

Reevaluating Jiao Hong's Position in Intellectual History: A Book Review of Yumin Dai's *On Jiao Hong and Ming-Qing Confucianism*

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Yumin Dai's book *On Jiao Hong and Ming-Qing Confucianism* represents a significant advancement in recent Confucianism research. The book comprises two parts: the first three chapters delve into Jiao Hong's "intellectual shift" in reconstructing mind teaching through the lens of "name-reality" and "thought", integrating textual research into moral cultivation and using Buddhist and Taoist ideas to soften the metaphysical aspects of religious syncretism. The final three chapters situate Jiao Hong within the Ming-Qing Confucian transformation, bridging the Ming Dynasty's revised mind teaching with Qing Dynasty's Qi-oriented teaching, and paving the way for Qianlong-Jiaqing textual research. The author introduces the dual-track transformation theory, breaking the traditional single-track framework, emphasizing dual changes in doctrines and methodologies during the Ming-Qing Confucian transformation. Methodologically, it blends a macro perspective with micro-analysis, overcoming intellectual history fragmentation. Theoretically, it highlights Jiao Hong's pivotal role in connecting the Confucianism in Ming and Qing dynasties, objectively assessing his incomplete thoughts and historical limitations, and revealing tensions between intellectual rationality and value beliefs. This research redefines Jiao Hong's place in intellectual history and offers a fresh interpretation of Ming-Qing Confucian transformation.

Keywords: Jiao Hong, Confucianism, mind teaching, intellectualization

Introduction

Jiao Hong (1540-1620), the top-ranked scholar in the imperial examination of the 17th year of the Wanli reign in the Ming Dynasty, was a prominent figure in the intellectual circle of the Ming Dynasty and a key member of the Taizhou School. His close relationship with Li Zhi, his associations with figures of the Taizhou School, and his friendships with Buddhists, Taoists, and missionaries made him an important figure in late Ming Dynasty. Jiao Hong is mainly known as a litterateur and official, while his image as a philosopher is relatively obscure. Edward T. Ch'ien regards Jiao Hong as the origin of textual research opened up by the mind teaching, while Yu Ying-shih sees him as a scholar without substantial innovation. Ch'ien and Yu have contradictory positions on Jiao Hong's coordinates in intellectual history, necessitating a reassessment of his place in it. Broadly speaking, current research on Jiao Hong focuses on history, literature, textual research, and other fields, but there is relatively little exploration of his philosophy. This important figure of the Taizhou School has not received

academic attention commensurate with his ideological value. Assistant Professor Yumin Dai's (2023) book *On Jiao Hong and Ming-Qing Confucianism* (China Social Sciences Press), with its novel academic perspective, precisely dissects the theoretical core of "intellectualized mind" in Jiao Hong's ideological system. This book not only fills an important gap in research on the transformation of Confucianism but also opens up a new dimension in the methodological study of Ming and Qing intellectual history.

Content Overview

This book is mainly divided into six chapters, with the first three chapters focusing on Jiao Hong's philosophy, and the last three chapters centering on his relationship with Confucianism in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Chapter One presents how Jiao Hong, from the perspectives of ontology, the theory of cultivation, and the theory of realm, reconstructs the system of the theory of cultivation with the concepts of "the relationship between name and reality" (*mingshi guanxi* 名实关系) and "thought" (*si* 思). This intellectual turn is not a deviation from the tradition of the mind teaching but rather a paradigm revolution in its methodology. Chapter two analyzes Jiao Hong's dual dimensions of textual research, deconstructing the dichotomy between philosophy and textual research. His practice serves as a knowledge foundation for constructing intellectualized mind teaching. Chapter three explores Jiao Hong's views on Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, revealing how he dissolved metaphysical fog through intellectualized interpretation, avoiding spiritual dilemmas and endowing doctrines with verifiable knowledge. Chapters Four and Five reposition Jiao Hong within the coordinate system of Confucian transformation in the Ming and Qing dynasties. By tracing the dual threads of self-correction within Ming dynasty's idealist philosophy and the shift towards Qing dynasty's scholarly trend, the author argues that Jiao Hong, who advocated intellectualized methods, served as a pivotal figure bridging the transition of Confucianism from mind teaching to Qi-oriented philosophy in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Further, Chapter Six introduces the theoretical insight of the "double-track transformation". Yumin Dai transcends the traditional framework of a single-line evolution from mind teaching to textual criticism, pointing out that the transformation of Confucianism in the Ming and Qing dynasties was actually a dual-track revolution encompassing both the theoretical framework and methodology. Jiao stands precisely at the intersection of these two transformations.

Academic Evaluation

Yumin Dai's book revolutionizes Jiao studies by uncovering the intellectual turn in his philosophy, challenging the traditional view of textual research as a peripheral academic activity. The book demonstrates how Jiao's philological practices were intrinsically linked to his reimagining of mind teaching, reframing textual scholarship as an ontological transformation of thought rather than mere knowledge accumulation. This approach dismantles the rigid mind teaching-textual research dichotomy, revealing how Jiao integrated moral cultivation with intellectual rigor. By analyzing Jiao's use of "the relationship between name and reality" and "thought" as conceptual tools, Dai shows how he transformed Wang Yangming's mind teaching into a structured cognitive framework. Crucially, Jiao's instrumentalization of Buddhist and Taoist ideas stripped the syncretic Three Teachings of metaphysical ambiguity, grounding Confucian practice in verifiable knowledge. The study's analysis of Jiao's extensive learning leading to profound understanding ideal further illuminates the interplay between textual scholarship and spiritual elevation, offering fresh insights into the rise of Qing philosophy.

Dai expands the scope beyond Jiao's textual contributions by positioning him within broader intellectual currents. Comparative analysis with Qing scholars like Gu Yanwu and Huang Zongxi positions Jiao's methodology as a precursor to both Qing philosophy and the Qianlong-Jiaqing evidential research movement. While highlighting Jiao's role in bridging Ming-Qing Confucianism, Dai avoids overstatement, acknowledging the incomplete nature of his intellectual turn and its limited historical traction, namely a stance mirroring Jiao's own ethos of relentless scholarship. The marginalization of Jiao's syncretic religious views further exposes the enduring tension between rational inquiry and spiritual belief during this transformative era. Beyond rehabilitating Jiao's legacy, Dai's study pioneers a "macro-micro" methodology, weaving together Wang Yangming's philosophical dilemmas, the ascent of textual research, and evolving interfaith dynamics into a cohesive narrative. By proposing a "dual-axis" model of Confucian transformation—simultaneously doctrinal and methodological, the author transcends linear historical narratives. This approach not only counters fragmentation in intellectual history research but also repositions Jiao as a pivotal figure in China's intellectual modernization, offering new frameworks to analyze Confucianism's adaptive strategies across dynastic shifts. The book thus sets a new standard for understanding how individual thinkers catalyze systemic ideological change while navigating the paradoxes of tradition and innovation.

References

Dai, Y. M. (2023). *On Jiao Hong and Ming-Qing Confucianism*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press.