Ming Statecraft:

Chinese Agendas of Political Economy

Vol. 1. Translations from the *Supplement to the Explication of* *The Great Learning*

Vols. 2-3. Essays on the Political Philosophy of Qiu Jun

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China has long been one of the most governmentalized countries in the world. The central court and its bureaucracy have aspired to monitor almost every aspect of individual and social life. Far from modern, this managerial appetite extends centuries into the past in a knowledge tradition known as *jingshi* 經世, which we translate as “statecraft.” The term is the first half of a phrase that expresses the obligation of the state to *jingshi jimin* 經世濟民, “to manage the age and assist the people.” This phrase gave birth in the nineteenth century to *jingji* 經濟, “economy,” though statecraft is about more than the economy: it identifies what the responsible state and monarch should do to ensure the good order, survival, and moral health of subjects. Western historians of China tend to identify statecraft with the Qing dynasty, but our work explores the active formulation of a statecraft agenda across all policy areas much earlier, in the mid-Ming dynasty in the fifteenth century.

Our key text is the *Daxue yanyi bu*大學衍義補 (Supplement to the *Explication of “The Great Learning”*). Its author, Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1418 – 1495), compiled this encyclopaedic compendium, which runs to 160 long chapters, while serving as head of the National Academy in Beijing. His post furnished him with a bevy of assistants who helped him compile what is the most comprehensive survey and analysis of the statecraft tradition ever published. It consists of brief, familiar citations from classical texts and documents interspersed with Qiu’s commentaries, some enunciating general principles, others recommending particular policies. The book touches on every aspect of statecraft: personnel, currency, state finance, charity, ceremonies, education, justice, and the administration of the military, among other themes. Although Qiu embraced a mid-Ming vision of informed rulership, he intended his understanding of what the state should do to ensure peace and prosperity to apply universally. Here was a template for the administrative state, and the most complete statement of the theory and policies of state administration prior to the emergence of political economy or public administration as academic fields.

The assumption grounding the approach of the *Supplement* is that all problems in the public realm—political and infrastructural, social and economic, environmental and moral—can be addressed through correct analysis and appropriate procedure. Although an autocratic temptation hovers at the edge of statecraft thought, it was an impulse the *Supplement* resists. Qiu’s model of the well-ordered state gave the emperor a role, but he was not the main actor, and had to be educated to do it properly. The real engineers of state administration, men whose education had to exceed that of the emperor, were morally informed technocrats: like Qiu and his students.

This project is in three volumes. The first two volumes consist of selected chapters from Qiu Jun’s magnum opus, *Supplement to the* *Explication of The Great Learning*, translated into English by a team of seventeen scholars of late-imperial history. The third volume consists of a set of essays by ten of the translators on significant aspects of Qiu Jun’s political philosophy, and Chinese political economy more generally, as reflected in his great work.

(Timothy Brook)