ABSTRACT

Zhang Juzheng (1525-1582), was a scholar-statesman of the Ming dynasty. He was appointed to a position in the Hanlin Academy at the age of 23. The beginning of his political career corresponds in time to a low point in dynastic fortunes. From the time he became chief grand secretary in 1572 until his death in 1582, as the Ming Shi notes, "the emperor abandoned all his own opinions and delegated authority to Juzheng. Juzheng then frankly took over the empire as his personal responsibility." Most studies on Zhang Juzheng concentrated on his political reforms while his thoughts on statecraft underlying these reforms were either neglected or only partially dealt with. As such, this Academic Exercise aims to make an in-depth study of Zhang's ideas of administering a country.

This study is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the biography of Zhang Juzheng and his political thoughts. Zhang did not formulate a systematic body of thoughts. He was an activist, and rather contemptuous of formal philosophy. His intention was to revive the spirit of the time. Although his philosophical position was only loosely and vaguely stated in his writings, it was important for the understanding of this great statesman.

The second part focuses on reviewing the statecraft thoughts of Zhang. His statecraft ideas on authority and responsibility, administration, economy, education and defence were put into practice to revive the spirit of the age by rather vigorous governmental action.

Was Zhang a great statesman? The last chapter concludes with a critical evaluation of Zhang's ideas of statecraft and his position in Ming history. It is hoped that this study will provide a fairer judgement of Zhang whose style of government has always been described as "dictatorship".