



# **The Confucian-Legalist State: A New Theory of Chinese History (Oxford Studies in Early Empires)**

*Dingxin Zhao*

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In *The Confucian-Legalist State*, Dingxin Zhao offers a radically new analysis of Chinese imperial history from the eleventh century BCE to the fall of the Qing dynasty. This study first uncovers the factors that explain how, and why, China developed into a bureaucratic empire under the Qin dynasty in 221 BCE. It then examines the political system that crystallized during the Western Han dynasty, a system that drew on China's philosophical traditions of Confucianism and Legalism. Despite great changes in China's demography, religion, technology, and socioeconomic structures, this Confucian-Legalist political system survived for over two millennia. Yet, it was precisely because of the system's resilience that China, for better or worse, did not develop industrial capitalism as Western Europe did, notwithstanding China's economic prosperity and technological sophistication beginning with the Northern Song dynasty.

In examining the nature of this political system, Zhao offers a new way of viewing Chinese history, one that emphasizes the importance of structural forces and social mechanisms in shaping historical dynamics. As a work of historical sociology, *The Confucian-Legalist State* aims to show how the patterns of Chinese history were not shaped by any single force, but instead by meaningful activities of social actors which were greatly constrained by, and at the same time reproduced and modified, the constellations of political, economic, military, and ideological forces. This book thus offers a startling new understanding of long-term patterns of Chinese history, one that should trigger debates for years to come among historians, political scientists, and sociologists.

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