Rule of morality versus rule of law? A Multi-method comparative study into the values that characterize a good civil servant in China and the Netherlands
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“To rectify the heart by impartiality, to discipline self by incorruptibility, to serve the emperor with loyalty, to serve the superior with humility, to get along with people with trustworthiness, to treat the subordinates with tolerance, to deal with affairs with prudence. These are the seven key points to be officials.”

“正以处心，廉以律己，忠以事君，恭以事长，信以接物，宽以待下，敬以处事，此居官之七要也。”

Xue Xuan (Ming Dynasty)
（明）薛瑄
Congzheng Lu, 1997, p. 243
《薛文清公从政录》

Chapter 3

Confucian Sage: The ‘good official’ in traditional Chinese admonitions and their contemporary relevance*


** This chapter is based on an article that is currently under review.

I specially thank Professor Guo Runtao and Professor Zhang Fan, who both work in the Department of History at Peking University, for their generous help. Professor Guo provided valuable remarks on existing admonition research, and Professor Zhang translated the titles of admonitions from classical Chinese into modern Chinese, which is helpful when I translated them into English.
Abstract

Chinese culture continues to be influenced by its Confucian root of the 'rule of morality' stressing personal virtue, moral education, and the endeavour to be a personal moral model. This article examines traditional values and the image of the 'good official' as prescribed in the rarely studied historical Confucian admonitions. These were composed as instructions for the daily administrative practice. In order to understand which values were regarded as important, the article focuses on three relationships that officials have to deal with: self-self, self-other, and self-state. Finally the article discusses some implications of traditional Confucian values for Western public administration.

Key Words: admonition; Confucian tradition; good official; rule of morality; values

Introduction

Retracing administrative history and tradition helps to better understand contemporary government (Raadschelders, 1998). The values and moral principles administrators hold constitute their ethical ethos and they reflect the tradition they are committed to (Stout, 2006). Administrative traditions are the carriers of "some basic cultural norms and people's values" (Jun, 2005, p. 91) that have remained consistent for a long period of time; some may perhaps never change. In China, for over two millennia Confucianism was the core teaching for all officials and the dominant governmental ideology in the imperial bureaucracy (Ren, 1997). Even in the present day, the Confucian belief on how to govern well resonates in Chinese administrative culture: "the peace and harmony of the world cannot be achieved by force of arms, nor by power of law, but only by moral virtues and moral influence" (Yao, 2000, p. 64). However, the image of the Confucian good official might be changing in the present day, as values in public administration are increasingly influenced by management ideas and practices from the West (cf. Mahbubani, 2013).

The presence of a long-standing Confucian tradition in context of the seemingly increasing Eastern-Western convergence, raises two questions: To begin with, what is the traditional Confucian notion of a good official? Second, what are the implications of Confucian values for contemporary public administration? The focus will be on the first question by tracing the traditional values attributed to the 'good official' in historical Confucian admonitions. These documents have not been studied widely; in fact, I have unearthed no English
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article addressing them, and even Chinese literature on the topic proves very scarce. Based on Foucault’s discussion on governmentality, the values concerning the good administrator can be clustered into three groups, representing three kinds of relationships that are morally relevant to an official (cf. Foucault, 1991; Gordon, 1991): self-self, self-other and self-state. The values are analysed in the framework of ‘public value universe’ that is identified by Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007). By looking into whether and which Confucian values fit in constellations, this study links the Confucian idea of good official with public value study and public administration today.

Confucian ideal offers a much needed “moral justification for bureaucracy”, which takes moral officials rather than adherence to laws as its central concern (Frederickson, 2002, p. 610). It forces us to rethink the priority of the rule of law, as it is well acknowledged that “the rule of law is not self-executing” (Kairyst, 2003, p. 327). Standing out from the trends of managerialism and NPM, admonitions uphold public servant values to “governing good” (e.g. with integrity, impartiality) rather than “governing well” (e.g. efficient, productive) (De Graaf & Van der Wal, 2010, p. 625). In another word, the admonitions concern prime values that can be studied best from a historical and cultural perspective (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007, pp. 376-377).

This article proceeds as follows. First, the concept of tradition and the characteristics of Confucian administrative tradition will be briefly discussed. Next, a concise theoretical framework to study the values in the admonitions is presented. The core of the article consists of a description and analysis of the values in the admonitions. The article concludes with a discussion of Confucian and western ideas on the ‘good official’, and some implications for present day Chinese and western public administration.

Before continuing, some observations on the translation of texts and terms from classical Chinese into English are required. Loss or distortion of meaning is inevitable when a term is translated, due to the contextual, historical, and cultural embeddedness of meaning (Rutgers, 2004, p. 151). For instance, junzi and li can be translated as “gentleman” and “rites”, but “fail to convey either the power of the idea or its practical meaning” (Frederickson, 2002, p. 617). The more complex and culturally specific a concept is, the more likely loss of meaning will be inevitable. Translating Chinese concepts into English, and vice versa, is never straightforward, and always involves interpretation. In this article, I made all translations in order to stay as close as possible to the original meaning.

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24 This means a classical style of Chinese prevailed before the May 4th New Culture Movement in 1919.
25 All Chinese characters in this paper are noted in Mandarin Pinyin.
Confucian administrative tradition

Tradition is defined variously (e.g. Eisenstadt, 1973; Boyer, 1990; Bevir, Rhodes & Weller, 2003; Shils, 2006), but most definitions share the idea that it refers to a basic normative orientation that people consciously or unconsciously rely upon and take for granted, which drive them to act in a specific way (cf. Van der Wal & Yang, forthcoming). Administrative tradition implies that the actions of administrators are motivated by “the values and beliefs of the larger group...and their subjectively (in)formed preferences” (Yesilkagit, 2010, p. 152). An administrative tradition can therefore be defined as the “more or less enduring pattern in the style and substance of public administration in a particular country or group of countries” (Painter & Peters, 2010, p. 6).

China is situated in East Asia, where the dominant administrative tradition is Confucianism. Confucian ideology has been discussed from different perspectives, such as Chinese tribalism (Fukuyama, 2011), bureaucratic culture (Frederickson, 2002), or its modern relevance (Yao, 1999). In relation to government, Confucianism is regarded as either positive or troublesome. Irrespective of these debates, it is generally accepted that the core idea of Confucianism is the fundamental role of morality in good government, with “reliance on the rule of virtuous men, rather than on the rule of law” (Painter & Peters, 2010, p. 27). Confucian ethics can furthermore be subdivided into “ethics for ordinary people and ethics for scholars” (Hwang, 1999, p. 166). Jiang (2003) also makes similar distinction in terms of ethical Confucianism and political Confucianism, claiming that the former focuses on personal spiritual cultivation while the latter targets political ideals and kingly government. Government should be under the moral rule of a Sage-King (Neisheng Waiwang), “the Confucian intelligentsia” (Cheung, 2010, p. 39), “scholar rulers” (Frederickson, 2002, p. 616), or junzi (persons of complete virtue): all signifying that good rule first of all relies on moral persons.

If western public administration is conceived as ‘law in action’, Confucian administration can be captured as ‘morality in action’ (Frederickson, 2002, p. 616). It focuses on the question what kind of persons should be in charge: what is a good administrator as a person? Frederickson (2002) concisely characterizes the traditional Chinese ideal of an official as well-educated, loyal to ruling power, incorruptible, having filial piety, and practicing self-cultivation (ibid.). In the following, a more detailed description of what these values amounts to will be provided.

26 Confucian thought is not simply equal to the ideas of the person Confucius. Furthermore, Confucianism is not the only important philosophical school in Chinese history. Nevertheless, no other school dominates like Confucianism and has had such a lasting influence.
A framework: what to look for

What to look for when investigating the notion of the good official?

Foucault’s concepts of ‘self’ in the context of ‘governmentality’ provides an interesting angle to distinguishes between relevant values. Governmentality concerns a broad meaning of governing: “how to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the people will accept being governed, how to become the best possible governor” (Foucault, 1991, p. 87). These questions address relationships beyond the political domain, which Gordon (1991) captures as: “the relation between self and self, private interpersonal relations involving some form of control of guidance, relations within social institutions and communities and, finally relations concerned with the exercise of political sovereignty” (pp. 2-3). All relationships originate from the cultivation of the self (Foucault, 1990). This, as we shall see, seems to almost perfectly reflect the notion of self-cultivation that is central to the ideals of the Confucian official.

The practice of self-cultivation firstly concerns the actions of oneself, the virtue, emotions, and intentions that “are confirmed only insofar as they are seen by, and exposed to, the intersubjective field of vision of others” (Hahm, 2001, p. 317). Therefore, the idea of “care for self” (Foucault, 1987) is further related to caring for others,

“Care for self is ethical in itself, but it implies complex relations with others, in the measure where this ethos of freedom is also a way of caring for others. That is why it is important for a free man, who behaves correctly, to know how to govern his wife, his children and his home. There, too, is the art of governing.” (p.118)

The practice of self-cultivation is also “a way of controlling and limiting” of power, “[a]nd the good ruler is precisely the one who exercises his power correctly, i.e., by exercising at the same time his power on himself. And it is the power over self which will regulate the power over others” (p. 119). It should be noted that for, Foucault’s “power” is not limited to politics or governmental interactions, but is present in all human relations (p. 122).

With regard to the forms of government, Foucault argues the art of government is to establish a continuity among self-government (connected with morality), properly governing a family (belongs to economy) and ruling a state (concerns politics) (cf. Foucault, 1991, p. 91).

From Foucault’s ideas on governmentality we can derive three core concerns regarding the nature of a good official: Is she/he a good person (self and self)? Does she/he care for and get along with others (self and others)? And, is she/he capable of doing the work well (self and state)? This provides us with focus to specifically trace the values in that constitute the ideal of the good official in the admonitions.

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The relationships of self-self, self-other and self-state are too abstract to get the image of a good official. It requires more substantial contents of values, to be specific, the values that matter the most for officials. There are many attempts to identify or classify public values (e.g., Van Wart, 1998; Kernaghan, 2003; Schreurs, 2005; Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). As relationships that official have to deal with are of interest in this study, I use the public value universe identified by Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007), who address the issues of boundaries, meanings and hierarchy of public values in present-day public administration. In their work, public values are classified into seven constellations associating with different aspects (see Figure 3.1). As we will see, when looking at the many values in the admonitions, it turns out that they mostly fit in their constellation 6: the values associated with the behaviour of public-sector employees, which means a strong focus of personal values in Confucianism.

What are admonitions

Before turning to specific values, we have to consider the nature of our prime source: admonitions. In English, “admonition” is defined as “counsel or warning against fault or oversight” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary) or “authoritative counsel or warning” (Oxford Dictionary). In Chinese, “admonition” consists of two Chinese characters: guan(官) and zhen(箴). Guan means (being) “official” or “authoritative”; zhen originally means “needle for sewing clothes”\(^{27}\). A needle is also a tool in Chinese medicine (acupuncture) (cf., Cui, 2005), used to “exam[ine], check or find a disease then to treat and remind the patient”\(^{28}\). Over time, zhen came to refer to the act of warning and advising good behaviour among emperors or officials.

The Chinese Confucian admonitions present administrators’ advice for and experiences of doing good administrative work. Most admonitions were written by officials for the purpose of self-discipline, or for both Emperor and ministers (Guo, 2011). From the Tang Dynasty (618-908) onwards\(^{29}\), emperors themselves also composed and edited admonitions (cf., Peng, 1995, 2002). Admonitions were official regulations and normative treatises implemented top-down in the imperial court and local governments, and those endorsed by imperial power even had the effect of laws (Du, 2011).

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\(^{27}\) As written in the Shuowen Jiezi, the first dictionary in China to analyse the structure of a character and explain its meaning, combining the shape and pronunciation together.

\(^{28}\) Original comments in the chapter Ming Zhen (铭箴) in The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons (Wen Xin Diao Long), authored by Liu Xie (ca. 465-?).

\(^{29}\) The milestone that emperor composed admonition is Chen-gui by the Empress Wu Zetian (reign 690-705).
The number of admonitions written is not agreed upon, but possibly over five hundred (Cui, 2005). The admonitions studied here are from the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties (see the Table 3.1), when they were most developed (Peng, 1995). The selected admonitions deal specifically with the behaviour of (the good) official. Next to these admonitions, by necessity the Confucian classics, the Four Classics, are included in the study. They are simply indispensable for interpretation, being obligatory literature for the Imperial Civil Examination (Ke-ju) and thus well known by all officials to whom the admonitions were directed.

Figure 3.1
Structure of the Public Values Universe


30 Majority of cited admonitions in this study are found in two compilations: Guanzhen: zuoguan de mendao [Admonitions: the knack of being an official] and Guanzhen shu jicheng [Assemblies of admonitions].

31 The Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130-1200) in Song Dynasty firstly selected four Confucian works together, giving annotations and commentaries. Since 1313 the Yuan Dynasty (1260-1370), the Four Books became text books for civil examination (cf. Yao, 2000, pp. 63-64). The translations of the Four Classics in this paper are mostly cited from James Legge (1815-1897), who first published the translated Chinese classic in 1861.
Values in admonitions

Due to the status of formal guidelines and content of practical experiences, admonitions provide us an effective way to look into traditional Chinese ideals about good officials. Admonitions do not present values in a structured way. They do, however, provide many indications of what were regarded as prime values. In the Confucian classic *The Great Learning*[^32], for instance, it is described what it means to be a *junzi*, as every official is expected aim for:

> Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy (Confucius, ca. 1965[^33], p. 223).

Based on what described in admonitions, the values are clustered into groups within the broader three kinds of relation as identified before.

**Values concerning the self-self relationship**

The admonitions promote the Confucian ideal of the “internal sage and external king”, which means that internal moral cultivation was considered the basis of good governance (Cheung, 2010, p. 32). Admonitions, in line with the classic texts, make it clear that a good official should cultivate the values of trustworthiness, endurance, incorruptibility, prudence, diligence, and impartiality in all aspects of his/her life. So let us consider the core values put forward in the admonitions:

Trustworthiness (*xin*, 信), meaning the quality of carrying out one’s words, is a major concept in Confucian thought and a core value of Junzi. Xin is often used in Confucian works, occurring over forty times in Confucian Analects for instance (Hall and Ames, 1987, p. 60). Confucius claimed *xin* to be one of the “first principles, and [to] be moving continually to what is right” as “the way to exalt one’s virtue” (Confucian Analects, 1983, p. 256). Confucius also argued that “I do not know how a man without trustfulness is to get on. How can a large carriage be made to go without the cross-bar for yoking the oxen to, or a small carriage without the arrangement for yoking the horses?” (Confucius, 1965, p. 17). This is reflected in for instance the admonition by Shi Chengjin (Qing Dynasty), “xin is the basis of administration. If the people trust the rulers and government, they will not doubt and things will go well” (Chuanjia Bao, Book 2, Volume 8).

[^32]: All admonitions cited in this article are shown in italic.
[^33]: The accurate year is not entirely sure as it is not shown in the printed publication that I use.
Endurance (忍) is a special character that refers to values of tolerance, forgiveness, and patience. In the admonitions endurance is regarded as key to being a successful official. Xue Xuan (Ming Dynasty) stated thus an official should “endure what others cannot put up with, achieve what others will never reach” (Congzheng Lu). Shi Chengjin (Qing Dynasty) recorded that “tolerance can improve morality, endurance can be helpful to success” (Chuanjia Bao, Book 2, Volume 8). As recorded in Volume 6 of the same book, the official “who can endure what others cannot endure and tolerate what others cannot tolerate” are those with extraordinary knowledge and ability.

There following three values usually discussed together in the admonitions: incorruptibility (清), prudence (慎), and diligence (勤). They were asserted first by Lü Benzhong (Southern Song Dynasty) and became a much promoted unit of values in later periods. The Emperors Kangxi (reign 1661-1722) and Qianlong (reign 1735-1796) both granted them to local government as a reminder of their importance (Cen, 2009).
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*Note: The Four Classics were selected together in Song Dynasty (960-1279). Please also see note 31.
Incorruptibility was considered a self-evident duty and quality of an official, and not something to boast about (Congzheng Yigui, Chen Hongmou, Qing Dynasty). Xu Bang (Ming Dynasty) compared an official’s incorruptibility to a woman’s chastity: “once defiled, it can never be purified again in the whole life” (Huanyou Riji). Incorruptibility has different levels. Superior incorrupt officials are “reasonable and wise not to take anything [that] should not be taken”, while those with a low awareness are incorrupt “because they do not dare to take for worrying about losing their positions or job” (Congzheng Lu, Xue Xuan, Ming Dynasty). Thus there is a distance between the high self-awareness of a sage and lower levels of moral sense. The way to incorruptibility is via thriftiness: “being an incorrupt official starts with being a thrifty person” (Xuezhi Yishuo, Wang Huizu, Qing Dynasty), and “only a thrifty person can cultivate incorruptibility” (Congzheng Yigui).

Prudence 克 (慎) means acting carefully and wisely. In admonitions, cautiousness is crucial for an official’s career (Peng, 2002). As in The Doctrine of the Mean, it is required that one pay attention to moral behaviour, particularly when no one is watching (慎独), because junzi should know that “there is nothing more visible than what is secret, and nothing more manifest than what is minute. Therefore the superior man is watchful over himself, when he is alone” (Confucius, 1983, p. 384). Prudence contains two aspects. On the one hand, officials should ensure that their words are appropriate and act carefully. Xue Xuan (Ming Dynasty) suggested that affairs should be managed with deliberation and decisions not made in a hurry (Congzheng Lu). He also warned against making promises too easily or neglecting tiny details, but rather approaching both with caution. On the other hand, officials should be prudent regarding the words and actions of others. Shi Chengjin (Qing Dynasty) advised keeping away from those who could cause trouble (Chuanjia Bao, Book 2, Volume 8). Xue Xuan made a similar observation that “preventing the mean persons (xiaoren, opposed to junzi) should [be] even more important and stricter than self-cultivation”. He considered prudence one of seven elements (impartiality, incorruptibility and trustworthiness, tolerance, prudence) necessary to be a good official (Congzheng Lu).

Diligence 劳 (勤) firstly requires officials to work with their heart and soul. By asking how one can “achieve successes without wholehearted dedication” (Xuezhi Yishuo), Wang Huizu (Qing Dynasty) regarded diligence as “the most important thing to deal with official affairs”. Wang captured this dedication in terms of officials treating the people in the same way a parent treats his child; namely, to do as good as possible. Diligence further implies persistent effort in

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Prudence, or phronesis, is also an important concept in Aristotle’s philosophy. As comprehensive as in Confucian thought, it is not merely a value towards practical politics, but a way of thinking and philosophical wisdom.
manage public affairs: “the subordinates must suffer if the official does not work diligently” (Zheng Rui, Qing Dynasty).

Impartiality (公正) contains two aspects in Chinese as is reflected in the two characters used: gong and zheng. Gong has the meaning of public (as opposed to private), while zheng means being upright and just without bias. Two qualities are therefore required for impartiality: keeping the public interest in focus and treating the people fairly. Emperor Qing Shizu (Qing Dynasty, reign 1643-1661) asserted that selflessness produces gong, and warned that even thinking of private interest could harm the public interest (Renchen Jingxin Lu). Wang Tianxi (Ming Dynasty) captured this value by arguing it is what he does himself: “I give impartiality priority in doing my work as an official. Being gong I will not be misled by private interests; being zheng I will not be tempted by evil” (Guanzhen Jiyao). Similarly, Xu Bang (Ming Dynasty) concluded that “impartiality nurtures brightness, bias results in darkness” Huanyou Riji). In most admonitions, gong and zheng are used interchangeably to indicate a more encompassing meaning. For instance, Xue Xuan (Ming Dynasty) asserted that impartiality is indeed something of a much bigger magnitude: it is the Way (dao) of keeping the entire universe running.

The previous values concern qualities of the person of the official and his work. These are not mutually exclusive, rather being a good administrator was regarded as inseparable from being a good person.

These values very neatly fit into Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman’s constellation 6 concerning the “behavior of public-Sector employees” (2007, P. 367). Values such as impartiality, incorruptibility and trustworthiness belong to the subgroup of moral standards and ethical consciousness that are associated directly with the individual. They are also tightly related to “integrity”, the central value of this constellation (ibid.). However, in the admonitions a number of modern values belonging to this constellation are also absent: accountability, professionalism and openness. Some of the self-related values do also fit in constellation 1 regarding the link between public administration and society, but, again they primarily concern the person (altruism, human dignity), rather than the common interest or sustainability.

Values concern self-other relationship

Traditional official was expected to be a moral exemplary not only as an individual by self-cultivation, but also as a component of “moral community” (Jun, 2005, p. 92) by fulfilling obligations in certain hierarchical relationships. The relationships include a family where official as (usually male) parent representing the absolute authority, a loyal relationship with the emperor who has the absolute power, and up-down benevolence to the people who are subjects of rule.
Family-related values

Family plays a significant role in Confucianism, as “China was regarded as Kuo-chia, a ‘family state’... ideally it was ruled by a service aristocracy of literary talent” (Finer, 2003, p. 443). Scholar-officials like Dong Zhongsu (179-104 BC, Western Han Dynasty), through their work San-gang, transformed family ethics into political ideology, speaking of “the authority of the ruler over the minister, the father over the son, and the husband over the wife” (Tu, 1998, p. 122)

In admonitions, when referring to government, family rule is regarded as an important prerequisite step from dealing with ‘inner affairs’ to ‘outer affairs’ (Peng, 2002). The Great Learning tells that “it is not possible for someone to teach others, if he cannot teach his own family. Therefore, the ruler, without going beyond his family, completes the lessons for the State” (Confucius, 1965, p. 234). The influence of a man and his family is emphasized by Confucius, “from the loving example of one family a whole State becomes loving, and from its courtesies the whole State becomes courteous, while, from the ambition and perverseness of the One man, the whole State may be led to rebellions disorder” (1965, pp. 234-235). In Mu Ling Shu (Xu Dong, Qing Dynasty), it is argued that “Who is not able to manage the followers, cannot manage the people; who is not able to manage family, cannot manage the followers”. Similarly, Wang Tianxi (Ming Dynasty) stated that “those who work in the government need to manage inner affairs first and then to manage outer affairs”.

However, admonitions also stress to keep family separate from official business. Wang (Ming Dynasty) warned that corruptibility would occur more easily when families seek extravagant lives or improper interests. Wang Huizu (Qing Dynasty) explicitly warned that “close relatives should not be recruited to work with” (Xuezhi Yishuo), since it could result in bias or corruption.

Family management is thus regarded as key for a good administrator. At the same time, a strict boundary should be maintained between official and private affairs. With a keen eye on the family on the one hand, a good official was also expected to take good care of the people on the other. In order to be a good administrator, the demand for running one’s family well as a prerequisite might be a prime distinction between Chinese and Western ideas.

In addition to family values, the relationships with the emperor and the people are valued highly, which was usually understood in analogy with family roles. As cited by Chen Hongmou (Qing Dynasty), “serving the emperor is just like serving a parent, treating a superior is just like treating an older brother, getting along with a colleague is just like [getting along] with family” (Congzheng Yigui).

Emperor-official relationship

Loyalty is strongly emphasized in the relationship between an official and the Emperor. Examples of good officials in admonitions all have a common feature,
namely that “the only way to meet the Rites of serving the Emperor is being loyal and honest” (Mu Ling Shu, Xu Dong, Qing Dynasty). Xue Xuan also used officials of great reputation as examples to show that those who were loyal could make a successful career and would be widely respected.

While admonitions emphasize loyalty to the Emperor, they discourage flattery. In Gongmen Bufeiquan Gongde Lu (Anonymous, Qing Dynasty), loyalty to the Emperor is described as “neither too supercilious nor too humble”; rather, it is about working diligently to promote benefits and eliminate harm to the country. Compared to admonitions in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, “loyalty” can be found more regularly in earlier admonitions like Zhong Jing (Eastern Han Dynasty) and Chen Gui (Tang Dynasty). These texts describe how loyal officials should be brave enough to admonish and reveal the improper behaviour of the Emperor, and expose those who claim loyalty to the Emperor but do not love the people. Loyalty in this case had a broader meaning, since it also refers to loving the people. The later admonitions from the Ming and Qing Dynasties are more concerned with the qualities of practical work, rather than repeating the precept of ‘loyalty’.

**People-official relationship**

In general, ‘the people’ are held in high esteem in Confucianism. A leading statement is in The Works of Mencius: “the people are the most important element in a nation; the spirits of the land and grain are the next; the sovereign is the lightest” (Mencius, 1965, p. 359). Confucius made an well-known metaphor: “The prince is a boat; the common people are the water. The water can support the boat, or the water can capsize the boat” (Xunzi, 1928, p. 125). In order to be close to the people, one value is particularly relevant: modesty (謙). Despite officials’ higher social rank, modesty requires that they are approachable and humble towards the people: “[in] being approachable and easy-going to the people, the people will consequentially support you” (Mu Jian, Yang Yu, Ming Dynasty). Xie Jinluan (Qing Dynasty) emphasized that there was no trick to be a good administrator in local county government beyond “getting close to the people” (Juguan Zhiyong Pian). The relationship between officials and the people therefore also refers to other values like people-orientedness and responsiveness.

To love the people, “the first responsibility of [an] administrator is to act in accordance with people’s needs” (cf. Chen Hongmou, Qing Dynasty). The Great Learning also suggests an official “to like what the people like; to dislike what the people do not like”, just as a mother knows what her infant wants (1965, p. 234).

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35 This was originally said by Confucius, but it might be more well-known in Kingly Government (王制), the work of Confucian philosopher Xunzi (312-230 BC) (see Xunzi, 1928).
To know what the people need requires benevolence and sympathy: “the way to [be] close to the people is sympathizing [with] their pain, cherishing their talent, saving their property” (Xuezhi Yishuo). Officials should also improve people’s life, especially those in need: “aid[ing] those people who have no support of life, such as widowers, widows, orphans and disabled persons” (Congzheng Yigui). This includes encouraging wealthy people to aid those in poverty, cultivating a harmonious social environment, and ensuring that “rich people do not bully disadvantaged people, [and] the poor do not envy the wealthy” (Congzheng Yigui).

The three subgroups of values with regard to self-other relationships correspond to Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman’s value constellation 2 (transformation of interests to decisions), constellation 3 (relationship with politicians), and constellation 7 (relationship with the citizens). Nevertheless, they address these values in very different ways. To begin with, the whole set of family-related values does not fit any public value constellation. However, family was the most important in forming centralized autocracy in Chinese history backing to the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC): “family, class, village imposed themselves on individuality, and set the pattern for political relationships” (Finer, 2003, p. 454). Humans were believed to be divided into classes of “above [superior] and below [inferior]”, and the wise king occupied the highest class as he executed “Heaven’s will” (Yu, 2003, p. 6). The whole state was regarded as being under the rule of a moral king, including the officials. It forms the ruler-subordinate relationship that “the young deferred to the old, women to men, men to their fathers, fathers to their ancestors, all to the emperor” (Finer, 2003, p. 442). Different with Western tradition of “citizen” and “human equality before the law and in the sight of God”, traditional China “knew only subjects” (ibid.).

Therefore, the emperor-official relationship is fundamentally different with the relationship between public administrators and politicians (constellation 3), even though (political) loyalty is required in both contexts. Accountability and responsiveness are not what Confucian officials concerned regarding to rulers. Also differently, admonitions emphasize high importance of caring and loving people, but nothing related to legality, individual rights, equality and justice in the frame of rule of law, professional discretion, or democracy and people involvement (constellation 7) (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007, pp. 368-369), although these values were only well developed in the West since the 19th century when the royal related matters disappeared and themes related to the state and law became fundamental issues in public administration (cf. Rutgers, 1997).

However, admonitions indeed put the people in a high position that their support is the ‘water’ to carry the ‘boat’ (the prince). In accordance with constellation 2 that consists of values, such as the will of majority, public involvement, protection of minority and listening to the public opinion, Confucianism also contains the idea of democracy. This echoes some statements
that Confucianism and democracy are less incompatible than many people believe (Fukuyma, 1995; O'Dwyer, 2003), even though Confucianism is apparently lack of individual free rights that liberal democracy is based on and “a transcendent law” (Fukuyma, 1995, p. 25).

**Values concern self-state relationship**

The basis of state in Confucian China is family, i.e. a family ruled by a good man. There is no emphasis on institutions and laws as surfaced in the Western tradition. Official and his/her family should obey the ruler, who was the state, had a “minimal” role: to complete virtue and to choose virtuous ministers (Finer, 2003, p. 459). Therefore, for a good official, the essence of the self-state relationship is loyalty to the ruler, by the means of being a moral minister, which is achieved by benevolent behaviours in administrative practice. In line with Will (1999) who distinguishes traditional administrative behaviour as concerning “the behavior of officials” and “the technical aspects of administrative work” (p. 3)\(^{36}\), values are not only claimed as slogans in admonitions, but fused into detailed description and practical guidance. Three topics can be identified in the admonitions: instructions for newly appointed officials, specific administrative matters, and responsibilities of different departments.

**Matters requiring attention for new officials**

Most officials were selected through the Imperial Examination, and hence lacked practical knowledge. Wang Huizu (Qing Dynasty) pointed out that reputation is formed at the beginning of a career, so a new official should work hard and discipline himself after taking up the position (*Xuezhi Xushuo*). To create a good environment, Shi Chengjin (Qing Dynasty) suggested new officials to learn the local rites from Confucian scholars and ensure that authority is respected by following these rites. Some admonitions outline specific do’s and don’ts. For instance, Zheng Rui (Qing Dynasty) mentioned thirty-four tips for new officials, including meeting with superiors, preventing bribes and gifts, and mapping local geography (*Zhengxue Lu*). Hu Yanyu (Qing Dynasty) outlined rules such as promoting agriculture and moral education and not recruiting relatives as employees, and even provided instruction on how to travel to a new position, such as avoiding too much luggage or too many servants (*Juguan Guaguo Lu*).

\(^{36}\) In Will’s work (1999), guanzhen (官箴) is translated into ‘official handbooks’ or ‘handbooks for officials’.

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**Specific administrative affairs**

Admonitions also describe the tasks of officials. The first is the development of agriculture, since “famine prevention and relief operations for the most seriously affected groups are indeed among the classic tasks of Chinese bureaucracy” (Will, 1990). Many admonitions wrote that local governments should encourage people to do agricultural work to ensure sufficient food and clothing (e.g. Gao, Ming Dynasty; Hu, Qing Dynasty; Chen, Qing Dynasty; Tian & Li, Qing Dynasty). In his edited admonitions, Xu Dong (Qing Dynasty) collected much information on how to develop water conservation, well digging and farming skills.

Another important issue was taxation. Since “people will benefit from even a bit less taxation” (Shi Di, Wu Yiyi, Qing Dynasty), the government should ensure no suffering from heavy, unfair, or overburdening taxes. It was proposed, for instance, that grain levies should be based upon the farming area that a resident owns, be allowed to pay with flexible deadlines, and not be imposed repeatedly (Gao, Ming Dynasty; Shi, Qing Dynasty; Zheng, Qing Dynasty).

The third administrative matter requiring special attention is judicial issues. Judiciary was not independent from administration in imperial China. Ya-men (local government) was the place where criminal and civil disputes were solved. The magistrate was both the administrative leader and judge in court. Admonitions therefore required magistrates to be familiar with laws and judicial precedents. Nevertheless, benevolence and flexible judgement were considered more important than strict execution of laws: “the law is a confirmed rule, but the human feeling differs. To show sympathy and humanity when implementing the law, the principle of harmony is hopefully not broken” (Xuezhi Yishuo). As “judgment without investigation and trial harms impartiality”, officials should investigate and inquire to get close to the facts (Zhengxue Lu).

**Responsibilities of different departments**

Lü Kun (Ming Dynasty) distinguished fifteen departments of local government each requiring their own responsibilities (Shizheng Lu). For instance, the Governor-General was responsible for almost all government affairs, such as agriculture, social safety, education, taxes, and judicial cases, and should therefore be a moral example of benevolence, incorruptibility, impartiality, and diligence. Lü also mentioned other departments with specific tasks; for instance, the Chief Secretary should make an effort to benefit the common people, especially the elderly, orphans, and poor people, and judicial departments should ensure the integrity of local government and fair verdicts. Accordingly, officials were evaluated according to moral influence: how right or wrong their behaviour is (Congzheng Yigui). Yuan Huang (Ming Dynasty) elaborated on this in
terms of “merit units” (功过格), which is a symbolic award to show the degree of (im)morality, not a material or financial reward.

There are many admonitions dealing with what can be considered primarily as practical matters. The previous illustrates that administrative work aimed to put Confucian morals into practice. Individual morality is a “personal as well as political” issue (Du, 2011, p. 61) in Confucianism. Put differently, the quality of a man with authority affects political decision-making and administrative practice. The only constellation matching this group of values is again constellation 6: the behaviour of public administrators. Slightly different with values referring to self-sel...
care for the people. The effectiveness of officials, then, rested on their ability to maintain and lead by virtue, morality and social values.

Putting values from admonitions in a contemporary perspective, as indicated in Table 3.3, it seems that terminal values for good government weight much higher than instrumental values (cf. Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994). It is debatable to classify public values as such (cf. Van der Wal, 2008; Rutgers, 2008), and Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) also point out that the prime or fundamental values should not be expected as “universal assent or immutable self-evident truths” (p. 375). Nevertheless, the admonitions posit as a fundamental (meta) value: the terminal or moral aspects take priority over the way or the means of government (cf. Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994).

Implications

The practice and ideas in public administration are formalized and refined during passing tradition down through generations. Thus Stout (2006) is inspired by the lineage of *Samurai* and *t’ai chi*: “when we take on the mantle of public service, it is important to know not only who we serve, but to which tradition we are committed, what moral principles this tradition holds, and what attitudes it engenders” (p. 620). Also the Confucian tradition as it presents itself in the admonitions raises issues we may want to rethink.

First of all, for Chinese administrative practice, the values traced in the admonitions are particularly significant. In a state with a single-party system, the Confucian ideal of the Sage King helps to legitimate the totalitarian elite rule of Communist government, against ideas on “democratic self-government” (Frederickson, 2002, p. 625). Under the rule of CCP, it has to be in line with what we learned from admonitions: Party members and administrators should morally self-regulate, and the people should advocate for leadership by a moral party to achieve a harmonious society. Nevertheless, I am not indicating any need to strive for democracy in China, particularly when democratization might “help preserve the continuity of Confucian moral tradition” (O’Dwyer, 2003, p. 39). But it does raise questions that are worth more consideration: do moral individuals lead to a moral organization, or vice versa? Which one matters more, moral persons in an evil system or a just system with less focus on individual morality?

Secondly, it stresses the importance of self-cultivation for public administrators, politicians and all employees in the public sector. Foucault (1991) actually seems fully in line with the admonitions when he states that there is a continuity between three fundamental types of government: “a person who wishes to govern the state well must first lean how to govern himself, his good and his patrimony, after which he will be successful in governing the state” (p. 91). However, the practice of self-cultivation, “through reading, through the precepts and examples that will provide inspiration, and by contemplating a life
...reduced to its essentials, to rediscover the basic principles of a rational conduct” (p. 51), rarely figures in present day Western reflections on administrative behaviour.
Table 3.2 ‘Admonition’ values concerning relationships of self-self, self-other and self-state

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Quotations from admonitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-self</td>
<td>Self-cultivation</td>
<td>Trustworthiness, Endurance, Incorruptibility, Prudence, Diligence, Impartiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-other</td>
<td>Family-related</td>
<td>Lovingness, Obedience, Incorruptibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emperor-official</td>
<td>Loyalty, Diligence, Lovingness, Bravery/courage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People-official</td>
<td>Modesty, Approachability, People-orientedness, Responsiveness, Public opinion, Benevolence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-state</td>
<td>New officials</td>
<td>Learning Confucian rites, Moral education, Thrift, Preventing bribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative affairs</td>
<td>Agriculture development, Taxation (fairness, benevolence), Judiciary (benevolence, sympathy, humanity, impartiality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td>Moral example, The good of common people, Integrity and fairness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constellation 1: Public Sector’s Contribution to Society</td>
<td>Self-self</td>
<td>Self-other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constellation 2: Transformation of Interests to Decisions</td>
<td>×</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constellation 3: Relationship Between the Public Administration and Politicians</td>
<td></td>
<td>×</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constellation 4: Relationship Between Public Administration and Its Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constellation 5: Intraorganizational Aspects of Public Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constellation 6: Behavior of Public-Sector Employees</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constellation 7: Relationship Between Public Administration and the Citizens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, the values in the admonitions (re)emphasize the importance of the individual in public administration. Van Wart (1998) describes individual values as the most fundamental for the promotion of other values: “without individuals with integrity, government agencies fall prey to a variety of problems” (p. 8). At the same time, public value “is rooted, ultimately, in society and culture, in individuals and groups” (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007, p. 374). Therefore, in the era of increasingly impersonal government, and depersonalized (mainstream) administrative theory it might be worthy reconsidering rejected ‘rule of man’ in the Western tradition, in a new sense—the rule of the rule of moral man, or morality next to the rule of law (cf. Yang & Rutgers, forthcoming). Furthermore, the power of laws and regulations is limited when government facing complex social problems. The Confucian ideal of the good official might point a way out: care about what is right more than about efficiency and productivity, and offer effective public service pivoting “around matters of morality” (Frederickson, 2002, p. 622) above laws and regulations. Obviously, this is not an easy undertaking.

A very different lesson is that, on the one hand, the framework provided by Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) proves useful for transnational, historic research. On the other hand, their public value inventory might overlook values in non-Western context. Their work only relies on literature from the United States, the United Kingdom and Scandinavia, leaving “historic state traditions and political cultures” understated (p. 357). To complement public value inventory does not mean, however, simply to add Confucian values to the inventory, but more importantly, to contextually consider the meaning and adaptation in public service ethos today. For instance, family-related values, missing in the seven-fold value universe, affect integrity of officials as private interest is involved when to balance the interest of family, friends, boss and the public. More importantly, the way civil servants deal with interpersonal relationship has strong impact on ethical leadership, cooperation, disclosure of misconduct and whistleblowing (cf. Park, Rehg & Lee, 2005). Too much focus on professionalism or democratic values (Kernaghan, 2003) will leave a large part of civil servant values underestimated: civil servant as a person first. Civil servant is not, and probably will never be, only a functionary, and thus more attention needs to be shifted to personal morals rather than functionary values.
adaptation in public service ethos today. For instance, family-related values, inventory, but more importantly, to contextually consider the meaning and political cultures" understated (p. 357).

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Confucius. (ca. 1965). The great learning. In: The four books: Confucian analects, the great learning, the doctrine of the mean, the works of Mencius [Chinese text with English translation] (J. Legge, Trans.) (pp.219-245). Shanghai: Commercial Press.


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