’s first month, on the wu shen day. Du, of the state of Song, assassinated his ruler, Yuyi, together with his grand officer, Kong Fu.⁴ What is the meaning of the phrase “together with,” in this context? It means that Kong Fu was caught up in the affair. Cases of regicide are abundant. Are there other cases, besides this one, of people getting caught up in regicides? The answer is yes. Qiu Mu and Xun Xi are fitting examples.⁵ Aside from Qiu Mu’s and Xun Xi’s cases, mentioned in the record, aren’t there other cases that pass unmentioned? The answer is that there are. Well, if some cases are mentioned and some are not, then why is this case mentioned? The present case, that of Kong Fu, is mentioned because he was a worthy. What was worthy about Kong Fu? Kong Fu was worthy because his righteous indignation was written on his face. In what way was his righteous indignation written on his face? Du planned to kill Duke Shang, but as long as Kong Fu was alive, Du never had the chance to get Duke Shang in his clutches. Therefore, Du first attacked Kong Fu at his home. Duke Shang knew that if Kong Fu were to die, then he himself would be doomed. He rushed to save Kong Fu, and thus both perished together. With Kong Fu and his upright countenance at court, none dared to transgress in any way that would

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⁴ Du’s full name was Hua Du. Kong Fu’s correct name was Kong Fujia, and he was an ancestor of Confucius. As for Yuyi, see the entry under Year Three of Duke Yin, above, where it is said that he was killed by Duke Zhuang, his successor. Probably Hua Du performed the deed, under the orders of Duke Zhuang. Yuyi’s formal name was Duke Shang.

⁵ Qiu Mu was killed at the same time as Duke Min of Song, and Xun Xi was killed at the same time as Zhuozi of Jin. See the twelfth year of Duke Zhuang and the tenth year of Duke Xi.