

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dai Zhaochen Learns to be an Official: Statecraft Ideas and Local Governance in Late Qing China

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Abstract

This article examines how statecraft (*jingshi* 經世) policies were implemented in the Late Qing period. It focuses on Dai Zhaochen, a prefect who served in Shandong and Guangdong in the 1860s. Dai was from a noted family of officials and had numerous “weak ties” with prominent *jingshi* officials. One of his handbooks, this paper shows, drew primarily on the *Collected Statecraft Writings from the Qing Dynasty* (*Huangchao jingshi wenbian* 皇朝經世文編). In office, Dai adapted policies from it and other collections, appealing to practicality and simplicity as the criteria for policymaking. More generally, he insisted that he was just a humble practitioner of the art of governance. The conclusion reflects on that disavowal, arguing that existing definitions of “statecraft” do not attend to Dai’s core concerns. I propose, therefore, that we stop seeking an essential definition of “statecraft” and instead pursue a broader socio-intellectual history of policy in the Qing.

Keywords: statecraft; Dai Zhaochen; Tongzhi restoration; Late Qing; policy ideas

This article is a study of how policy ideas circulated in the Qing. It begins from the observation that even the many studies of the 1827 *Collected Statecraft Writings from the Qing Dynasty* (*Huangchao jingshi wenbian* 皇朝經世文編) have told us too little about how *jingshi* (“statecraft”) ideas were transmitted or applied.¹ It then presents the case of Dai Zhaochen 戴肇辰 (1810–1890), a little-known Qing prefect from the mid-nineteenth century.² Dai’s experience, I argue, shows how careful attention to the content and transmission of policy ideas can help explain the logic and evolution of Qing governance.

¹The Oxford English Dictionary defines statecraft both as “the art of managing state affairs” and as “a style or system” for doing so. I refer to the first definition as “governance.” For the second, I follow convention and translate *jingshi* as statecraft to describe the scholarly and politically movement commonly called *jingshi*. I do not use the term to describe Dai, since he himself did not use it. *Jingshi* did not appear in Qing Manchu dictionaries such as the Qianlong-era *Imperially Commissioned Mirror of the Manchu Language, expanded and emended* (Ch. *Yuzhi zengding qingwen jia* 御制增訂清文鑿, Ma. *Han-i araha nonggime toktobuha Manju Gisun- i Buleku Bithe*), searchable at <http://hkuri.cneas.tohoku.ac.jp/p06/kdic/list?groupId=18>.

²Dai was born on February 3, 1810, and died on December 19, 1882. See Li Chenglin, “Muzhiming,” 6b in Dai Xieyuan, *Dai zhaochen xiansheng xingshu* 戴肇辰先生行述 (hereafter *Xingshu*).

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The article, in other words, argues that we are only at the beginning of understanding the social and intellectual history of policymaking in this period.

Since at least the fall of the Qing, scholars have been using handbooks and anthologies of administrative documents from officials to understand the empire's local governance. After World War II, these efforts reached their apogee. Xiao Gongquan argued that local self-governance was not proto-democratic. Qu Tongzu assessed the Qing government against a standard of rationality, lamenting its technical imprecision.³ Both authors read these handbooks and documents as clues to the essential nature of governance (feudal, autocratic, democratic) under the *ancien régime*.⁴ With the opening of China and its archives in the 1980s, cracks appeared in these general evaluations. Legal historians, in particular, showed the interactions and divergences between law, morality, and social norms.⁵ To explain these divergences, twenty-first century scholars have turned to intellectual history, evaluating Qing policy in relation to contemporary political philosophy.⁶ I see this attention to the realm of ideas as an essential step towards understanding how and why Qing policy diverged from contemporary social norms and Western theoretical models.

And yet, this work tells us little about the range of policy positions or how they circulated. Kishimoto Mio has noted the difficulty of grouping scholar-officials based on their ideas. It is especially hard for political thinkers, since party and clique were anathema, and most writers deliberately obscured their partisan affiliations.⁷ This makes tracing connection and influence difficult. The problem is most evident when considering research on the *Collected Statecraft Writings*, the most widely cited repository of Qing policy essays. Where did its proposals sit in the broader landscape of Qing governance?

³Hsiao Kung-chuan [Xiao Gongquan], *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967) and Ch'ü T'ung-tsu [Qu Tongzu], *Local Government in China under the Ch'ing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962). See also He Jianghui 何江穗 and Fang Huirong 方慧蓉, "Xiao Gongquan zhongguo Xiangxue chuyi" 蕭公權《中國鄉村》芻議 *Dushu* 2017.9: 110–19. I use "local" to refer to counties and prefectures, and "local elites" to refer to those who were usually called literati (紳士) in the sources. In the events discussed here, their resources and status mattered at least as much as their literacy. As Philip Kuhn argued, since neither magistrates nor prefects had direct control over Green Standard troops, they relied more on militias and braves; see Philip Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796–1864* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 123–24.

⁴See, generally, Hou Xudong 侯旭东, "Zhongguo gudai zhuanzhi shuo de zhishi kaogu" 中国古代专制说的知识考古. *Jindaishi yanjiu* 2008.4: 4–28 and Kamachi Noriko, "Feudalism or Absolute Monarchism: Japanese Discourse on the Nature of State and Society in Late Imperial China." *Modern China* 16.3 (1990), 330–70.

⁵For example, see Melissa Macauley, *Social Power and Legal Culture: Litigation Masters in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), especially chap. 7, and Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), especially chaps. 2 and 3.

⁶For example, see William T. Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Richard Von Glahn, "Modalities of the Fiscal State in Imperial China." *Journal of Chinese History* 4.1 (2020), 1–29; and Eric Schluessel, *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

⁷Kishimoto Mio, "New Studies on Statecraft in Mid- and Late-Qing China: Qing Intellectuals and Their Debates on Economic Policies." *International Journal of Asian Studies* 6.1 (2009), 87–102. On schools of political thought in the late Qing, see Benjamin A. Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), especially introduction and chap. 1, and Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), especially chap. 2.

Did they represent common wisdom or radical reform? Moreover, did bureaucrats read the collection or implement its proposals? If so, how? Related research has focused on famous scholar-officials, many of whom were personally associated with the compilation of the *Collected Statecraft Writings*.⁸ In addition to William Rowe's biography of Chen Hongmou 陳宏謀 (1696–1771), who was canonized in it, Eric Schluessel has shown how the Hunan statecraft tradition embodied in the *Collected Statecraft Writings* shaped Zuo Zongtang's 左宗棠 (1812–1885) policies in Xinjiang.⁹ But how widely did these policies spread beyond the network of scholar-officials from Hunan?¹⁰ In other words, where was the statecraft movement situated in the world of Qing governance? As Andrea Janku has shown, it was only reprinted once before 1870. After 1870, scholar-officials quickly supplanted it with continuations and began publishing their essays in the new periodical press.¹¹ Janku's research raises the question of just how widely the *Collected Statecraft Writings* was read and circulated within the bureaucracy. To shed light on this problem, this article makes use of the sources newly cataloged in Pierre-Étienne Will's *Handbooks and Anthologies for Officials in Imperial China: A Descriptive and Critical Bibliography*.¹²

I focus on Dai Zhaochen, one of the tiny number of local officials who left both administrative documents and official handbooks. Dai's main prescriptive handbook was a large anthology of Qing essays on governance titled *A Record of Learning to be an Official* (*Xue shi lu* 學仕錄) and published in 1866.¹³ Dai anthologized 187 pieces from seventy-two authors. As Will notes, its contents are "such as might have been found (or are actually found) in" the *Collected Statecraft Writings*.¹⁴ When reading the text, which remains otherwise unstudied, I found that over fifty of its authors and at least fifty of its entries were also included in the *Collected Statecraft Writings*. Given that both collections retitled pieces, and Dai's purview also included handbooks by authors like Wang Huizu 汪輝祖 (1730–1807), the overlap is even greater than the numbers suggest. Dai does not comment on this fact, but such practices of uncited recompilation were common in the Qing, and Dai also included essays from numerous other collections. Moreover, it is historically plausible that Dai read the *Collected Statecraft Writings*.

⁸The Chinese scholarship is focused on the *jingshi* ideas of individual (mostly quite famous) scholar-officials and the general intellectual trends of certain eras. A fair treatment of this work would require a much more extensive discussion. Interested readers can refer to Yang Nianqun 楊年群, "Jingshi' guannian shi santi" "經世"觀念史三題. *Wen shi zhe* 2019.2, 56–71, as well as the literature review in Zhou Jiming 周積明 and Lei Ping 雷平, "Qingdai xueshu yanjiu ruogan lingyu de xin jinnzhan jiqi shuping" 清代學術研究若干領域的新進展及其述評. *Qingshi yanjiu* 2005.3: 109–24.

⁹Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 37. See also Benjamin A. Elman, "The Relevance of Sung Learning in the Late Ch'ing: Wei Yuan and the Huang-ch'ao Ching-shih Wen-pien." *Late Imperial China* 9.2 (1988), 56–85.

¹⁰See especially Stephen R. Platt, *Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), chap. 1; Rowe, *Saving the World*, 137–45; Daniel McMahon, "The Yuelu Academy and Hunan's Nineteenth-Century Turn Toward Statecraft." *Late Imperial China* 26.1 (2005), 72–109.

¹¹Andrea Janku, "Preparing the Ground for Revolutionary Discourse from the Statecraft Anthologies to the Periodical Press in Nineteenth-Century China." *T'oung Pao* 90.1/3 (2004), tables on 73–76 and *passim*.

¹²Pierre-Étienne Will, ed., *Handbooks and Anthologies for Officials in Imperial China: A Descriptive and Critical Bibliography* (Leiden: Brill, 2020). See also Hilde De Weerd's forthcoming work on this genre.

¹³Dai Zhaochen, *Xue shi lu*, in *Siku weishou shu jikan* 四庫未收書輯刊, edited by Siku weishou shu jikan bianzuan weiyuanhui 四庫未收書輯刊編纂委員會, ser. 2, vol. 26 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2000). Will, *Handbooks and Anthologies*, 102, lists an edition from 1865 held at Hong Kong University, but all other editions in the *Quanguo guji pucha dengji jibenshujuku* are from 1866 or 1867.

¹⁴Will, *Handbooks and Anthologies*, 103.

He grew up in Jiangsu, where it was compiled, and spent time in Hunan in the early 1830s, shortly after it was published. Even if Dai himself did not read it cover to cover, its contents were Dai's main source. *A Record of Learning* therefore shows how Dai read and assessed the contents of the *Collected Statecraft Writings*.

Additionally, Dai left an unusually rich corpus of biographical material and administrative documents. Dai's son published his father's biography, epitaph and various other ceremonial texts, providing valuable biographical background on Dai's life.¹⁵ In 1849, Dai himself published a short and didactic handbook. The remainder of his works appeared in the 1860s. In 1863, after his first tenure as a prefect, Dai published a volume of documents titled *A Record of Public Service* (*Conggong lu* 從公錄). In 1866, towards the end of his second tenure, he published *A Record of Learning*. And upon his retirement in 1870, Dai republished his first collection of documents together with two additional volumes, titled *A Record of Public Service, Continued* (*Conggong xu lu* 從公續錄) and *A Record of Public Service, Third Installment* (*Conggong san lu* 從公三錄).¹⁶ In addition to public proclamations and records, these anthologies contained regulations, prefaces, and opinions as well as communications with Dai's superiors and subordinates. During the second of his four appointments, Dai completed *A Record of Learning*. Together with his biography and administrative documents, it shows how he received the statecraft tradition and drew on it as an official.

The article proceeds chronologically through Dai's life and career while making an argument about how he learned to be an official. It begins with his education and early career, during which time he read and studied with relatives and colleagues. The remainder of the article focuses on his experience as a prefect in the 1860s. Most of Dai's policies were typical of the period: he coordinated rebellion suppression in the 1850s and oversaw political reconstruction in the 1860s.¹⁷ Rather than reviewing all his policies, therefore, the latter sections probe the sources of three of Dai's policy decisions, showing how he evaluated and adapted competing policy ideas. These sections show how the statecraft tradition offered Dai not only specific policy *blueprints*, but also *models* of their successful use and general *principles* to consider when implementing them. A final section shows how Dai—and figures like him—have been left out of historiographical discussions more focused on the inventors of new policy ideas, rather than on the lower-level officials who adapted and implemented them. The conclusion builds on that observation to reconsider the question of statecraft in the Qing.

Dai's Political Education

This section provides a sketch of Dai's early life and education. Its first purpose is to introduce him to the reader. Dai Zhaochen was born into an elite Jiangsu family,

¹⁵To my knowledge, the only known copy of this text is in the Columbia University Library. It also contains a biography of Dai's wife, née He 何, whom it described as industrious, maternal, and well-versed in the four books and Tang poetry.

¹⁶In the notes, I have abbreviated *A Record of Public Service* and its two continuations as *Cong-lu*, *cong-xu*, and *Cong-san*, respectively. All three volumes are in Guanzhenshu jicheng bianzuan weiyuanhui 官箴書集成編纂委員會, ed. *Guanzhenshu jicheng* 官箴書集成, vol. 8 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1997), and all citations are to these editions.

¹⁷For a recent review of the literature, see the introduction to Daniel Knorr, "Fragile Bulwark: The Qing State in Jinan during the Taiping and Nian Wars." *Late Imperial China* 43.1 (2022), 43–83.

which provided him with an entrée into officialdom. He spent his youth preparing for the examinations and learning from his relatives. In reconstructing Dai's background, this section also underlines the importance of lineage networks of family learning and secretarial offices for the transmission of policy ideas in the late Qing.

Dai was born into a family of successful officials, many of whom had purchased their degrees. According to their genealogy, compiled in 1837 and then again in 1862, Dai's family traced its origins to the Yuan Dynasty. By the eighteenth century, the family had settled in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, at the heart of the wealthy Yangtze Delta region.¹⁸ The genealogy elliptically refers to them as farmers and gives no detail on the occupations or lives of most members. In the Qianlong reign (1736–1795), a few Dai men began winning official positions. The preface describes this as the moment when the Dai began studying letters and the martial arts. Dai's great-great-uncles served as officers in the Green Standard army. Numerous other relatives served in civil posts, notably as county magistrates.

The pinnacle of the family's official success was Zhaochen's great-uncle Dai Sanxi 戴三錫 (1758–1830, 1793 *jinshi*¹⁹). Sanxi first rose to national attention (receiving an imperial audience), when he caught a Sichuan sect leader during a routine *baojia* inspection.²⁰ During his subsequent tenure, which included nearly a decade as Sichuan governor, Sanxi submitted over 3,000 memorials. He recommended Liu Heng 劉衡 (1776–1841) as Ba County 巴縣 magistrate, a post from which Liu would pen some of the most famous administrative handbooks of the late Qing.²¹ While outlining the extent of Sanxi's reputation and network would require a more extended discussion, we get some sense of his significance from an editorial comment at the end of He Changling's 賀長齡 (1785–1848) official biography. Changling, the editors conclude, lacked the martial abilities to stabilize a frontier territory. Sanxi, by contrast, “worked hard on civil affairs” and “was effective at governing” (during his long tenure on the Sichuan frontier.²² We have no definitive evidence that Zhaochen ever lived with his great-uncle, but Zhaochen's father and younger brother Dai Pan 戴槃 (b. 1813) worked in Sanxi's Sichuan offices briefly in 1833 and 1839, and Zhaochen would likely have heard something of their trip, even if he did not go himself.²³ Moreover, Sanxi's fame would likely have opened doors for his younger relative, and Zhaochen did reprint Sanxi's primer when he served in Guangdong, suggesting that he had read at least some of Sanxi's official papers.²⁴

¹⁸Dai Pan 戴槃, ed., *Daishi jiasheng yuebian* 戴氏家乘約編. Microfilm. Tokyo: National Diet Library, 1975 [1862], especially “fanli,” “zhushu,” “guanxian,” and “gongju.” Further editions were compiled in the Late Qing and Republic.

¹⁹See entry in *Renming quanwei renwu zhuanji ziliaoku*, Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica. Birth and death dates cited are from this database unless noted. Handbook author dates are from Will, *Handbooks and Anthologies*.

²⁰Compare *Renzong Rui Huangdi shilu* 仁宗睿皇帝實錄 304:32b, and Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽 et al., eds., *Qing shi gao* 清史稿 380:11611. Both accessed at Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan: Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo 中央研究院歷史語言研究所: Hanji quanwen ziliao ku 漢籍全文資料庫, <https://hanchi.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/ihp/hanji.htm>. (Hereafter “Scripta Sinica”).

²¹*Lufu zouzhe*, First Historical Archives, Beijing, China, file number 03-2562-043, DG5/5/20 (I format subsequent notes as FHA, archive number, abbreviated date). On their relationship, see also Liu's biography in Zhao Erxun, *Qing shi gao* 478:13056.

²²Zhao Erxun, *Qing shi gao* 380:11619.

²³Dai Pan, ed., *Tingli shangguan nianpu*, appended to *Daishi jiasheng yuebian*, unpaginated manuscript, The National Diet Library. Tokyo, Japan.

²⁴“Guochao mingwen xiaoti duben chongke xu” in *Cong-san*, 40a.

Examination failure punctuated Dai's early life. Despite his allegedly precocious ability to memorize the classics, he never succeeded in the civil service examinations.²⁵ Dai would go on to fail the provincial examinations five times. Even after entering the bureaucracy, Dai said that he "had no learning whatsoever."²⁶ Writing the preface to *A Record of Learning* decades later, Dai would sidestep the question of classical literacy, writing that he had studied the classics and histories and that officials must know them fluently.²⁷

As Dai's classical studies stalled, he turned to more practical reading. In 1833 his uncle Dai Yuli 戴於禮 (n.d.) was appointed as magistrate of Leiyang 耒陽 County, Hunan,²⁸ and Dai followed him there. Dai's biography is then silent on how he spent the remainder of the 1830s. He probably studied and worked. His son Dai Xieyuan 戴燮元 was born in 1837.²⁹ According to Xieyuan, Zhaochen continued his studies in Hunan while also "reading examination papers from the local academy." According to his biography, Dai spent his free time "discussing useful knowledge" and developed a "will to order the world" (*you jingshi zhi* 有經世志).³⁰ Scholars have long noted the importance of familial traditions of learning in the intellectual history of late imperial China, and the Dai family exemplified that dynamic.³¹ During these first several decades of Dai's life, he learned about governance from a dense network of male relatives and their friends and colleagues.

In the 1840s and 50s, Dai cut his teeth on some of the most technically complex systems of the Qing state. He purchased his first appointment, in 1841, as an administrative clerk (*zhishi* 知事) in the Liang Huai 兩淮 salt administration, a recent site of reform by statecraft luminary Tao Shu 陶澍 (1779–1839).³² There, he distinguished himself both by rooting out corrupt practices and by his martial valor during the Opium War. After the war, Dai stayed and reformed salt transportation logistics, stove management, monopoly pricing, and merchant–government relations. At the same time, he was able to "live close to home, with lots of relatives and friends" with whom he "discussed county-level governance."³³ Tao Shu himself died before Dai's arrival, but Dai's first published book received a preface from Xu Qiaolin 許喬林 (1775?–1852), one of the editors of Tao's collected works and of the *Brief Gazetteer of Huabei Salt-Ticket Administration* (*Huai bei piao yan zhilüe* 淮北票鹽志略).³⁴

²⁵See (*Guangxu*) *dantu xian zhi* 丹徒縣志 23.32a. Unless otherwise noted, I cite all gazetteers from Airusheng zhongguo fangzhi ku 愛如生中國方志庫, http://www.er07.com/home/pro_87.html. See also Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 2a.

²⁶FHA, 04-01-12-0497-128, TZ3/5/30.

²⁷Dai Zhaochen, *Xue shi lu, zixu* 1a–1b.

²⁸Compare Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 2a with (*Guangxu*) *leiyang xian zhi* 耒陽縣志 4–1.11b.

²⁹Chen Hongyan 陳紅彥 et. al., eds. *Qingdai shiwenji zhenben congkan zongmu suoyin tiyao* 清代詩文集珍本叢刊總目索引提要 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2017), 999.

³⁰Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 2a–2b.

³¹For example, see Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship*. The family communicated frequently enough for the 1862 version of the genealogy to note Zhaochen's recent appointment in Shandong.

³²See FHA, 04-01-13-0295-015, XF1/7/5 on the purchase.

³³See, respectively, Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 3a, and Dai Zhaochen's own preface to his *Qiu zhi guan jian* 求治管見, in *Guanzhenshu jicheng*, edited by Guanzhenshu jicheng bianzuan weiyuanhui, Vol. 9 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1997).

³⁴See Xu's preface to Dai Zhaochen, *Qiu zhi guan jian*.

This phase of Dai's career ended in 1849 when his father died, and he returned home for mourning. Afterwards, in 1852, he was appointed as magistrate of Mi'le 彌勒 County in eastern Yunnan. Although he was already in his forties, Dai begged off. Perhaps Yunnan was too far. Perhaps he wanted to stay closer to his aging mother, as his son later suggested. Or perhaps it was he who lobbied the Anhui Governor, Manchu bannerman Fuji 福濟 (1811–1875), to let him stay and address the growing rebellion in the Lower Yangtze Delta.³⁵ Regardless, it was a consequential decision. In the 1850s, he worked under Fuji, and probably came to know Li Hongzhang (1823–1901), then in charge of Fuji's staff.³⁶ Dai helped manage population registration, military rations, boats, and donations for Qing armies in Anhui and Jiangsu, particularly using his experience in the salt monopoly to generate funding.³⁷ These were bureaucratically intractable and technically complex tasks. It was his ability to handle them—and probably the professional connections he made in doing so—which led to his recommendation for the post of prefect.³⁸

In the 1860s, Dai served four tenures as prefect. The prefect occupied a strategic position in Qing administration coordinating problems which, although still local in scope, were too strategic or complex for county magistrates to resolve themselves. This earned them a much higher official rank than magistrates (4b vs. 7a).³⁹ In 1861, Dai was appointed to Dengzhou 登州, Shandong. After a leave of absence to mourn the death of his mother, Dai was sent to Lianzhou 廉州, Guangdong in 1864.⁴⁰ He spent the remainder of the decade in Guangdong, serving first in Qiongzhou 瓊州 (on today's Hainan Island) (1867) and then in Guangzhou 廣州 (1869).⁴¹ As Dai gained seniority and experience, he received increasingly difficult and important jobs. Dengzhou was rated as strategic and complex, while Guangzhou, which was wealthy, unruly, and strategically important, was rated as strategic, complex, strenuous, and difficult.⁴² These promotions suggest that his superiors thought Dai well-suited to local administration on the challenging maritime frontier.

³⁵See generally Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 2a–3b and (*Minguo*) *Dantu xian zhi zhiyu* 丹徒縣志摭餘, 7a. On his reassignment, see FHA, 03-4099-080, XF4/1/29; FHA, 04-01-12-0480-094, XF4/2/17.

³⁶On Li's role in Fuji's *mufu*, see Xue Fucheng 薛福成, *Yong'an biji* 庸齋筆記, *juan* 1. Accessed at Airusheng zhongguo jiben guji ku 愛如生中國基本古籍庫, www.er07.com/home/pro_3.html. And Xu Ke 徐珂, *Qing bai lei chao* 清稗類鈔, 1390. Accessed at Hanji quanwen ziliao ku.

³⁷Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 3b–4a.

³⁸Shandong Governor Tan Yanxiang suggested appointing Dai as Jinan Prefect: FHA, 04-01-13-0295-015, XF11/7/05. On normal recruitment patterns for prefects, see Hu Heng 胡恆, Chen Bijia 陳必佳, and Kang Wenlin 康文林, "Qingdai zhifu xuanren de kongjian yu lianghua fenxi: yi zhengqu fendeng, jinshenlu shujuku wei zhongxin" 清代知府選任的空間與量化分析——以政區分等《縉紳錄》數據庫為中心, *Xinya xuebao* 37 (2020), 381–82.

³⁹There was some variation in rankings; see Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 158. See also Hu Heng, Chen Bijia, and Kang Wenlin, "Qingdai zhifu xuanren de kongjian yu lianghua fenxi."

⁴⁰Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 10b–11a. On his appointment in Lianzhou, see FHA, 04-01-12-0497-128, TZ3/5/30; 04-01-12-0497-129, TZ3/5/30; *zongrenfu* 宗人府, FHA, 05-13-002-000786-0096, TZ3/6/8. In the Qing, Lianzhou was part of Guangdong. Today, it is in Guangxi. On Dai's sojourn in Shanxi, see Li Chenglin, "Muzhiming," 3a, in Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*.

⁴¹See FHA, 03-4646-166, TZ8/4/22 and Dai's biography in (*Guangxu*) *Guangzhou fu zhi* 廣州府志 23.23b. Will, *Handbooks and Anthologies*, 103. Will states that the Guangzhou post was an "acting" one. When Dai wrote the preface to *Xue shi lu* in mid-1866, he was still serving in Lianzhou.

⁴²See *Qing shi gao, dili zhi, juan* 72 *passim*.

Localizing Defense Policy in Dengzhou

Dai's formal official career began in 1861 in Shandong, at a time when rebellion was still raging across much of the empire. As scholars have long noted, Qing officials developed numerous policies for suppressing and defending against it.⁴³ They fortified villages, emptied rural areas of supplies and people, organized militias, and hired mercenaries. In doing so, they came to increasingly rely on leadership and funding from local elites. This section describes how Dai adapted these preexisting policy blueprints when he served in Dengzhou. After reviewing his success in warding off Nian rebels, it compares his policies with related texts included in *A Record of Learning*. In this case, statecraft learning provided specific blueprints for Dai to follow and a lesson in how to localize them.

Upon his arrival that spring, Dai began preparing for a siege.⁴⁴ He solicited over 15,000 taels of silver in donations (including 400 taels from his own purse) to repair the Dengzhou city wall.⁴⁵ He required militiamen to close the gates and question entrants, and city dwellers to stockpile food and firewood. Meanwhile, he called on clerks, gentry, soldiers, and braves to defend the gates. Citing a popular and apt metaphor, he said that “unity of will is like a wall.”⁴⁶ Dai wanted *tuanlian* militias to facilitate this defense,⁴⁷ but he quickly realized that most people were too poor and busy for training. As a result, he was forced to hire wage laborers as paid mercenaries:

Shop clerks and teachers were each half the number. And although they volunteered to fight, there were not enough of them, and so we had no choice but to also hire mercenary braves. All of those recruited as braves were craftsmen and people who did handicrafts ... as for the four township *tuanlian* militias, they are all farmers. They work in the fields for six hours per day and find time to practice their martial arts. When there is no need, each can engage in his respective job.

鋪戶夥計居其半 讀書處館居其半。雖各努力向前，而人數無多，不得不添募壯勇。應募者皆為工匠手藝之民 ... 至四鄉團練，盡係務農之人。三時力田，乘隙習武。無事，則各安生業。

Craftsmen and shop clerks, presumably employed in flexible ways in more urban settings, made better soldiers than farmers tied to their fields. But creating a dispersed network of local defenders also raised the question of geography. Dai explained:

As for scholars and businesspeople, when they pick up arms and join regiments, it is hard to hope that they will be very vigorous. Those people without resources who will never be willing to give up their homes and neglect their fields and crops are also

⁴³In addition to the work of Philip Kuhn and Daniel McMahon, cited above, see recent work by Dai Yingcong.

⁴⁴On the repair, see “Chongxiu dengzhou fu cheng ji,” *Cong-lu*, 43a–43b, which records Dai leaving for Dengzhou in Xianfeng 11 month 2, roughly March 1861. He had arrived by May: Dai Xieyuan, *Dongmou shoucheng jilüe* 東牟守城紀略, in *Zhongguo fangzhi congkan (huabei difang)*, vol. 1 (Taibei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1968–), 12b. On the wall, see (*Guangxu*) *zengxiu dengzhou fu zhi* 增修登州府志 7.1b, 13.31b, and 25.15a; Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 5b–6a. See also Knorr, “Fragile Bulwark,” 47, 62–64.

⁴⁵FHA, 03-4986-011, TZ3/11/29.

⁴⁶“Choubei juncheng fangdu zhangcheng,” *Cong-lu*, 18a–20b.

⁴⁷For the quotations below, see “Bing zunyi sheli tuanying zhangcheng you,” *Cong-lu*, 7a–10b.

reluctant to leave their fields. And there is no world in which they will leave their own villages and families, abandoning their homes without even defending them. These sorts of circumstances vary somewhat. The counties and districts are anywhere from thirty-five to two hundred miles away from the prefectural seat, and so it is difficult to select men to send for training with rations for the road. In the various towns and villages far away from the seat, it is also hard, when there are no military problems, to convince them to leave their livelihoods [i.e. fields] and travel to the city for training.

其讀書、貿易之人，一旦執械從戎，固難期其強勁。而養贍無資，斷不肯棄室家而不顧其耕田力穡之人，既難棄其田疇。亦萬無捨其本村之身家，不自防禦而輕去其鄉之理。似此情形微特。各州縣地方，遠或距道府五六百里，近或距道府一二百里，勢難抽丁送練，裹糧相從。即各鄉村鎮，距城較遠之區，亦難於無事時，責以入城常行訓練，致荒本業。

In addition to the questions of transportation and profession, there was the question of urgency. Even if people were loyal to the Qing government at a local level, how could they be convinced to bear the expenses of regular military practice? The costs of training were obvious, unlike their benefits. Perhaps as a response, Dai offered his subjects the possibility of more vibrant political participation:

the public, local affairs of a city should be discussed together by gentry, elders, *baojia* [heads], village heads, and lineage heads. If, in their deliberations, each has his own [partial] view, they can always submit them [to officials], and there are officers waiting to hear them ... regarding right and wrong and the straight and crooked parts or local public affairs, townspeople each have their own public views. If among them, there are occasional prejudices, then they can be reported to officials and gentry for arbitration. They cannot recklessly spark debates, mislead the people's hearts, and dare to write public placards.

城邦地方公事，應由紳耆、保甲、鄉正、族長共同會議。如會議個有偏見，盡可呈告，有司聽候示尊 ... 遇地方公事是非、屈直，鄉黨自有公評。即其中，偶有偏徇，亦儘可告官伸理斷，不可妄生議論、煽動人心、冒寫公詞。⁴⁸

Here, Dai assumed the presence of a “right” and “correct” view, and of various local figures who would help bring it to light through structured dialogue in official channels.

Amidst this mobilization, Dai tried to determine which of his subjects were trustworthy.⁴⁹ Before the attack, Dai had distinguished between “outsider people attending the fairs,” who needed to be investigated but had legitimate reasons to enter the city, and true “vagrants and bandits” who needed to be “removed from the jurisdiction” entirely. Among the travelers were bandits, who gambled, told fortunes, and caused trouble. Likewise, he only thought that a portion of local elites were qualified to lead troops. As

⁴⁸“Yan jin biaotie changhong shi,” *Cong-san*, 22a–23a.

⁴⁹The discussion in this paragraph draws on “Yanna ganhui feitu gaoshi” and “An min gaoshi” in *Cong-lu*, 15a–15b, 38a–40b.

a class, this group was seen as much less susceptible to bribery than yamen clerks.⁵⁰ But who among the elites were qualified to lead? Dai's writings do not provide details on their backgrounds, but he does highlight the qualities that they needed. Writing before he had served as an official, Dai emphasized wisdom.⁵¹ Now, his criteria were more concrete: he wanted people "familiar with the geography and sentiments" of the locality. If they were to be reciting the Sacred Edict, they needed clear pronunciation.⁵²

These preparations came to the fore that fall, when Nian rebels laid siege to Dengzhou city for forty days. Dai successfully defended the city, even though his mother died midway through the siege.⁵³ This success was recorded in more detail than any other moment in Dai's official career. It won him and his subordinates recommendation and promotion.⁵⁴ And it was memorialized in the county and prefectural gazetteers and in a detailed narrative written by Dai's son.⁵⁵

In fact, most of Dai's defense policies in Dengzhou followed the prescriptions of earlier officials. *A Record of Learning* contained several pieces touching on *tuanlian*. The first, by Liu Heng, was introductory: it outlined how gentry would lead local people to keep watch at key spots and raise the call for help as needed.⁵⁶ The second, by Yan Ruyi 嚴如煜 (1759–1826), a Hunan *jingshi* luminary, focused on defending against coastal pirates by using *tuanlian* militias to cut off their food supplies on the mainland. Yan embodied the principle of adapting to local conditions, but his program was otherwise quite different from Dai's. The third was more specifically similar to Dai's program. In it, Gong Jinghan 龔景瀚 (1747–1802) used *tuanlian* to "strengthen the walls and clear the countryside." The *Collected Statecraft Writings* included this piece, which provided the clearest blueprint for *tuanlian* organization in Dai's *Record of Learning*. Through fortification, militia organizing, and stockpiling, Gong argued, counties and prefectures could defend themselves without large contingents of government troops. When Dai initially proposed repairing the wall, he explicitly used Gong's phrase, explaining that sturdy walls would give rural settlers refuge in case of attack.⁵⁷

Dai followed Gong's advice to mobilize his subjects according to their ability and availability. For both men, gentry leadership was one circumscribed part of a larger mobilization. As we saw above, Dai saw limits to gentry leadership, both political (trustworthiness) and practical (knowledge of local conditions). Gong likewise advocated "choosing those from well-off families, with upright character and understanding of how to do things, either literati or elders, to serve as heads of forts."⁵⁸ In other words, the key qualifications for leadership were ethics and ability more than literati status per se. Moreover, both men saw a continued leading role for government officials in supervising these civilians: Gong advocated organizing *tuanlian* at a prefectural level,

⁵⁰"Chongxiu dengzhou fu cheng ji," *Cong-lu*, 43b.

⁵¹Dai Zhaochen, *Qiu zhi guan jian*, 6b.

⁵²See respectively "Bingqing paibo yuanbian ...," *Cong-san*, 29b, and "Jiangsheng lun," *Cong-san*, 19b.

⁵³Dai Xieyuan, *Dongmou shoucheng jilüe*, 3b–13a *passim* and *idem.*, *Xingshu*, 6b–8a; *Like tiben* 史料題本, FHA, 02-01-03-111338-005, XF11/08/25.

⁵⁴FHA, 03-4898-082, TZ3.

⁵⁵See (*Guangxu*) *Zengxiu dengzhou fu zhi* 增修登州府志 13.31b–32a; (*Guangxu*) *Penglai xian xu zhi* 蓬萊縣續志 12.

⁵⁶Liu Heng, "Tuanlian zhuangding zhangcheng," in *Xue shi lu* 14.16b–19a.

⁵⁷"Chi ge zhouxian xiu cheng zha," *Cong-lu*, 11a–11b. He also ordered county seats walls to be repaired.

⁵⁸Gong Jinghan, "Jianbi qingyi yi," in *Xue shi lu* 10.8a–16b. See discussion in Philip Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies*, 37–50.

just as Dai in fact did. Third, Green Standard troops retained a vital role. For Gong, they were to train and supervise militiamen; in Dai's case, they served alongside militiamen in defending Dengzhou. Finally, in both cases, it was the laboring poor and not agricultural peasants who would fortify and defend the city. Both systems mobilized ad hoc coalitions of Qing subjects.

Throughout his career, Dai appealed to local suitability as a principle in evaluating policy proposals. Explaining his *tuanlian* program to his superiors, Dai wrote that since “the characteristics of each prefecture are different, and I have not yet travelled through my jurisdiction, I do not dare make unsupported proposals. Probably, when organizing *tuanlian* militias, it is nothing but adjusting according to time and practicing according to place” (*Ge fu qingxing bu tong, bi fu wei jing qinli, yi bu gan xuanni. Dadi tuanlian zhi fa, buwai yu yin shi zhiyi, xiang di zhiyi* 各府情形不同，俾府未經親歷，亦不敢懸擬。大抵團練之法，不外於因時制宜，相地制宜）。⁵⁹ “Governing according to local conditions” (*yin di zhiyi* 因地制宜) was a cardinal principle of Qing governance.⁶⁰ Dai's great-uncle Sanxi's official biography had lauded his ability to govern according to place, using the same set phrase.⁶¹ And Zhaochen experience's in salt and river administration had likewise taught him the importance of local variation. He mostly excluded general advice on these two topics from his *Record of Learning*, writing in the editorial notes (*fanli* 凡例) that for salt-making and hydrology, “one must proceed according to place and time, and one cannot describe them completely in books.”⁶² One of the few pieces on hydrology was from Huang Lihong 黃六鴻 (b. 1633); it provided a schematic guide to the regional variation of hydrological systems.⁶³ Notwithstanding his short appointments, Dai exemplified a sensitive imperial approach to the “politics of difference”: he sought out “local and situated knowledge,” used it to “apply the rules of thumb” in official discourse to his jurisdictions and achieved “practical success” as a result.⁶⁴

Simplifying Baojia Registration in Lianzhou

After a leave of mourning (c. 1862–1864), Dai was appointed in Guangdong, where he would serve for the rest of the decade. As his son later noted, “Guangdong is a place that links together China and the outside, and there are very many foreign languages and customs. Excited [by them], the people listen and follow them; when they get anxious, they revolt.”⁶⁵ The prime example of this mixture of foreign ideas and local customs was of course the Taiping Rebellion, launched not far away in eastern Guangxi and ongoing at the start of Dai's tenure in Guangdong. More generally, the Qing bureaucracy rated all

⁵⁹“Bing zunyi sheli tuanying zhangcheng you,” in *Cong-lu*, 10a.

⁶⁰Ma Ruheng 馬汝珩 and Ma Dazheng 馬大正大正, eds., *Qingdai de bianjiang zhengce* 清代的邊疆政策, 62–64. This work focuses on frontier governance, but the principle was cited in the interior as well. See also Hu Heng, *Bianyuan didai de xingzheng zhili: qingdai tingzhi zai yanjiu* 邊緣地帶的行政治理: 清代廳制再研究 (Beijing: shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2022), conclusion.

⁶¹Zhao Erxun, *Qing shi gao* 380:11611.

⁶²Here and below, see “fanli” in *Xue shi lu*.

⁶³*Xue shi lu* 4.21a–22a.

⁶⁴Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), esp. chap. 1; quotations from James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), chap. 9, here 317, 316, 323.

⁶⁵Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 15b.

three of the prefectures in which Dai served as challenging posts: Lianzhou bordered Vietnam; Qiongzhou had an indigenous Li population, and Guangzhou was a hub of global trade.⁶⁶ Lianzhou and Qiongzhou saw fierce resistance to the imposition of the commercial tax in the early 1860s.⁶⁷ Local militarization and political “reconstruction” were ongoing during Dai’s tenure.⁶⁸

As in Dengzhou, Dai drew on the defense policies which Qing provincial officials had developed in the preceding decades. Specifically, in response to rebellion in the mountains of neighboring Guangxi,⁶⁹ he refashioned the *baojia* system of household registration. The military threat in Dengzhou had been so pressing that Dai immediately began preparing for an attack. In Lianzhou, he had time for the more laborious and fundamental task of household registration. In implementing *baojia*, he followed the general Qing trend of registering a wider range of socially marginal peoples. Interestingly, however, he advocated a very simple system of registers. This section thus shows Dai evaluating multiple possible policies and choosing between them. It moves our discussion from the problem of adapting prefabricated policy blueprints into the more complex realm of evaluating between them using abstract principles of good governance.

A *Record of Learning* anthologized around ten pieces on *baojia*. Pieces like that by Wang Huizu defended the institution against its detractors. Lu Huiyu 陸會禹 described *baojia*’s historical origins. Yang Mingshi 楊名時 (1661–1736) and Tong Guoqi 佟國器 (d. 1660) described how to use *baojia* to deal with various politically contentious groups. Peng Peng 彭鵬 (1637–1704) offered a typical account of how clerks used *baojia* to extort money from Qing subjects. Most of these pieces were from the early Qing and addressed fundamental features of *baojia* unchanged in the preceding century. Two of them offered specific recommendations on implementation. The first, by the noted provincial official Yu Chenglong 于成龍 (1617–1684), was based particularly on his experience governing Huangzhou in eastern Hubei, a jurisdiction punctuated by Yangtze River tributaries, as it was being conquered by the Qing.⁷⁰ For Huangzhou, Yu devised a detailed program of patrol boats, bridges, locks, night watches and logbooks coordinated through *baojia*. Although his piece could have been relevant in coastal Guangdong, the *baojia* regulations which Dai included in his Lianzhou administrative papers were much less detailed.⁷¹

The second was “An Essay on the *Baojia* Statutes and Substatutes” (“Lun *baojia* shili shu” 論保甲實例書) by Zhang Huiyan 張惠言 (1761–1802), a piece also anthologized in the *Collected Statecraft Writings*. In it, Zhang launched a fundamentalist critique of the Qing approach to *baojia*. He praised Wang Yangming’s 王陽明 (1472–1529) *baojia* system for *not* requiring officials to supervise the maintenance of ten-household placards.

⁶⁶While in Lianzhou, Dai noted that warfare in neighboring Vietnam was contributing to a boom in piracy. See “Bingqing jiangli jiaoban yangfei chuli yuanbian you,” *Cong-xu*, 1.29a.

⁶⁷*Muzong yi huangdi shilu* 穆宗毅皇帝實錄 74.495a–496a, in Hanji quanwen ziliao ku.

⁶⁸Qiu Jie 邱捷, *Wanqing guanchang jingxiang: Du Fengzhi riji yanjiu* 晚清官場鏡像: 杜鳳治日記研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2021), chap. 2; Melissa Macauley, *Distant Shores: Colonial Encounters on China’s Maritime Frontier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 90–96; David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineages in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), chaps. 20–21.

⁶⁹*Muzong yi huangdi shilu* 133.145b–147a; 179.222a; 212.765b–766a.

⁷⁰Taniguchi Kinoriyū 谷口規矩雄, “U Seiryū no hokōhō ni tsuite” 于成龍の保甲法について. *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 34.3 (1975), 370–88. See also William T. Rowe, *Crimson Rain: Seven Centuries of Violence in a Chinese County* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), chap. 7.

⁷¹See “Qingcha *baojia* zhangcheng,” *Cong-xu*, 3a–5a.

According to Zhang, this supervision was a later addition and an unnecessary burden on communities.⁷² He instead recommended doing away with official registers (often called circulating registers⁷³) as an additional layer on top of household placards. In ten points, Zhang argued that this government supervision and registration was expensive, useless, and burdensome.

In doing so, he contravened a widespread desire for more precise and frequent inspections.⁷⁴ The nineteenth-century programs anthologized in Xu Dong's 徐棟 (1792–1865) seminal *Book of Baojia* (*Baojia shu* 保甲書, 1837) and by its 1869 redaction *Essentials from the Book of Baojia* (*Baojia shu jiyao* 保甲書輯要) required even more effort. They called, for instance, for updated information on women and children, workers and migrants, and other people who were not male household heads. Registration and inspection were supposed to be frequent and detailed. For example, the ten-point program by Zong Jichen 宗稷辰 (1788?–1867), who wrote a preface for Dai's first collection of administrative papers, prompted a national discussion of *baojia* policy in 1851.⁷⁵ Zong proposed a remarkably detailed registration procedure. He emphasized the need to give experienced magistrates ample time to complete initial registration, which "above all needs to be detailed."

Dai's *baojia* program required less effort. In Dengzhou, he had only required *baojia* placard heads (*pai zhang* 牌長) to report the aggregate populations of their streets.⁷⁶ In Lianzhou, Dai issued a proclamation and an associated set of regulations outlining his program.⁷⁷ It organized households into the classical decimal units (here called placards) but eliminated the hundred- and thousand-household units common in Qing *baojia* programs. Dai instructed placard heads to report directly to the *tuanlian* bureaus, bypassing other levels of the *baojia* hierarchy.⁷⁸ Moreover, Dai's reporting requirements were less detailed and frequent. Under them, placard heads were to report the names of household heads and the number of their members. But Dai explicitly noted that they did not need to record the names or ages of any of the other household members. And unless there was a death or the placard had been physically damaged, placard heads did not need to regularly update household placards. Dai was spurning the centralized, frequent registration advocated by many other Qing *baojia* practitioners. He, like Zhang, wanted a program that was "simple and easily done [i.e. practicable]."⁷⁹

This choice reflected Dai's larger commitment to practicability. Murat Dağlı has critiqued historians who use 'pragmatism' to understand Ottoman politics.⁸⁰ He has

⁷²Xue shi lu 13.24a–28a *passim*.

⁷³Liu Meng 劉猛, "Qingdai de hukou xunhuan ce" 清代的戶口循環冊, *Lishi dang'an* 2016.2, 135–40.

⁷⁴My Ph.D. Dissertation in progress offers a more comprehensive analysis of the variety and evolution of Qing *baojia* policy. See also Hsiao Kung-chuan, *Rural China*, 48.

⁷⁵The original proposal is in *Gongzhong dang*, National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, file number 305000381-021, XF1/7 and also Zong Jichen, *Gongchi zhai wenchao* 躬恥齋文鈔 4:1a–6a. Here I rely on the latter, which also includes the responding edict.

⁷⁶"Choubei juncheng fangdu zhangcheng," *Cong-lu*, 18b.

⁷⁷See "Qingcha baojia shi" and "Qingcha baojia zhangcheng," in *Cong-xu*, 1.1a–2a and 1.3a–5a, respectively.

⁷⁸*Tuanlian* bureaus were established empire-wide in 1860: Frederic Wakeman, Jr. *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839–1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 164–67, cited in Knorr, "Fragile Bulwark," 57.

⁷⁹Zhang Huiyan, "Lun baojia shili shu," in *Xue shi lu* 13.24a. For further discussion, see conclusion to this article.

⁸⁰Murat Dağlı, "The Limits of Ottoman Pragmatism." *History and Theory* 52.2 (2013), 194–213.

argued that ‘pragmatism’ covers the power relations which shape politics under a blanket called necessity. While I sympathize with Dağlı’s critique, I also think that Dai was genuinely committed to making policy that worked. This was evident in his choices as well as his frequent use of adjectives such as simple (*jian* 簡), convenient (*bian* 便), and doable (*ke* 可) or “easily done” (*yi xing* 易行). The first product of Dai’s engagement with the statecraft tradition was a short magistrate handbook titled *Modest Opinions about the Search for Good Government* (*Qiu zhi guanjian* 求治管見, 1849, literally *Views on the Pursuit of Governance, seen [narrowly as] through a tube*). Its preface twice claimed that it was even more “practical and useful” (*qieshi youyong* 切實有用) than Wang Huizu’s classic *Personal Views on Learning Government* (*Xue zhi yi shuo* 學治臆說). Dai’s handbook, published before he had served as a prefect, harped on professional decorum, the virtue of making incremental improvements, and the importance of humility. It provided a list of “dos” and “don’ts” in a concise format, denouncing corruption and arguing for a limited use of torture, more generous famine relief, and careful management of one’s subordinates. These were standard fare for Qing official handbooks, and Dai’s text was unremarkable. Indeed, one preface claimed that “its thinking seems shallow, and its language seems simple, but its opinions are precise and appropriate for governance.”⁸¹ For *A Record of Learning*, he likewise selected “apposite and applicable” essays, while leaving aside those “profound opinions” which were not practicable.⁸² For Dai, simplicity and practicability were cardinal virtues of decision-making, in addition to being rhetorical devices used to justify those decisions.

Above, I have surveyed cases in which Dai streamlined bureaucratic procedures and empowered local elites and common people to maintain political order. In Dengzhou, he worked within the limits imposed by local socioeconomic conditions to put together a fighting force to defend his prefecture. In Lianzhou, he advocated for a simplified form of *baojia* to avoid the costs, inconveniences, and corruption of more detailed household registration. In both cases, his policies echoed specific provisions found in *A Record of Learning*. While his *tuanlian* policy in Dengzhou fit well within a contemporary trend, his *baojia* policy in Lianzhou differed more from prevailing discourse. This latter case shows Dai relying on a more general principle to compare conflicting policy ideas. It suggests that Dai had a larger set of principles informing his use of the policy blueprints in the *Collected Statecraft Writings*.

Debating Ethnic Conflict in Qiongzhou

By 1867, when Dai was transferred to Qiongzhou, he had accumulated nearly two decades of experience in local governance and published *A Record of Learning* as a mark of his ascent into officialdom. Correspondingly, his policies in Qiongzhou departed more significantly from common Qing bureaucratic practice. In Qiongzhou, Dai formed a strong opinion on ethnic conflict and thus implicitly took a stand in a wider debate about the issue. This section reflects on that departure, opening the way towards a larger discussion of definition in the conclusion.

In the late Qing, Qiongzhou prefecture was a place of commerce and conflict. The island had been identified as one of the treaty ports to be opened in the wake of the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin. But the opening was delayed by nearly two decades, as the British

⁸¹Zhu Longguang, *Xu*, 1a, in *Qiu zhi guan jian*. See also Will, *Handbooks and Anthologies*, 312–13.

⁸²See *zixu* and *fanli*, respectively. Dai’s preface-writers similarly harped on this: see Xu Qiaolin, *Xu*, in *Qiu zhi guan jian* and Zhang Zuoyan, *Xu* in *Cong-xu*.

evaluated the prospects for trade against the costs of opening a consulate.⁸³ In 1872, an English newspaper reviewed the mercantile opportunities of the newly opened (1858) treaty port of Haikou, at the north end of the island. It described Haikou's position in regional trade networks, through which merchants sold products like sugar and oil. Indeed, Qiongzhou merchants would build a dozen guild halls in Malaysia before the end of the Qing.⁸⁴ The reviewer saw little opportunity for foreigners to participate in these trade arrangements.

At the same time, the island's interior saw continual ethnic strife. As Dai wrote to his superiors upon his arrival in Qiongzhou, "it is surrounded by the sea, and inhabited by the Li, and so since ancient times has attached importance to both prevention and defense."⁸⁵ One estimate counts eighty-five instances of Han–Li conflict in the Qing, or about one every three years.⁸⁶ They began in the seventeenth century, when Li people resisted Qing conquest and helped Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624–1662) in his brief time on Hainan.⁸⁷ In the early eighteenth century, the Qing court acknowledged these issues in allowing Qiongzhou subjects to own firearms, a rare exception to a strict prohibition.⁸⁸ The Qing court typically characterized the Li as barbarous. One typical account, that of the imperially commissioned *Illustrations of Tributary Peoples* (*Zhigong tu* 職貢圖), was that "their nature is violent and ferocious, and they periodically kill with impunity."⁸⁹ An 1806 memorial from the governor-general claimed that Li and Han people were living harmoniously, but he nonetheless described the Li as brutish and concluded that registering them through the island's *baojia* system was unrealistic.⁹⁰ After 1840, as Li unrest became more frequent, the Qing attitude hardened further, tilting from pacifying towards suppressing.⁹¹ There had been an armed conflict three months before Dai arrived, and there would be another four months into his term.

As far as we know, Dai stepped into this tense situation with little experience dealing with the problem of ethnic difference. Nonetheless, he quickly developed a strong opinion on the situation, articulated in "A Discussion of Governing the Li." It expanded on the assessment of the situation which Dai sent to his superiors when he assumed office. In that initial survey, Dai argued that rapacious Han moneylenders caused Li uprisings, clerks

⁸³Zheng Binbin 郑彬彬, "Wanqing qiongzhou kaibu yanjiu (1858–1876): jiyu yingguo dang'an de kaocha" 晚清琼州开埠研究 (1858–1876): 基于英国档案的考察, *Shixue yuekan* 2023.1, 73–85.

⁸⁴On commerce, see F. Hirth, "The Port of Hai-K'ou." *The China Review, or Notes and Queries on the Far East* [Canton], 1872, 124–127. Gale: China and the Modern World, www.gale.com/primary-sources/china-and-the-modern-world. On guilds: Zhou Weimin 周偉民 and Tang Lingling 唐玲玲, *Hainan tongshi: Qingdai juan* [vol. 4] 海南通史·清代卷 (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 2017), 234.

⁸⁵"Bing chakan qiongzhou dagai qingxing you, *Cong-xu* 2.1a–1b.

⁸⁶Zhou Weimin and Tang Lingling, *Hainan tongshi*, 245–73, here 262–63; see also Lu Wei 盧葦, "Qingdai hainan de 'liluan' he qingchao zhengfu de 'zhili' zhengce" 清代海南的“黎亂”和清朝政府的“治黎”政策, *Guangdong shehui kexue* 1993.1, 96–99; On Dai's arrival, see "Bing chakan qiongzhou dagai qingxing you," *Cong-xu* 2.1a.

⁸⁷Liu Dongmei 劉冬梅 and Ouyang Jie 歐陽潔, "Qingchu Hainan lizu yongwu kangqing yuanyin fenxi" 清初海南黎族勇武抗清原因分析, *Shixue jikan* 6 (2012), 104–8.

⁸⁸For the Yongzheng Emperor's proposal, see *Shizong xian huangdi shilu* 世宗憲皇帝實錄 104.376a and (*jiqing*) *daqing huidian shili* 大清會典事例 613.18b–19a, both from Hanji quanwen ziliao ku.

⁸⁹Zhuang Jifa 莊吉發, ed., *Xie Sui zhigong tu manwen tushuo jiaozhu* 謝遂《職貢圖》滿文圖說校注 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1989), 248–49.

⁹⁰FHA, 04-01-01-0495-071, JQ11/7/13.

⁹¹On this terminology, see Mao Haijian 茅海建, *Tianshan de bengkuai: yapian zhanzheng zai yanjiu* 天朝的崩潰·鴉片戰爭再研究 (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhishi sanlian shudian, 1995), chap. 3.

and Green Standard troops exacerbated them through violence and extortion, and incompetent officials allowed them to swell.⁹² Dai began his “Discussion” from a more macroscopic perspective. He listed quotations from Ming and Qing texts compiled in the Daoguang *Qiongzhou Prefectural Gazetteer* (*Qiongzhou fu zhi* 瓊州府志), which documented repeatedly both dynasties’ failures to “pacify” the Li.⁹³ Dai dismissed military suppression as a solution because it had failed at great cost to the government. In the historical record, he found a different lesson: “although it is said that the character of the Li is difficult to domesticate, their uprisings cannot be said to have no reason.” He continued:

For example, in 1829, when the Yazhou Li people rioted, it was because the *jia* heads who took responsibility for tax collection levied several times the normal land tax. In 1833, when the Danzhou Li people rioted, it was because a treacherous person gave out a loan and then charged excessive interest, even killing a traveler. This year, when Li people in Guanfang Village, Yazhou killed soldiers, it was an extreme reaction to the extortion and murder committed by Hong Yunzhang. *How can one say that the Li people like to riot?* In fact, they have been forced to act this way. (My emphasis.)

卽如道光九年，崖州黎人作亂，為甲頭包攬田賦加收至倍蓰所致。道光十三年儋州黎人作亂，為奸徒借貸盤剝及仇殺客人而成至。本年，崖州官坊村黎人戕害弁兵，則為洪雲章索詐斃命激變。豈黎之好為叛亂與？實迫之使然也。⁹⁴

In our terms, Dai argued that what appeared as a matter of ethnic difference (the notion that the Li people were naturally unruly) was in fact a reasonable response to political and economic exploitation. Dai concluded that “the harm done to the Qiongzhou people by the Li has a distant origin.”⁹⁵ What his contemporaries might have seen as an external problem (the presence of a strange, foreign people), Dai recast as a problem internal to the Qing political system. The Green Standard officer⁹⁶ Hong Yunzhang had exhorted the Li people, and their violence in response was just an understandable retaliation. His solution flowed from this diagnosis:

If local officials were honest with the Li people on an everyday basis when there were no problems, and did not allow treacherous people to make excuses for exploitation, allow thieves to sneak in and mislead them, or allow soldiers and petty clerks to cause trouble when something did happen, implemented *baojia* to strengthen supervision and carried out *tuanlian* militias for defense, and set things in this way, then if something did happen, one could gather at the garrisons and take soldiers and militiamen to go investigate, without letting things unravel, and at the same time

⁹²“Bing chakan qiongzun dagai qingxing you,” *Cong-xu* 2.1b–2a.

⁹³Compare with Zhou Weimin and Tang Lingling, *Hainan tongshi*, 274–81.

⁹⁴This and the extract below are from “Zhi li yi,” *Cong-xu* 2.20a–20b.

⁹⁵“Zhi li yi,” *Cong-xu* 2.19a; also “Bing chakan qiongzun dagai qingxing you,” in *idem.*, 1–2.

⁹⁶*Qing muzong yi huangdi shilu* 清穆宗毅皇帝實錄 279:864b–865a. The text in the *Veritable Records* lists Hong as a *waiwei* 外委, which could refer either to a Detached Company Commander (外委千總; rank 8a) or a Detached Squad Leader (外委把總; rank 9a). See Hucker, *Dictionary of Official Titles*, 561.

suppress and pacify them, “using both kindness and force,” and things would never become so uncertain.

倘地方官平日無事，示黎人以誠信，無任奸民藉端盤剝、匪徒乘間煽惑、弁兵差役遇事滋擾。並舉行保甲，以嚴盤詰、辦理團練，以資防禦，則有措置如此。一旦有事，立即會營督帶兵練馳往查辦，無使滋蔓，隨剿隨撫、恩威兼施，則無疑如此。

Here we have a mix of classic Qing ethnic policy (“using both kindness and force”⁹⁷) and an indictment of prior officials’ approach to the Li people. Dai suggested that the standard policy of suppression and magnanimity was not wrong so much as irrelevant. The Li people, like those anonymous vagrants drifting into local fairs, were beyond his control. Instead, he tried to control Qing subjects through registration, surveillance, and militarization using systems like *baojia* and *tuanlian*.

How are we to understand Dai’s approach to ethnic governance? His *Record of Learning*, by my reading, contains only one piece addressing the issue, a letter from the seasoned Qing bureaucrat Cheng Hanzhang 程含章 (1762–1832).⁹⁸ Cheng begins from what he calls the greatest risk to a local official: that “above and below are separated, and their feelings are not in sync.” He goes on to attack the description of people as crafty (*diao* 刁) or savage (*man* 蠻), writing that these behaviors were often the *result* of punishments meted out by officials who failed to sympathize with their real needs. Continuing in an idealistic and high-handed tone, Cheng urges his readers to understand the people’s feelings and to be sensitive to them. Dai’s study of Qiongzhou’s history, his appreciation for the frustration of the Li people, and his appeal to sincerity and virtue all reflected Cheng’s ethos. Theirs was a moral approach to ethnic governance, which assumed a universal human nature. If local officials treated the Li with sincerity and fairness, they argued, the Li would be transformed into law-abiding Qing subjects.

Dai’s view resonated with at least one comment by the reigning Tongzhi Emperor (r. 1862–1875), but it does not seem to have influenced the court’s response to the Li uprisings. In the spring of 1870, an edict condemned so-called Li bandits as “uncouth and set in their ways.” That fall, another edict responding to a memorial from the provincial government in Guangdong raised the possibility that the current Li disturbance was a result of mismanagement by the local officials. This explanation echoed Dai’s argument and contrasted with the earlier edict. By year-end, however, the Qing court had turned away from this position. A third edict instructed the Guangdong governor Žuilin 瑞麟 (1809–1874), then also governor-general, to “completely annihilate” the remaining rebels, to “tear them up by the roots.”⁹⁹ Official corruption, as far as the court was concerned, was no excuse for killing an official, and did not explain away the fundamental barbarity of the Li.

Li’s position also contrasted sharply with what seems to have been a broader statecraft trend in the Late Qing towards forced ethnic assimilation. As Eric Schuessel has shown, Zuo Zongtang’s Hunan Army undertook a thoroughgoing program of ethnic assimilation in Late Qing Xinjiang. Likewise, in 1880s Guangdong, then-governor Zhang Zhidong

⁹⁷Ma Ruheng and Ma Dazheng, eds., *Qingdai de bianjiang zhengce*, 57–62.

⁹⁸“Yu shan zuo shuguan shu,” *Xue shi lu* 16.15b–17a.

⁹⁹See Muzong yi *huangdi shilu* 279.864b–865a; 340.483a–483b; 344.531b–532a.

張之洞 (1837–1909), aggressively sought to assimilate the Li through charity schools.¹⁰⁰ Dai's program, by contrast, was less forceful. He acknowledged the challenges of heterodoxy and ethnic difference and was aware of foreign influence. But he did not seek to eliminate these problems from the social environment. Perhaps this was because he lacked the power, and perhaps it was because he lacked the inclination. In either case, Dai was stretching the limits of his influence and reaching the end of his career.

How Dai Was Forgotten

These sorts of practical, localized policies won Dai numerous accolades. Literati, clerks, and local students wrote Dai commendatory compilations in each place where he served.¹⁰¹ The first compilation from Dengzhou is no longer extant, but the evidence cited above speaks to Dai's popularity there. In Lianzhou, local students wrote him dozens of fawning poems and (we are told) trailed him to his next post.¹⁰² In Qiongzhou, according to Pierre-Étienne Will, “the local instructor (*xundao* 訓導) ... and a large number of students, detail[ed] in flowery language Dai's good policies ... He is said to have succeeded with almost supernatural authority and efficiency and acquired considerable popularity.”¹⁰³ Perhaps this is why the editors of the Republican gazetteer for Qiongzhou 瓊山 county in Qiongzhou mistakenly wrote that Dai had attained the status of *jinshi*.¹⁰⁴ While the contents of these compilations tell us little about Dai's policies, their number and length speak to his reputation.

As Dai's career advanced, these successes earned him an enviable reputation among his colleagues. The tone of the prefaces to his three collections of administrative documents became progressively more fawning.¹⁰⁵ Preface-writers in the first volume acknowledged Dai's “outstanding political reputation” and that he “was inextricably linked with the people.” In the second, they once again praised Dai's responsiveness. By the third, they lauded Dai not just for his concrete achievements, but for his general excellence. One writer cited Dai's ability, his own ignorance, and the amount he learned from the *Records*. Another waxed poetic, writing that “among those called administrators, many who are good shepherds of the people are not good at governing the army; those diligent at hearing complaints, are perhaps not as good at pacifying [the people].” Dai was celebrated not for his specialization, but for his breadth.

He also left a legacy within his lineage, which by the Guangxu reign had an identifiable tradition of local governance. In 1880, Zhaochen's nephew Dai Jie 戴杰

¹⁰⁰Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, “Pi lei qiong dao fu bingqing bo jingfei she tuntian yixue,” in *Zhang Zhidong jinglüe qiong ya shiliao huibian* 張之洞經略瓊崖史料匯編, edited by Zhou Weimin and Tang Lingling (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2016), 82. Compare with Zhang's earlier initiatives in Xinjiang, discussed in Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, chap. 4.

¹⁰¹See *A Record of Affection in Dongmou* 東牟攀轅錄 on Dengzhou (not extant), *A Festschrift from Lianzhou* 三廉贈別錄 (1867 edition at Fudan; see Will, *Handbooks and Anthologies*, 1132 Entry #0906), *Collected Responses to [Dai's] Lingzhi* 靈芝唱答集 (also from Lianzhou; 1868 edition at Fudan), *A Record of Affairs in Qiongtai* 瓊臺紀事錄 (from Qiongzhou, 1869 edition at Harvard), and *A Festschrift from Qiongzhou* (from Qiongzhou and Guangzhou, not extant). See Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 8a, 13b, 15a, 17a.

¹⁰²Dai Xieyuan, *Rui zhi shanfang shichao* 瑞芝山房詩鈔, 1875, 68a–8b.

¹⁰³Will, *Handbooks and Anthologies*, 1132.

¹⁰⁴(*Minguo*) *Qiongzhou xian zhi* 瓊山縣志 21.32a and 23.60a.

¹⁰⁵See Zong Jichen, *Xu, Cong-lu*; Yu Zuoxin, *Xu, Cong-xu*; Huang Jijin, *Cu, Cong-xu*; Liu Yannian, *Cu, Cong-san*; Ji Ruzhou, *Cu, Cong-san*.

republished *Modest Opinions about the Search for Good Government* along with Liu Heng's classic *Knowledge Acquired from Reading the Law* (*Du lü xinde* 讀律心得). The following year, Jie published his own collection of administrative papers, titled *Miscellaneous on Learning Government from Respect-and-Simplicity Studio* (*Jingjiantang xue zhi zalu* 敬簡堂學治雜錄), with a preface from Zhaochen's son Xieyuan.¹⁰⁶ Even in its title, Jie's collection echoed the lessons of his uncle Zhaochen: simplicity and humility in the process of learning to govern. Moreover, Jie devoted the latter half of his own preface to the problem of local variation, writing that "in politics, the most important thing is to govern according to local conditions, so while [these policies] were effective in Ling [陵] [county, where Jie served], we cannot know whether they will be effective in other jurisdictions."¹⁰⁷ Within the collection, Jie included several detailed proclamations and a ten-point program for *baojia*. While Jie referred to it as "simple and easily implemented", its registration procedures and reporting requirements were in fact much more detailed and burdensome than Zhaochen's had been. But as Jie himself emphasized, these provisions were written specifically based on current conditions. The larger principles of practicability and localization remained part of what Xieyuan in his preface referred to as the Dai "family learning" (*jiaxue* 家學).

This reputation and influence were surely part of the reason that his son Xieyuan compiled Zhaochen's biography "in preparation for one day when it may be chosen as material for state history."¹⁰⁸ But Zhaochen never did receive an official state biography. While we can only speculate on why this may have been the case, it is undeniable that Dai achieved neither the rank and stature of Dai Sanxi nor the wide bureaucratic influence of a handbook author like Liu Heng.

Perhaps one reason was that Dai did not seek to propagate original policy proposals. In the words of his epitaph, written by the eminent Hanlin Academician Li Chenglin 李承霖 (b. 1815), Dai "had no desire to compete with those substance-less writers disconnected from civil affairs."¹⁰⁹ Dai's intellectual life began, around 1830, with failure at classical study and his turn towards matters of governance. When it ended, in 1870, Dai had status, prestige, and reputation, but he still fashioned himself as a humble practitioner. This is most evident in the titles of his works themselves. Rather than treatises, he called them *records* of his experience *studying* how to be an official and *pursuing* an official career. For the same reason, Dai explained in the *fanli* that *A Record of Learning* remained necessarily incomplete: "when I have seen and heard more, I will compile an additional text to supplement [my findings]." Dai explicitly refused to acknowledge that he could make an intellectual contribution to Qing governance. In the preface to *A Record of Public Service*, he wrote that "I would not dare say that I have benefited the public. Doing so has just been my heart's ambition." Defining "public service," Dai hid behind a cloud of keywords: diligently working for the "national economy and people's livelihood," "promoting the good and suppressing abuses," "pacifying the interior and repelling external harms,"

Dai's limited ambitions reflected in part his relatively low office. For example, despite serving on the coast, there is little evidence that he engaged in foreign affairs. When Dengzhou was being opened as a treaty port in the wake of the Second Opium

¹⁰⁶Will, *Handbooks and Anthologies*, 312–13, 608–9, 1309–10.

¹⁰⁷Dai Jie, *Jingjian tang xue zhi zalu* 敬簡堂學治雜錄, *zixu*, in Hanji quanwen ziliao ku.

¹⁰⁸Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*, 21a.

¹⁰⁹Li Chenglin, "Muzhiming," 4b in Dai Xieyuan, *Xingshu*.

War, the Manchu bannerman in charge of the operation memorialized to suggest *ignoring* Dai's recommendations on the matter, saying that although they "accorded with local conditions," they contradicted the new treaty, perhaps because Dai was not familiar with it.¹¹⁰ Like other Qing prefects, Dai had the status to voice his opinion in bureaucratic debates and the power to transform institutions in his jurisdictions, but not the provincial or national platforms to spread them. Although prefects were increasingly allowed to submit secret memorials to the throne in the late Qing, they did so much more sparingly than their superiors.¹¹¹ Dai was able to build a reputation in the places where he lived and served, but not able to gain national fame or earn a place in the dynastic historical canon.

But comparing Dai with Yan Ruyi, who also spent most of his career at the sub-provincial level, suggests that it was more than a question of office.¹¹² Like Dai, Yan came from a family of officials. And like Dai, he had limited examination success in his youth, only passing the provincial examinations when he was nearly 40. Both men entered the bureaucracy in middle age and spent most of their careers in one province (Yan in Sha'anxi). But the stature they attained differed dramatically. Yan almost immediately established himself as an expert on militia organization and ethnic governance in the mountains of south-central China. He took hardline positions on ethnic assimilation and pushed to restructure the society under his rule. And the result was several original treatises on frontier policy which later became precedents for men like Dai. Historians have likewise focused on figures like Yan—leading figures with strong agendas and clear positions.

Dai's ambitions may have also been more moderate because the prospects for reform had dimmed over the course of the century. This article has avoided an extended discussion of the politics of political reconstruction in the 1860s, since Dai's practices seemed in many ways typical of the period. But perhaps the virtues to which he attached so much importance—simplicity, practicability, suitability to local conditions—reflected the exigencies of his era. Rebuilding a shattered social order with limited fiscal resources forced Qing officials to make do, and local officials in particular lacked the power to initiate large, novel programs of reform.

Dai Zhaochen and "Statecraft"

These speculations on the limits of Dai's ambition, success, and fame bring us back to the questions with which this essay began. Where should we place Dai within the Qing statecraft tradition? What does his case tell us about its transmission and reception? In other words, what did statecraft mean to Dai Zhaochen? This essay has surveyed Dai's upbringing and clerkships (c. 1810–1860), arguing that he learned about governance not just from reading, but also from his elder male family members and their colleagues. I then

¹¹⁰Wen Qing 文慶 et al., eds., *Chouban yiwu shimo (xianfeng chao) 籌辦夷務始末(咸豐朝)* 79.2a, in *Hanji quanwen ziliao ku*.

¹¹¹By statute, prefects were not allowed to submit palace memorials: (*Guangxu daqing huidian* 大清會典 82.10b–11a, in *Hanji quanwen ziliao ku*). As a matter of fact, some prefects, such as those specially appointed or with higher ranks, did submit memorials. The FHA online catalog includes hundreds of memorials from prefects in the Tongzhi reign, less than one percent of the number of memorials from governors and governors-general. This was a relative increase from the Qianlong reign, but still very infrequent. www.fhac.com.cn/search_catalogues.html. Searched on April 1, 2024.

¹¹²The biographical detail below is drawn from Daniel Mark McMahon, "Restoring the Garden: Yan Ruyi and the Civilizing of China's Internal Frontiers, 1795–1805" (PhD diss., University of California Davis, 1999), 16–23.

contextualized three of Dai's policy choices, and argued that Dai found statecraft policy blueprints useful, but that the *Collected Statecraft Writings* also provided models of their successful use, which Dai adapted according to operating principles such as practicability and suitability to local conditions.¹¹³ Dai was an expert because he could sift through this advice and apply it judiciously in real-world contexts.

This argument should prompt us to reconsider the definitions of *jingshi* currently used by scholars. The first focuses on statecraft as a social movement centered in early-nineteenth-century Hunan. While Dai was adjacent to and aware of this movement, the evidence does not suggest that he was an active participant in it. He did not exchange correspondence with its leading lights; he had no institutional affiliations with its key organs. While he was well-connected and exceptional enough to publish his official papers, Dai nonetheless lived nearer to the edge of this social world than more famous figures like Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–41857). By his own admission, Dai was a *recipient* of its ideas.

A second definition, often adopted by intellectual historians, sees *jingshi* as a Confucian commitment to governing. This definition recognizes the fact that the Confucian classics were formative for Qing officials. Yu Ying-shih saw statecraft learning (*jingshi zhiyong* 經世致用) as a “general trend of Ming–Qing Confucianism.” Like Chang Hao, he considered its impulse to order the world using Confucian morality as a basic feature of late imperial Way Learning (Daoxue 道學)—even “a defining feature of Confucian humanism.”¹¹⁴ *Jingshi* in this view was defined by its practitioners' diligent efforts to govern. The challenge with using this definition is deciding how to measure concepts such as diligence, commitment, and vigor. If every official who left records was definitionally proving his commitment to governance, then this definition becomes too general to provide analytical insight into the relationship between policy writing and Qing governance more generally.

A third definition comes the closest to describing the nature of Dai's expertise. In recent years, American scholars have often highlighted the intersection between *jingshi* and technocracy. These scholars have disproven the earlier notion that Qing officials were nothing more than Confucian generalists.¹¹⁵ Statecraft bureaucrats, they argue, used technical (i.e., specialized, or mechanical) tools to solve social problems. William Rowe described the technocratic approach of Chen Hongmou.¹¹⁶ More recently, scholars of material culture like Chen Kaijun have written about the knowledge practices, writing habits, and impressive sophistication of Qing “technocrats.”¹¹⁷ There is no doubt that

¹¹³Compare Lorraine Daston, *Rules: A Short History of What We Live By* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

¹¹⁴Chang Hao, “On the Ching-shih Ideal in Neo-Confucianism.” *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i* 3.1 (1974), 36; Yu Ying-shih 余英時, *Zhongguo sixiang chuantong de xiandai quanshi* 中國思想傳統的現代詮釋 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshiye gongsi, 1987), 418–23).

¹¹⁵For one explication of that earlier view, see Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The Tung-Chih Restoration, 1862–1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 92.

¹¹⁶Rowe, *Saving the World*, 3. Rowe also identifies Chen as a statecraft practitioner under the first and second definitions: 137–45. See also his *Speaking of Profit: Bao Shichen and Reform in Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 193. On technocrats in the Song, see the recent work of Charles Hartman.

¹¹⁷See Chen Kaijun 陳愷俊, “Yi wei jishu guanliao de ziwu xiuyang: du tao guan Tang Ying de wenhua chuanguo he jiyi xide” 一位技術官僚的自我修養——督陶官唐英的文化創作和技術技藝習得, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 364 (2013), 92–100; Liu Fengyun 劉風云, “Shiba shiji de 'jishu guanliao'” 十八世紀的技術官僚, *Qingshi yanjiu* 2010.2, 17. See also Yulian Wu, *Luxurious Networks: Salt Merchants, Status, and Statecraft in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 191–93.

governing a polity as large and diverse as the Qing was a complex and technical task. And Dai was intimately acquainted with some of its more technical functions, including military finance and the salt monopoly.

At the same time, this definition has its limitations. Benjamin Elman has critiqued the anachronistic valorization of Wei Yuan and the *Collected Statecraft Writings* as harbingers of modernization.¹¹⁸ Yang Nianqun has asked if lauding *jingshi* has become a Eurocentric way of praising proto-economic or proto-scientific aspects of premodern Chinese governance. I think these authors are right to be skeptical of how much importance the Qing bureaucracy attached to technical sophistication. Much of what animated Dai's governance was adapting and simplifying existing ideas, rather than inventing complicated, technical new solutions to existing problems. In the three cases cited above, Dai repeatedly highlighted the importance of personal morality and interpersonal relations in addition to the specifics of policy. At a more general level, Dai did not describe his goals or achievements in terms of acquiring specific technical knowledge, and he did not try to theorize about governance in terms of a well-articulated philosophy.

Perhaps, then, it is time to set aside statecraft as our primary rubric for discussing governance in late imperial China. Rather than asking whether a given figure ought to be included under its banner, or debating between its many possible definitions, this article has offered some initial methods and hypothesis for the social and intellectual history of policymaking in the Qing period. I have asked some of the classic questions of intellectual history: What were Dai's intellectual influences, and how did he build upon them? What characterized his policies, both in their technical details and in their rhetorical justifications? What were the principles which helped him discuss, evaluate, and adapt preexisting ideas? I have also tried to understand the social and material contexts in which ideas spread: What were the genres of writing about policy and how did they complement each other? In addition to reading them, how else did officials learn about governance? The case of Dai Zhaochen has raised these questions, questions which I think can guide us towards a deeper understanding not only of how Chinese governance has evolved, but why.

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¹¹⁸ Benjamin A. Elman, "The Failures of Contemporary Chinese Intellectual History." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43.3 (2010), 386–87; Yang Nianqun 楊年群, "'Jingshi' guannian shi santi" "經世" 觀念史三題, *Wen shi zhe* 2019.2, 57.

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