
***Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China: Publicizing the Qin Dynasty.* By Charles SANFT. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014. Pp. ix + 251.**

LI Kin Sum, Sammy

Department of History, Hong Kong Baptist University

Charles Sanft's book presents a fresh perspective in its examination of the history of the Qin 秦 dynasty. His emphasis on communication and cooperation as two means of governance introduces a new approach in exploring the achievements of the Qin empire. For an extensive empire like that of the Qin, coercion policies alone could not have enabled the establishment of an efficient government. Sanft argues that, while past consensus has held that the Qin empire was founded on a basis of coercion, the viability of this approach is questionable. He instead examines the opportunities and benefits that communication and cooperation policies must have brought to the governance of the Qin empire and focuses his analyses accordingly. Sanft's choice presents us with a starkly different and original image of the Qin.

After a general introduction, Chapter 2 provides a summary of the interdisciplinary study of communication and cooperation. Sanft attempts to define the theoretical framework for his later analysis of communication, cooperation, and their attendant benefits. Chapter 3 is a summary of the discussion of non-coercive governance in early Chinese thought. Chapter 4 is devoted to the discussion of mass communication and standardization. Sanft focuses on the history of the Qin government's unification of the measurement system and the standardization of weights and measures. He deems the edicts issued by Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 and Qin Ershi 秦二世 to be important texts designed for wide dissemination with the express purpose of announcing to Qin subjects the existence of both the government and empire. Sanft devotes the last three chapters, Chapters 5, 6, and 7, to an exploration of the close relationship between common knowledge, public image construction, mass communication, rituals, construction works, laws, and administration. These chapters delineate Qin Shihuang's five tours around the realm, new transportation projects, and administrative and legal systems, and the rationale

behind them. The Qin government, as Sanft argues, intelligently manipulated these means to create common knowledge and communicate with the populace to remind them of the presence of the empire.

Given such a new approach to dealing with the Qin history, there are many aspects raised in the book that provide opportunities for further rumination. The first issue concerns the historicity of textual records. Sanft at various points emphasizes that what the Qin government did was not very original. The Qin government's policies were creative, but they were founded in already existing precedents. This description is accurate, but one could further elaborate on why scholars have been left with the impression that the Qin government was so innovative, as the result of textual historians' construction of the image of the Qin empire.

Sanft's emphasis on the Qin government's active image building and communication project is valid. We should not, however, ignore the ways in which the textual historians constructed an image of the Qin and disseminated this information to their readers. The political agendas of the historians such as Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 B.C.) and other Han dynasty historians that Sanft cites should be examined closely. How historians' accounts complement or distort the Qin government's communication project is another aspect of the discussion. We need to carefully attend to the many layers of information and many different parties that were involved in the creation of the common knowledge of the Qin dynasty. The excavated texts, inscriptions on metal containers and weights, stele inscriptions, and transmitted texts all bear various authorial agendas and convey different aspects of this common knowledge.

The second issue is whether we can determine how broadly information was disseminated at all. Sanft argues that the Qin government's edicts, decrees, and public texts reached a wide audience and as a result, the government succeeded in creating the public image it desired. His evidence includes the wide circulation of the weights and containers bearing the edicts of the unification of the measurement system. But, as Sanft also notes on pp. 72–73, the People's Republic of China and the United States today both allow the existence of two different measurement systems in their respective countries. Thus how do we know with certainty that the Qin government's orthodox system was, in fact, widely adopted by the populace and thus proof that the government successfully communicated with the populace? How do we know that there was only one system operational in Qin territory, as issued by the Qin government, and not two or more? To what degree did the measurement systems of the six opponent states truly become extinct? Could there have been even more than seven measurement systems surviving into the Qin, if all

that historical records say about the chaos of the measurement systems in the Warring States period is true? Sanft does not have enough space in his book to respond to these questions, but they are important to the discussion of the success of the Qin publicity campaign.

Space here is also inadequate to address all these questions, but several lines of investigation await further research. We do not know how “chaotic” the measurement systems before the Qin dynasty were, as the seven states’ implementation of their respective measurement systems remain unknown to us. But it is highly possible that each state could have had its own measurement system, or that several states shared a same system in common. There is no reason to expect that a single, clearly organized measurement system existed during the Warring States period. That measurement systems were “chaotic,” or (more accurately) “diverse,” is to be expected.

But for those textual historians vested in the description and analysis of a highly unified China, diversity in the measurement system is an unwelcome complication, and thus they looked for a clear contrast between the pre-Qin and Qin periods. They wanted to create an image of the pre-Qin period as chaotic, while the Qin period by contrast was highly unified and organized, bringing benefits and convenience to the populace. We cannot rule out the possibility that there were multiple measurement systems co-existing in the Qin empire; the fact is that we do not know. We can at least, however, list some criteria for measuring the success of the Qin government’s issued measurement system and the scope of its dissemination. As Sanft notes, actual measurement standards have been found in a vast expanse of areas within the Qin territory (p. 60). These finds indicate the successful dissemination of the Qin measurement standards to local authorities.

There are more criteria to be discussed outside Sanft’s framework. For example, archaeologically excavated measurement standards dating to the Qin period and which bear the edicts outnumber those uninscribed standards. For most of these archaeologically excavated standards, it seems there was a single organized measurement system in use at the time of manufacture, because their volumes and weights are relatively close. Uninscribed measures or measures divergent in weight and volume might reflect the use of another system; but, again, we simply do not know. Perhaps measures indicating the existence of other measurement systems were not preserved and were melted down throughout history. Because of the large number of extant measures bearing the Qin edicts, we do know that the Qin government’s issued system was the most successfully preserved one. But we still do not know whether it was the single existing one or not.

An additional criterion is that the Qin government emphasized the constant regulation and adjustment of the weights and measures. The Gaonu 高奴 weight was regularly sent back to the central government for re-adjustment. Qin Ershi's edict mentions the second national regulation of the measurement system. Since corrosion and inappropriate usage might have led to changes in the volumes and weights of the measures and weights, the government had to conduct adjustment regularly to avoid major disparities. The "unification" of the measurement system might perhaps be better described as "regulation." Had the Qin government's promulgated measurement system not been in constant use, the government would not have the incentive to maintain it with such rigor.

Since Sanft emphasizes the importance of cooperation and communication, we should not ignore the attitudes and responses of potential cooperators. Sanft focuses on the attitudes and agendas of the Qin government, but does not fully explore the mindsets and behaviors of the cooperators themselves. Responses and reactions from commoners and subordinates are also important in such a mass communication project. Perhaps this is too difficult to gauge or impossible to answer, but future scholars might bear this question in mind. For example, were all public construction workers *corvée* laborers? If all were forcibly conscripted into labor, the quality control and supervision costs would have been too high for the government to afford. The works might not have been constructed at a high level of quality. The Qin public works, such as the imperial palace and the highways, were magnificent, but would they have involved the efforts of willing workers? Preservation work on the Direct Road and other highways would have necessitated the cooperation of nearby residents. It would have been too costly for the government to oversee the maintenance and upkeep of the highways on a daily basis. All these questions await future scholarly study.

The high cost of supervision and control might have impelled the Qin government to actively solicit cooperation from the populace. This is another aspect that strengthens Sanft's hypothesis regarding the Qin government's motives for launching publicity campaigns. The government had to rely on a high degree of cooperation. Commoners who needed work would like to cooperate if they could find ways to sustain their lives. Who would have comprised the construction crews? Besides those forcibly conscripted workers and criminals, there could have been a large number of displaced people at the beginning of the Qin dynasty. Years of war had created large numbers of unsettled commoners and immigrants, and the end of war brought the release of many regular soldiers as well as armed stragglers. The rapid social

transformations and industrial revolutions of the mass production systems in the Warring States period would have also produced mass unemployment among skilled workers. These individuals had incentives to settle permanently and thus would likely have participated in these large-scale construction works. The composition and organization of this work force are interesting areas for further exploration.

In light of this study, some of the received historical records should be re-examined. For example, it is said that approximately 700,000 workers were drafted to construct the imperial palace and tomb. Are these histories authentic and verifiable with reference to newly excavated textual and material records? It is, of course, impossible to gauge solely from textual evidence. But as more archaeological excavations of Qin construction works have recently been brought to light, it is time to re-examine these traditional views of the Qin dynasty. They could well have been histories fabricated to denigrate Qin Shihuang's image.

Last but not least, what about the cooperation between relative equals among the populace, which eventually aided the government's active solicitation of popular cooperation more generally? Sanft emphasizes the empire's initiative in soliciting the cooperation of subordinates, but he does not mention that mutual cooperation among commoners would have been a decisive propellant in the government's successful campaigns. This is reflected in the successful regulation of the measurement system and the widespread dissemination of the measurement standards. The commoners could not have achieved this on their own because no one private authority could persuade every party to attain a consensus about the measurement system. The only prevailing authority they could resort to was the Qin government.

Sanft's book leaves us much room for the imagination and for further subsequent studies. His fresh perspectives and extensive use of evidence prove a solid contribution to the field, and the avenues for research that he has opened up will allow us to make many new advances in the study of the early Chinese empire.