



Shizi: China's First Syncretist

Paul Fischer

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By blending multiple strands of thought into one ideology, Chinese Syncretists of the pre-imperial period created an essential guide to contemporary ideas about society and government. Merging traditions such as Ruism, Mohism, Daoism, Legalism, and Yin-Yang naturalism into their work, Syncretists supported an integrated intellectual approach that contrasted with the exclusivist philosophies of Confucianism and Daoism. Presenting the first full English translation of the earliest example of a Syncretist text, this volume introduces Western scholars to both the brilliance of the syncretic method and a critical work of Chinese leadership.

Written by Shi Jiao, China's first syncretic thinker, during the Warring States Period of 481 to 221 BCE, *Shizi* is similar to Machiavelli's *The Prince* in dispensing wisdom to would-be rulers. Its twin pillars of advice encourage self-cultivation and effective government, recommending that rulers maintain self-discipline, hire reliable people, delegate power consistently and transparently, and promote in orderly fashion. The people, in turn, would emulate their leader's detachment and objectivity, and the state would function justly and peacefully. Paul Fischer provides an extensive introduction and chapter by chapter summary and analysis, outlining the importance of syncretism in Chinese culture, along with the text's particular features, authorship, transmission, loss, and reconstruction over time. The *Shizi* set the stage for a long history of syncretic endeavor in China, and its study provides insight into the vital traditions of early Chinese philosophy. It also constructs a template for interpreting other well-known works, such as the Confucian *Analects*, the Daoist *Laozi*, the Mohist *Mozi*, and the Legalist *Shang jun shu*

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