

Chinese Statecraft

Engaging the writing of the fifteenth-century Confucian theorist and chancellor of the Imperial Academy, Qiu Jun, these essays enlarge our grasp of both Confucianism and the Chinese state, exploring what educated Chinese imagined as best practice in meeting the challenges of administering the realm. Rediscovering statecraft in the Ming period allows us to think about the tradition of applied Confucian duty without the moralism dominating conventional Chinese intellectual history, redirecting that history away from purely philosophical terms. As Qiu reminded Emperor Hongzhi, this “is not empty talk. I humbly hope that your enlightened majesty will give these ideas your careful attention when you have the leisure to reflect. The people of the realm have no greater wish.” Drawing together a team of leading historians, this volume provides a vivid sense of the day-to-day policy calculations of the Ming government and brings Chinese political thought into the mainstream of comparative political theory.

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Chinese Statecraft

Political Theory and Administrative Practice in Ming China

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Ancestral portrait of Qiu Jun, 1837. Rubbing in black ink on paper,
148 × 63 cm. Princeton University Art Museum; gift of George Rowley.

The inscription above the portrait reads:

On the Portrait of Qiu Jun, Master Wenzhuang of the Ming

In a wonderland wild and spiritual,
blessed by engendering heroes,
Master Wenzhuang stood out from others,
known and admired by his contemporaries
For his *Supplement* to Zhen Dexiu,
his erudition as vast as the South Sea,
For his prioritizing the people
and explaining and adhering to the Classics,
For his rectitude in defying vulgarians
and extraordinary talent that amazed others.
He shone south of the mountains
and rose above his peers in the two capitals.
Widely admired for centuries,
as glorious as Polaris,
His virtue has continued for generations,
his portrait inspirational and majestic.

The sixteenth day of the seventh lunar month in the seventeenth year of the Daoguang reign of the Qing Great State (16 August 1837).
Composed respectfully by Dong Guohua, junior scholar from Wu County.

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Preface: Chinese Statecraft

Timothy Brook

This book offers readers, specialists and non-specialists alike, an overview of the Chinese tradition of statecraft, which is to say, the practical body of principles that determined the duties and obligations of the state toward the people and that guided officials in the administrative practice of good government. In English, “statecraft” is not a word that anyone uses anymore, particularly in describing the contemporary world. But despite its slightly archaic tone, “statecraft” is the most suitable translation of the Chinese term, which in its turn is also archaic but names a widely recognized activist strand in Confucian learning.

The term in Chinese is *jingshi*. *Jing* means “to run through,” as warp threads run through cloth, and is used to refer to management or administration on a large scale. *Shi* is a word of wide meaning that is used to speak of a generation, to designate the world, and to refer more generally to everything that happens around us. *Jingshi* means to put the practical affairs of this generation into good order. It embraces not just practice but conception – that is, both what should be done and how it should be done. “Managing the affairs of the age” might get as close as we can to the core meaning of *jingshi*. Through the practice of statecraft, Confucians hoped to shape the world in ways that accorded with the key Confucian values of deference and mutual obligation. To call *jingshi* “political philosophy” would narrow its scope too tightly around the struggle for power. *Jingshi* is not about seizing power; it is something looser, more like “political economy” in the broadest sense, which embraces the policies and practices by which state and society provide maximal security for the people and as much prosperity as possible.

This volume does not claim to be encyclopedic in covering all facets of Chinese statecraft. It selects the topics that the authors of the individual chapters have chosen to address on the basis of their expertise in the history of China’s state administration. What unifies the contributions to this volume is not so much a common point of view as it is a common text, which appeared in 1487 when its author, Qiu Jun, presented it to his emperor, Hongzhi, who was enthusiastic and ordered it into print the following year. The title of the book is *Daxue yanyi bu*, or *Supplement to Explications of the Great Learning*

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(hereafter the *Supplement*, as we will refer to it in this volume). The clumsy title situates the book in the wake of two earlier books. The first is the *Daxue* (*Great Learning*), a short classic from the Han dynasty, canonized as a distillation of Confucius's sayings, which describes in a formulaic way how a state should be governed at all levels, from the individual up to the entire realm. The second text, *Daxue yanyi* (*Explications of the Great Learning*), is a much longer treatise on the moral foundations of the well-ordered court written by the thirteenth-century Confucian philosopher Zhen Dexiu.

Qiu claimed that his *Supplement* was simply an expansion on Zhen's study. In fact, it looks far beyond the perimeters of Zhen's work to address in a massive 160 chapters the administrative policies and tasks necessary to achieve a well-ordered realm. To do this, Qiu constructed his magnum opus as a thematically based historical overview of Chinese statecraft policies and practices since the time of Confucius and even before. Qiu was serving as chancellor of the Imperial Academy in Beijing while he assembled his masterwork, which is why he was of sufficient rank to be able to approach Emperor Hongzhi when he ascended the throne at the age of seventeen and to present him with what he believed could serve as a blueprint or master plan to guide him in best policy and best practice for governing what was the largest polity in the world at that time. Other statecraft compendia would appear after Qiu's *Supplement*, often imitating its tone, but none as comprehensive, carefully constructed, or internally consistent.

Qiu's *Supplement* is very much a product of the dynasty for which it was produced, the Ming (1368–1644). There is no absolute and complete version of Confucian political philosophy, which developed and was revised as China's historical circumstances changed; there is only the version that prevailed at any one time. If Qiu's version has been widely regarded as the best expression of that tradition, it is because he developed it during this critical phase in China's history between the end of the Mongol occupation of China in the fourteenth century, which collapsed with the fall of the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), and the Manchu conquest in the seventeenth that brought China into the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Qiu, of course, had no way of seeing into the future to know what was coming. But he could look back to the recent as well as the ancient past to scrutinize and analyze the impact that Mongol domination had had on Chinese political philosophy and state administration in the century between its founding and the reign of Hongzhi. From his perspective late in the fifteenth century as he set about constructing a new and comprehensive program of state responsibility, Qiu sought to dial down the autocracy and universalism of the Mongol Great State and reinstate earlier, more conservative traditions of Confucian service, imperial deliberation, and care for the people.

Qiu constructed the *Supplement* as an explicitly didactic text for none other than the emperor himself. That noted, he certainly expected his colleagues to pay close attention as he took them, as well as the emperor, through the full range of policy options in order to highlight why his policy choices should be followed. His rhetorical resource in this project was history. Qiu never simply states what should be done. He builds to each policy statement by walking the reader through a dense undergrowth of texts ranging from the ancient canons and the subsequent body of Confucian commentators to historical writings. The exercise attests that the administrative task of state responsibility was not something that Qiu invented in the fifteenth century. It was a broad and complex tradition stretching back to before the time of Confucius, a survey of which allowed Qiu to review the many policies that previous emperors and advisers had prioritized over two millennia, and then to identify what he regarded as best policies for the Ming.

Qiu identified the responsibilities of the imperial state in eleven categories, on which basis he organized the sections into which the book is divided. He opens the *Supplement* with a pre-chapter not numbered among the 160 chapters into which the book is formally divided. The pre-chapter he wrote to instruct the emperor on how to comport himself in relation to the tasks of ruling the state. Thereafter follow the eleven substantial sections: (1) the regulation of the court; (2) the training and management of personnel; (3) the support of agriculture and the people's security; (4) the operation of taxation and state finance; (5) the maintenance of the ritual order through rites and music; (6) the conduct of official sacrifices; (7) moral indoctrination and education; (8) physical infrastructure, such as city walls and courier posts; (9) penal law; (10) military preparedness; and (11) foreign affairs, including the management of non-Chinese living within the realm. The final section of the book, entitled "Achieving Perfection," is not a section like the others so much as a quartet of concluding chapters that summarize the benefits for the ruler of following his recommendations.

The first two chapters of this volume, one descriptive and the other analytical, introduce Qiu and his project to assemble a comprehensive blueprint for Confucian state policy. The chapters that follow focus on particular issues that concerned Qiu, arranged in the order in which the *Supplement* addresses them. Chapter 3 is based on the pre-chapter. Chapters 4 to 6 have been written to address key issues in the second to fourth sections of the *Supplement*, which is to say, personnel, the people's security, and state finances. To get to Chapters 7 and 8, we skip Qiu's sections on rites, state sacrifices, moral education, and infrastructure, and move to his ninth section, on law. Chapters 9 and 10 respond to Qiu's tenth section on military preparedness, and Chapters 11 and 12 explore his views in the eleventh section, on foreign policy and the

management of non-Chinese living within the borders of the Ming state. To ensure that we do not drown out Qiu's voice, each chapter is preceded by a passage that, with one exception, is taken from the section of the *Supplement* on which the chapter that follows it is based.

As this outline indicates, our coverage of the *Supplement* is not evenly distributed, but comprehensive coverage was not our intention. The mandate we gave our contributors was to select a topic or theme that resonated with their scholarly interests, and then to reflect on how Qiu approached that topic or interpreted that theme. The book thus prowls the boundary between Qiu's concerns and the issues that we as contemporary sinologists feel need to be addressed in China's statecraft tradition. This meeting of world views is what drives this volume, the intention being to present a new and comprehensive portrait of the principles of political economy and state administration that have animated Confucian statecraft and shaped the policies that capital officials since the 1490s have believed best served the task of nourishing the people and securing the realm.

Rather than fill a gap in Chinese intellectual or administrative history, the purpose of this book is to enlarge the scope of our grasp of both Confucianism and the Chinese state, and to understand what educated Chinese imagined as best practice in meeting the challenges of administering the realm. Without Qiu's *Supplement*, the Chinese tradition of applied Confucian duty is diminished, even lost, behind the moralism that has dominated the conventional understanding of Chinese intellectual history. Rediscovering statecraft in the Ming allows us to re-embed this strain of thought in a longer intellectual tradition, and so to redirect that history slightly away from the inclination among historians of Confucianism, within China as well as without, to address that school of thought in purely philosophical terms. As Qiu reminded Emperor Hongzhi in no uncertain terms, his compilation "is not empty talk. I humbly hope that your enlightened majesty will give these ideas your careful attention when you have the leisure to reflect. The people of the realm have no greater wish" (DYB 15.10b).¹ We trust that this volume will offer readers within and beyond the field of China studies some insights into the Confucian tradition that a more traditional sinology has somewhat underplayed. Beyond that concern, we hope that readers will be in a better position to reflect on what the Chinese historical tradition has to offer for writing a global history of managing the state, governing responsibly, and providing for the needs of the people before the advent of the modern era.

This book is the outcome of a series of graduate research workshops at the University of British Columbia (UBC) that gradually extended outward to include colleagues around the world in five international workshops, the first on Salt Spring Island off the coast from Vancouver, the second at Concordia University in Montreal, the third at the Collège de France in Paris, the fourth at

the University of Washington in Seattle, and the fifth at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. For their work in making the latter four workshops possible, I wish to express my gratitude to Tim Sedo, Pierre-Étienne Will, R. Kent Guy, and Chu Hung-lam. A conference at UBC on the occasion of my retirement in September 2022 – “How Is China Governed? From Ming Statecraft to Xi’s New Era” – for which I am deeply grateful to the organizers Timothy Cheek, Bruce Rusk, and Shoufu Yin, served to bring this long cycle of work to the completion it achieves in this volume. In addition to all who have contributed to the project over the years, I reserve my final thanks for my co-editor, Lianbin Dai, who did much to bring this volume to completion.