



The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires

Leo G. Perdue

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The all-too-frequent disregard of historical and social contexts by many wisdom scholars often leads to the distortion of this literature and transforms its teachings into abstract ideas lacking any incarnation in the social and historical world of human living. Leo Perdue here argues from a sociohistorical approach that the proper understanding of ancient wisdom literature requires one to move out of the realm of philosophical idealism into the flesh and blood of human history.

Arguing that wisdom was international in practice and outlook, Perdue traces the interaction between both ruling and subject nations and their sages who produced their respective cultures and their foundational worldviews. While not always easy to reconstruct, he acknowledges, the historical and social settings of texts provide necessary contexts for interpretation and engagement by later readers and hearers. Wisdom texts did not transcend their life settings to espouse values regardless of time and circumstance. Rather, they are located in a variety of historical events in an evolving nation, reflecting a vast array of different and changing moral systems, epistemologies, and religious understandings.

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