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1 Statecraft Confucian

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China today is one of the most governmentalized societies in the world. State penetration into everyday life may not be as thorough as some critics insist, yet the idea that the state should be present in society – monitoring, supervising, and regulating every aspect of individual and social life, even life itself – persuades most Chinese to submit to state oversight in exchange for the security that the state claims to provide. This expectation, which regards the state as the font of social order and moral regulation, accepts that its capacities and interests must be upheld at all costs, even at the expense of social justice and individual liberty. The Chinese are not alone in this belief, of course. The formation of national security states worldwide since the Cold War, and especially in the past decade, has done much to naturalize the supremacy of state authority.

China is not alone in elevating the state above the citizen, but it does draw on a several-millennia-long tradition of state policy and political philosophy supporting this orientation. The term in Chinese that tags this tradition is *jingshi*, literally the warp (in the weaving sense of the word) of this world or this generation and figuratively the policies and programs by which the state should manage public affairs. The antique tone of the standard translation in Anglophone sinology, "statecraft," acknowledges that the craft of administering public affairs has been outclassed by the brutal realpolitik that the term "politics" now celebrates. Nonetheless, "statecraft" suits the intellectual weight and practice orientation of Confucian *jingshi*. It characterizes state administration as a craft that can be learned and should be applied consistently and systematically to solve real-world problems. It also expresses the seriousness of the task of managing public affairs, which became the core vocation and highest responsibility of educated Confucians.

At the heart of this conviction lie two desiderata: maintaining the viability of the ruling regime, almost regardless of how it rules, and ensuring the livelihood of the people. By Confucian logic, these objectives are closely linked, if not inseparable. To protect the realm, administrative procedures have to be in place to monitor court conduct, recruit and supervise personnel, and develop administrative protocols. Revenue must be collected to support the

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state, though in a way that does not plunder the people. Military institutions must be sustained to ensure security and to protect borders from incursion or invasion, though again without harming the farmers on whose production the state and the army rely. By meeting these tasks, according to Confucian logic, a competent state administration ensured the people's livelihood. Failure to do so was recognized as a threat on its own terms, but it was recognized even more as a threat to the security of the realm and the longevity of the dynasty.

Confucian statecraft fell into obscurity with the collapse of the imperial system after 1911. In a bid to adapt Chinese traditions to global trends, Sun Yat-sen borrowed Abraham Lincoln's mantra in the Gettysburg address – "of the people, by the people, and for the people" – to propose a program of good governance, which he called the Three Principles of the People – nationalism (of the people and against imperialism), democracy (by the people and against autocracy), and livelihood (for the people and against poverty). Nationalism and democracy bristle with modernist concepts of rights that were foreign to the Confucian vision of government; livelihood, however, does not. Confucian statecraft was not government of or by the people, but it was unquestionably government for the people. The Confucian vision of the well-ordered realm obliged the state to protect the livelihood of the people, which is to say, to conduct its operations in ways favouring "what benefits the people." By this logic, the regime that fails to benefit the people may legitimately be overthrown. To put this in our language, political and civil rights may be trampled without consequence, but social and economic rights must be protected if a regime is to enjoy legitimacy.

Confucians, as well as latter-day historians, have reconstructed the political tradition of statecraft back at least to Confucius himself, if not beyond, though primarily as one of many applications of Confucian principles rather than as the core of the doctrine. Confucius was a philosopher concerned with discerning the patterns through which the world was brought to order, and then with training students to serve rulers who respected these patterns and conformed their conduct to them. That concern gave his thought considerable political salience, certainly for rulers but just as much for administrators who, in serving their rulers, understood that they bore ethical and practical obligations beyond simple loyalty. Serving the ruler and serving the people were not the same task, especially when the ruler perceived himself to be under threat. The Confucian official could not afford openly to acknowledge that the two objectives could be in opposition to each other, even less to bring this contradiction to his ruler's attention. Confucian praxis thus accepted the compromises that serving power required so as to ensure that other moral tasks could be accomplished. Practical compromise could sometimes induce Confucian officials to embrace a steadfast conservatism that resisted any innovation that might jeopardize either the ruler's longevity or the people's welfare. But it could also encourage

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a spirit of experimentation to develop new methods to ensure their welfare in response to changing circumstances.

Curiously, given Confucius's assumption that the purpose of learning was to serve political rulers, the statecraft tradition has largely been ignored by Chinese and foreign scholars of Confucianism. Their preference has been instead to locate Confucianism with a more general history of philosophy that prioritizes the work of conceptualization over the practice of application. Confucianism has thus been read for its philosophical content at the expense of its contribution to political economy. Pick up any handbook of Chinese philosophy, and you will find Confucianism presented as a corpus of thought and a system of logical construction rather than as a body of policy or a method of policy analysis. This reading of Confucianism as pure philosophy would have surprised the many historical Confucians who understood Confucianism as a guide to their conduct of life, especially in public office.

Qiu Jun, the focus of this volume's analysis, was one of these Confucians. He understood the teachings of that tradition as a blueprint for meeting the needs of the people and responding to the demands of this world, not as contributions to abstract philosophy. The Ming dynasty, the setting for the events and ideas in this book, was a period notable as an age when many of the intellectually most prominent figures – most conspicuously the best-known philosopher of that dynasty, Wang Yangming – espoused Confucian principles to guide their personal lives and at the same time embraced Confucian political economy to guide their service to the state. They did not imagine the two endeavors as being disconnected or in opposition, and nor should we.

Lessons of the *Great Learning*

The central concern of Confucianism as a political economy was to buttress the moral and material foundations for stable familial, social, and political life. The means for ensuring stability was instilling the right relations between male and female, elder and younger, and ruler and subject, in each case the latter serving the former and the former extending care to the latter. Politically, the most conspicuous relationship for the operation of a Confucian political economy was service to the ruler, but it was understood that all three relationships were essential for sustaining the hierarchy without which Confucianism could not imagine orderly family, social, or political life.

One authority for this arrangement is a Han dynasty text traditionally traced back to Confucius known as the *Daxue*, or *Great Learning*.[2] The *Great Learning* consists of a short main text that allegedly transcribed what Confucius said, followed by a slightly longer elaboration in ten chapters reportedly made by his followers. In the main text, Confucius declares that the ultimate purposes of learning are "to illuminate shining virtue to the world,

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to renovate the people, and to rest in the highest excellence." Then the main text lays out a simple eight-step program for achieving the perfection of hierarchy. Shining virtue will be illuminated only once the wise ruler brings peace to the realm, to translate "all under Heaven" (*tianxia*) less loosely than many do. To bring peace to the realm, he must govern the state well. Before he can do that, he must put his family in good order; and before that, he has to cultivate himself. To cultivate himself, he must first achieve righteousness of mind; and in order to do that, he has to achieve complete sincerity; though before he can become perfectly sincere, he has to increase his knowledge; and to do that, he has to examine the physical world around him. These are the Eight Steps that lead to the perfection of virtue. The process moves through physical observation, philosophical reflection, and personal self-cultivation to worldly conduct, but it begins and ends in the world, first by observing it, then by bringing it to a state of equilibrium.

From the perspective of this text, virtue makes sense to the extent that it has real-world consequences, hence the appeal of what we might call technocracy: an administrative operation designed to formulate and deliver policies that improve the conditions by which people could live ethical lives.[3] If, as Max Weber argued, the goal of bureaucracy is to manage the administrative operations of the state within a rational and just legal framework, then the task of technocracy is to work out what policies are appropriate as well as conformative to existing rules, and how they should be implemented to produce effective results.[4] Statecraft activists were technocrats in the sense that they brought to the task of government a set of technologies – methods and procedures for solving problems – and not just a schedule of moral precepts. Qiu Jun intended that his blueprint for dealing with the ills of his own age should provide Ming officials with a repertoire of ideas and policy options not only that they should adopt but that they could also revise in keeping with the needs of their times.

Recovering Ming Statecraft

Since *From Philosophy to Philology*, Benjamin Elman's study of applied Confucianism in the Qing period, historians of China have regarded the transition from Ming to Qing as a progression from introspective speculation to the grounded study of the real world: from philosophy to philology, as Elman so neatly expressed it; or as we might put it, from metaphysics to statecraft. This analysis rests in part on the early Qing condemnation of late Ming thought for acting irresponsibly in the face of the foreign and domestic threats that brought down the Ming dynasty. This was a partisan move on the part of the Manchus designed to secure the legitimacy of their new regime in

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China by shifting culpability for the fall of the Ming from themselves as successful invaders to the Chinese as failed moral actors. It also provided Chinese intellectuals early in the new Qing regime with a *mea culpa* by which they could not just regret what had been lost and take some responsibility for it, but could also bid to secure the moral high ground as they moved on to serve the new regime. It worked. The notion that the Yangming school of Neo-Confucianism caused the failure of the dynasty was widely agreed to, and became a truism of Chinese philosophical history right into the twentieth century. The celebration of what some historians of philosophy called late Ming individualism in the 1970s was in essence a continuation of the Qing dismissal of Ming philosophy.[5]

Reading what Confucian writers and scholars of the Ming actually wrote, one quickly discovers that the nature of the self was not the universal topic that it has been assumed to be. Yes, it was an issue that engaged some thinkers in the sixteenth century, but most Ming thinkers, from Wang Yangming down to ordinary school teachers, were attentive to far more practical concerns. The program that they accepted as their own could be found succinctly formulated in the *Great Learning*. The highest moral goal of the ancient sage had been to broadcast virtue to the world. He did so by descending from the governance of the state to the regulation of family, to the cultivation of the person, to the rectification of the mind, to the achievement of sincerity, to the extension of knowledge, and finally to the investigation of things. For the everyday Confucian, the program worked in the opposite direction. He was supposed to begin by observing the world, then know and train his mind, then organize his family, and then finally, whether as a ranked official or as a responsible member of the local gentry, contribute to organizing society and state. Even Wang Yangming, who made an unorthodox interpretation of the text and Eight Steps in the *Great Learning* based on his subversive program, did not pause at the stage of knowing the self but carried on to pursue a program of pragmatic official service devoted to the practical tasks of administering the state.

Ming statecraft was not a program of subordinating the moral self to the absolute ruler. It involved developing the best policies by which the state could meet the needs of the people and educating the ruler to support his officials in their pursuit of best policies. This is the dual program that informs Qiu's *Supplement*, arguably the most comprehensive guide to state administration produced during the Ming dynasty. The purpose of this book is to introduce China specialists and historians of political thought more generally to the school of Confucian statecraft that Qiu Jun distilled and presented to the emperor, as well as his colleagues, in his monumental handbook of state administration, and to become aware of its effects on Chinese political organization and imagination.

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Biography of a Statecraft Confucian

Qiu Jun was a native of Hainan Island, which lay as far south as you could live and still be a subject of the Ming dynasty. Passing comments in Qiu's essays parrying mainland condescension and defending the strength of local Confucian tradition suggest that hailing from Hainan pushed him to exceed expectations.[6] Qiu was born into an educated but not office-holding family.[7] His photographic memory proved to be a valuable skill in mastering the curriculum of an education system based in part on the ability to memorize classical texts. He did not start studying for the civil service exams until he was sixteen, which was comparatively late for a Ming student, but eight years later (1444) he not only passed the provincial exams in Guangzhou but ranked first in the province. His written performance earned him a coveted spot in the National Academy in Beijing to continue his studies. There he made the acquaintance of those who ran the government and staffed the bureaucracy. The first time he was eligible to sit for the triennial national exam was in 1445, the year following his success in the provincial exams, but he did not pass. He sat for the exam again in 1448 and in 1451, but success continued to elude him.

Qiu returned home that year to attend to family obligations, but he went back to Beijing the following year to continue preparing himself for the next examination in 1454. This time, his luck shifted. He not only passed the national examination, but shone at the final session, the palace exam, in which he was ranked at the top of the second echelon of successful graduates. Rumour had it that he should have been ranked at the top of the first echelon on the strength of his answer to the policy question, but that he was so disheveled that he got marked down for slovenly appearance, a personal trait for which he remained mildly notorious for the rest of his life. Even though Qiu would eventually rise to the highest post of chief grand secretary, he spent his entire sojourn in Beijing living on the south side of Suzhou Lane – the less desirable side because it was cold in the winter – in a dilapidated house that cried out for renovation that was never undertaken. The only things of value his house contained were his books. Qiu's library mattered to him. Later in life, he recalled that his father had possessed a significant library of several hundred volumes, but that his father's friends had helped themselves to his collection after his death. Qiu later recovered some of the lost books, but had to build his own library more or less from scratch. Eventually, his books numbered in the tens of thousands, becoming one of the largest private collections assembled from scratch in the Ming realm, and possibly anywhere in the fifteenth-century world.

Qiu's indifference to social convention did not block his immediate appointment to the Hanlin Academy, the body of scholars who advised the court and

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drafted imperial edicts. Of the eighteen graduates appointed to the academy that year (1454), Qiu was ranked first. Appointment to the academy was a recognition of scholarly ability and writing skill. It could also be a way of moving sideways someone whom the Ministry of Personnel feared lacked the practical sense needed to be a hands-on administrator. We might presume that Qiu's inattention to his appearance may have helped his being sidetracked into the academy, though what really counted was the large reputation he had secured by this time as a strict thinker and informed writer.

Most Hanlin bachelors were moved out of the academy within three years of their appointment; Qiu stayed much longer. After a decade in the academy, he was appointed to the editorial teams for several important imperial publishing projects. The most sensitive of these projects was the compilation of the *Veritable Record* of the reign of Emperor Zhengtong, whose capture by the Mongols while on a military campaign in 1449 threw the Ming regime into its most intense crisis. Only a highly regarded and skilled scholar could be trusted to craft the permanent record of a reign marked by military defeat, dethronement, and what some regarded as a palace coup. Once that delicate task was completed, Qiu was appointed as a court lecturer tasked with instructing the emperor on policy matters. Apparently, Emperor Chenghua enjoyed his effusive style. After Chenghua's death, Qiu was given the task of editing his *Veritable Record*.

One policy area in which Emperor Chenghua responded positively to the policies Qiu devised was how to deal with rebellious aboriginal populations in south China. The Chinese had begun colonizing these aboriginal lands as early as the Qin dynasty, though control over the native population had never been complete, particularly in the less accessible uplands to which the aboriginals could retreat. As someone whose entire career had been in the capital, Qiu lacked the experience in field administration that might have been expected of someone offering proposals on this issue. Qiu's advantage in this matter was his knowledge based on his having grown up on Hainan Island, where there was a concentration of aboriginal Li people who had no enthusiasm for Ming rule.[8]

In 1477, Qiu was promoted out of the Hanlin Academy to become chancellor of the Imperial Academy in Beijing, an appointment that effectively made him the national head of education and research. Three years later, in 1480, at the age of fifty-nine, he was given the concurrent rank of vice-minister of the Ministry of Rites. This was the year in which Qiu began the research project that would eventuate in the *Supplement*, the text that sits at the heart of this volume. The 160 chapters are groupings of sets of texts, each of which begins with a foundational passage from the Classics or an early historical text, followed by carefully selected commentaries that date from the Han to the Song dynasties, and then concludes with Qiu's analysis of the best policy for

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the issue under examination. The *Supplement* is not just a reference collection of excerpted writings, however. Each entry is a carefully structured set of readings that direct the reader to a particular conclusion that he marks off with the two characters *chen an*, translated here as "Your minister comments." While some of his comments are bland and somewhat general, most present an intentional argument in favour of the policy option to be preferred. His comments are written with such clarity, even simplicity, flavoured with a certain didactic tone, that we seem to be hearing Qiu speaking directly to his seventeen-year-old emperor, telling him how to manage every aspect of state administration. With the *Supplement* in hand, all the emperor had to do on any issue was to turn to the appropriate section and find the right answer to any policy question.

Qiu reveals nothing about how he produced the vast compendium of sources and arguments that his book contains. No policy-focused work on this scale had ever been attempted in China, or possibly anywhere in the world at this time. To carry out the project through the 1480s, it might not be unreasonable to suppose that he put his students at the Imperial Academy to work as research assistants to help find, edit, and arrange the rich assortment of passages on public morality and government policy that the *Supplement* recycles from the Confucian tradition. What is clear is that this was one man's self-initiated project, not an assignment from the court. That it became the standard textbook on state administration rather than languishing in the private archive of a diligent scholar was due in part to the scale and wisdom of the project, but in part as well to its timing. The death of Emperor Chenghua in September 1487 created an opening to take the work to court and present it to his eldest surviving son, Zhu Youtang, who was formally enthroned as Emperor Hongzhi that winter. Zhu Youtang came to the throne eager to do a better job than his father had done in handling the affairs of state. The chancellor laid his magnum opus before the earnest young man, offering it as a complete guide to the tasks of managing the administration of the Ming state. The timing was perfect on both sides: the teacher found his student, and the student his teacher; the scholar found his patron, and the patron his scholar; the would-be administrator found his head of state, and the head of state found his chief executive officer. Emperor Hongzhi authorized the book for government publication and promoted Qiu to the rank of Minister of Rites.

Hongzhi's positive response was more than Qiu bargained for. He was sixty-seven at the time and intended to retire back to Hainan Island, but the emperor declined that request. Instead, he gave him the task of compiling his father's *Veritable Record*. Once that was done in 1491, Qiu revived his petition to retire, three times. Hongzhi responded by appointing him chief grand secretary, the highest post in the land. Suddenly, at the age of seventy, Qiu found himself dragged from the world of policy research up into the highest

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level of administrative politics to which his gruff personality did not well suit him. There would be no retirement for Qiu. Not even his failing eyesight was enough to convince Hongzhi to let him go. He died in office on 28 February 1495 at the age of seventy-four.

The *Supplement*

The *Supplement* was the most complete overview of administrative policies that anyone in the Chinese tradition had compiled – or in any tradition, for that matter. This is not saying much, as Europeans had not yet begun to approach state administration, as they would later, as something you could study in a systematic fashion. Monarchs did what they did to promote what they perceived to be their national and family interests, and advisors steered them according to those purposes. The idea that the monarch was responsible for the good order of society and its maintenance in the face of social, environmental, and military threats was arguably not yet conceived in these terms. The *Supplement* may thus be said to mark a significant moment in the history of policy and the history of the state as much as a century before such works began to appear in Europe.

Qiu assigned the book its cumbersomely scholastic title to align it securely with its Confucian genealogy. He situated his work as an extension of the project of the thirteenth-century Confucian scholar Zhen Dexiu, author of *Explications of the Great Learning*, which turned the *Great Learning* into a textbook of moral cultivation. Qiu respected Zhen's explications but chafed at his decision to cover only the first six steps of the program in the *Great Learning* – from examining the world to regulating the family, which left the two later steps – governing the state and bringing peace to the realm – unaddressed. Qiu thus exploited the stopping-short of Zhen's book as a device to frame his own extended commentary on all aspects of state administration. Indeed, throughout the book he actually has little to say about Zhen's interpretations. Rather, he uses Zhen's book as an occasion to turn away from moral cultivation to political economy while at the same time aligning his book securely with the Confucian tradition. This strategy may signal Qiu's belief that the task of Confucian statecraft was more important, and infinitely more complex, than the task of Confucian self-cultivation. The two endeavors need not compete or be in conflict, but they moved in the direction of different goals. Qiu's was the bringing of order and good government to the realm, not reforming the individual, however advantageously the two might benefit each other. Zhen had filled forty-three chapters with proposals to guide Emperor Lizong (r. 1224–1264) of the Song toward attaining wisdom and putting his family in order, but Zhen had nothing to offer the emperor who was faced with a collapse in the circulation of commodities or the descent of a plague of

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locusts. For Qiu, these were precisely the tasks that his students had to master, including his student-emperor, in order to live up to their obligation to serve the people. Managing the realm to sustain the dynasty and benefit the welfare of the people needed 160 chapters, not just 43.

As Qiu explains in his preface to the *Supplement*, of which an excerpt precedes this chapter, he organized his book into thematic divisions. These divisions construct a path that moves outward from the throne. The pre-chapter with which Qiu opens his book, the subject of Chapter 3 of this volume, was written explicitly to instruct the emperor on how to orient himself to the tasks of ruling the state. This pre-chapter is then followed by 160 chapters that Qiu organized under 119 thematic heads and grouped into 12 sections. Qiu starts with the regulation of the court, then turns to the training and management of personnel. He then moves outward to agriculture and the people's security, followed by taxation and state finances. After a section on the ritual order through which the court asserted its hegemony over society in the form of rites and music, and then the organization of the official sacrifices performed at state temples, Qiu turns to operational tasks designed to assert control more directly: moral indoctrination and education, infrastructure, penal law, and military preparedness, the last of which leads quite naturally, given that the primary purpose of a military is to defend borders, to foreign affairs.

Although Qiu does acknowledge his intellectual descent from the philosophical tradition of Zhen Dexiu, he does not explicitly invoke a model or precedent for the scheme by which he organizes his content. The work that best anticipates the *Supplement* may be the Tang dynasty compendium created by Du You entitled *Comprehensive History of Institutions* (*Tongdian*), in which are gathered records of state institutions going back to antiquity. Du organized this work into nine sections, starting with (1) food and commodities, then turning to (2) personnel and (3) government offices, then (4) rites and (5) music, followed by (6) military affairs, (7) penal law, and (8) local administration, and ending with (9) border defence. Qiu's thematic concerns are not dissimilar to Du's, though his focus on the court and personnel at the start may reflect the increasing centralization and anxiety over central control of the later Chinese state. If there is a precedent from the Song dynasty, it would be Ma Duanlin's *Comprehensive Examination of Documents* (*Wenxian tongkao*). Ma loosely followed Du's sequence of knowledge categories, though with the notable addition of taxation near the beginning of his compilation and a cluster of subsections ranging from historical bibliography to the history of portents, before closing with a survey not so much of foreign affairs as of foreign countries. Lianbin Dai examines this intellectual lineage more closely in Chapter 2.

Both Ma and Du were concerned to present readers with an informed archive on Chinese state administration, yet neither focuses as closely on policy options, particularly the need to distinguish the strengths of one option

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