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# Song Dynasty Family Rituals and the Reconstruction of Confucian Daily Life

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## Abstract

The reconstruction of Confucianism during the Song dynasty is an important issue in the history of Chinese thought. Song scholar-officials not only introduced ideological innovations and founded the new type of Confucianist “School of Universal Principle” known as “Neo-Confucianism,” but also, in their reconstruction of Confucianism, attended to the specific rituals and introduced the concepts and values of the school into people’s daily life and habits. The observance of ritual privately at home – using ritual to “instruct” and “admonish” the family – became the way for scholar-officials to embody Confucian values effectively in daily life. Song family rituals developed differences from previous eras with respect to text, structure, and meaning. However, as rituals that comprehensively arranged the order of Confucian daily life, they were not merely a static Neo-Confucian text and system. Rather, scholar-officials’ ritual activities were always the concrete, dynamic aspect of the Confucian revival movement. Therefore, we must begin the discussion of family rituals from a wider perspective, first by exploring the motivation and goals of scholar-officials’ rituals. We will then discover how frustrated and compromised scholar-officials of the period felt when the pattern of daily life they had created proved difficult to accommodate to the real world. We will finally take note of the value system that this pattern was meant to demonstrate.

## Keywords

Chinese history – Song Dynasty – Confucianism – rituals – daily life

### 1 From “Rejecting Heresy” to “Distinguishing Chinese from Yi (夷)”<sup>1</sup>

The main goal of the revival of Confucianism in the Song dynasty (960–1279) was to combat Buddhism. Shi Jie 石介 (1005–1045) said that Buddhism, after its introduction to China, “replaced China’s people, philosophy, customs, writing, teaching, architecture, rituals, music, literature, clothing, food and drink, and religious practices.” As a result, “with their hair shaved and their gowns overlapping on the left, they are neither scholars nor farmers, workers nor merchants; half of China is dressed like Yi people.”<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, Song dynasty Confucian philosophers were united in their goal to “revive Confucianism to replace Buddhism as the guide to human life.”<sup>3</sup> This reaction against Buddhism was the focus of their philosophical reflection. However, for questions such as how to rebuild Confucian culture and how to integrate Confucian values into daily life, scholar-officials had to seek answers from specific, real-world issues and a broader historical context.

One of the most prominent examples of Buddhist religion infiltrating Chinese daily life was the practice of cremation. From an administrative point of view, the Northern and Southern Song dynasties’ frequent orders to prohibit cremation were much discussed by scholar-officials.<sup>4</sup> There were many reasons for the prevalence of Buddhist funerals, but the customs were doubtless often the result of long-term evolution and crystallization. As a result, despite repeated imperial orders prohibiting cremation, and despite many scholar-officials’ opposition to Buddhism, Buddhist funerals remained quite prevalent.

In the face of Buddhist modes of life in the real-world environment, scholar-officials first had to determine, based on their own culture, whether opposing

1 Translator’s note: Names for peoples that pre-modern writers perceived as non-Chinese, such as Yi 夷, here, and Hu 胡, Qiang 羌, and Fan 蕃, below, have been transliterated rather than translated. Yi 夷 is distinct from Yi 彝, which designates a modern minority ethnic group primarily resident in Southwest China.

2 Shi Jie 石介, *Cu Laishi xiansheng wen ji* 徂徠石先生文集, annot. Chen Zhi’e 陳植鏗 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 60, 116–17.

3 Qian Mu 錢穆, *Song-Ming lixue gaishu* 宋明理學概述 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1984), 30.

4 See Wang Cheng 王稱, *Dongdu shilüe* 東都事略 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1979), 2.78; Wang Yong 王楙, comp., *Yanyi yimou lu* 燕翼詒謀錄, annot. Cheng Gang 誠剛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 3.24.

cremation was necessary. Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), attempting to trace the origins and development of cremation in China from its historical context, believed that cremation violated Confucian filial piety.<sup>5</sup> Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), however, cited Buddhist teaching that rejected this view as strange and absurd. In Sima Guang's view, after death, form and mind were separated, so it was impossible for the dead to suffer the "breaking, burning, pounding, and grinding" of cremation. The Buddhist's so-called "heaven" and "hell" only served the purpose of exhortation and punishment on earth.<sup>6</sup>

Song dynasty scholar Wang Yong 王楙 (dates unknown) believed that the funeral rituals of Buddhism and Daoism, as well as the barbarian music (*huyue* 胡樂) used in those rituals, should be re-evaluated and re-appraised. He used phrases such as "What is the point?" (*he yi ye* 何義耶) and "How can you bear it?" (*he ren ye* 何忍也) to denounce the uneducated secular masses for being ignorant of the rational basis behind their daily rituals and trampling on their own culture.<sup>7</sup> Huang Zhen 黃震 (1213–1280) criticized cremation of kin as "the greatest among filial impieties," "quite simply an offense against public morals," and "the height of cruelty, devoid of humanity."<sup>8</sup>

In addition to observing and attacking the Buddhist way of life, it was also important for the Confucian scholar official to construct a new Confucian pattern of life to replace the influence of Buddhism. Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133–1180) noted, "The flourishing and decline of ritual are the responsibility of scholars and officials."<sup>9</sup> He believed that changes in social values and behaviors needed to begin with the scholar-official class, and then gradually permeate the whole society. Naturally, reconstructing a Confucian ordering of life was not the same as reconstructing the entire social order. Scholar-officials believed that by researching and codifying family rituals to reconstruct a Confucian pattern of life, "even if you cannot travel the world, you can still examine a township," and one could "examine a clan" and "examine a family."<sup>10</sup>

Due to limitations of space, I will not undertake a detailed comparison of the provisions on Confucian daily life in different family ritual texts, particularly

5 Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤, *Er Cheng ji* 二程集, annot. Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 58.

6 Sima Guang 司馬光, *Sima shi shuyi* 司馬氏書儀, in *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 5-54.

7 Wang Yong, *Yanyi yimou lu*, 3.24.

8 Huang Zhen 黃震, *Huang shi richao* 黃氏日抄, in *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), 708: 70.685.

9 Zhang Shi 張栻, *Zhang Shi ji* 張栻集, annot. Yang Shiwen 楊世文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 1275.

10 Zhang Zai 張載, *Zhang Zai ji* 張載集, annot. Zhang Xichen 章錫琛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978), 384.

the detailed regulations of behavior. However, although the detailed manifestations differ, the basic goals of the compilers are relatively consistent.

In the third year of the Chunxi 淳熙 period (1176), Zhang Shi 張栻 summarized the family rituals that Cheng Yi, Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077), and Sima Guang had compiled: “Although there are similarities and differences among the rituals established by the three scholar-officials, by carefully studying the intent of emperors in ancient times and rejecting heretical theories, we find that there are no longer any differences.”<sup>11</sup>

“Rejecting heretical theories” (*bachu yiduan zhi shuo* 罷黜異端之說) to oppose the influence of Buddhism underscores Northern Song (960–1127) scholar-officials’ objectives in creating family rituals. During the Southern Song (1127–1279) dynasty, as the Confucian movement came into full flower, many scholar-officials adopted “reject heretical theories” as a family admonition.

Fan Rugui 范如圭 (1102–1160) admonished officials in charge of education and discipline not to follow Buddhism in preparing their funerals;<sup>12</sup> Cheng Duanmeng 程端蒙 (1143–1191), approaching his death, “ordered that Buddhism not be followed in preparing his funeral”;<sup>13</sup> Lu Jingzhi 陸靜之 (d. 1187), five years before his death, “wrote a will of over a hundred characters forbidding his family from following Buddhism”;<sup>14</sup> Lin Yunzhai 林芸齋 (dates unknown), “approaching death, personally wrote a thousand characters, demanding that his family not follow Buddhism in preparing his funeral”;<sup>15</sup> Liu Gong 劉珙 (1122–1178) “when about to die, left behind last words ordering his family not to follow Buddhism in preparing his funeral”;<sup>16</sup> and Xiang Huan 向滯 (1122–1181) wrote, “my funeral sacrifices will not serve Buddhism.”<sup>17</sup>

The writings, admonitions, and prohibitions that scholar-officials created when facing death constituted part of the content of family ritual. Apparently, they were independent founders of the Confucian order of life: only by leaving orders, admonishments, and prohibitions on following Buddhism in preparing their funerals could they get the funerals they preferred. In the texts describing how scholar-officials prohibited their family members from

11 Zhang Shi, *Zhang shi ji*, 1275.

12 Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Hui'an xiansheng Zhu Wengong wenji* 晦庵先生朱文公文集, vol. 24 of *Zhu zi quanshu* 朱子全書, comp. Zhu Jieren 朱傑人 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe; Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 89.4145.

13 Ibid., 90.4187.

14 Lu You 陸游, *Lu You ji* 陸游集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 2311.

15 Zhu Xi, *Hui'an xiansheng Zhu Wengong wenji*, *bieji* 晦庵先生朱文公文集·別集, 7.4981.

16 Ibid., 88.4126.

17 Yang Wanli 楊萬里, *Chengzhai ji jianjiao* 誠齋集箋校, annot. Xin Gengru 辛更儒 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007).

following Buddhism in preparing funerals, many passages mention that the scholar-official or his ancestors followed Neo-Confucianist teachings. This shows that Song Confucian scholars' rejection of Buddhism in their way of life and their pursuit of Confucianism in their thinking were mutually constituting expressions of their feelings. Together, they set the scene for the Confucian revival movement.

With respect to re-establishing the order of life, what Song Confucian scholars wanted to transform was not only the influence of Buddhism, but also all sorts of customs of foreign ethnic groups. For example, they considered cremation both related to Buddhism and a foreign practice. Sima Guang noted that cremation, "may have originated in the customs of the Qiang and Hu peoples and gradually penetrated China. After being practiced for a long time, it has come to seem normal, and no one finds it strange. How sad!"<sup>18</sup>

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), based on his study of everyday clothing over a long period of history, remarked that, "Clothing of this era is mainly influenced by Hu people,"<sup>19</sup> and that clothing changed over time:

At the end of the Xuanhe 宣和 period, people in the capital still went out wearing *shanmao* 衫帽. But by the time the Song government moved south, people began wearing *bailiangshan* 白涼衫. During the Shaoxing 紹興 period's first 20 years, scholars still wore *bailiangshan*, but later when war broke out, they changed again to *zishan* 紫衫; this was military attire.<sup>20</sup>

Surveying this historical phenomenon, Zhu Xi did believe that it was feasible for people to re-adopt ancient styles, but he insisted that clothing must "distinguish Chinese from Yi" (*bian de hua yi* 辨得華夷).<sup>21</sup>

At this point, Song Confucian scholars' discussion of reconstructing Confucian daily life expanded from "rejecting heresy" to "distinguishing Chinese from Yi." While the former argument was a strong emotional appeal, the latter was a relatively rational mental claim. What was called "distinguishing Chinese from Yi" meant distinguishing between the Confucian order of life and other cultural models. Making this distinction was itself a rethinking of the Confucian order of life. It required creating definitions and identities for Confucianism

18 Sima Guang, *Sima shi shuyi*, 7:76.

19 Li Jingde 黎靖德, comp., *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, annot. Wang Xingxian 王星賢 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 91.2327.

20 Ibid., 91.2325.

21 Ibid., 91.2328.

itself in the real environment, so that the Confucian order of life could become clear and distinguishable. Only in this way could it give people the capacity to recognize and act. One specific example illustrates this claim very vividly:

Hedong 河東 had a large population but little territory. When the people held funerals, although relatives attended, they always used cremation. They gathered the ashes and took them to the monastery. Then after a long time, they disposed of them. This had become the custom. When Han Qi 韓琦 (also known as Han Zhigui 韓稚珪, 1008–1075) held office in Bingzhou 並州, he used public funds to buy several *qing* 頃 of land for graves to bury the remains of local people. In ancient times, only rebels were punished by having their bodies burned. Scholars and ordinary people, however, followed the ritual of preparing and burying the dead. Only Hu and Yi peoples and Buddhist monks and nuns were permitted to follow the Yi ritual of burning coffins; ordinary people were forbidden from burning corpses. Han Qi's use of the law on rituals to change custom reflected the conduct of ancient officials who upheld the law and followed principles.<sup>22</sup>

The main idea of this text is that, according to the practice of classifying people into categories, Yi people and monks and nuns were permitted to follow Yi rituals, while ordinary people were prohibited from following the custom of cremation. The classification scheme defined each person and the order of life that he or she represented. According to *Song xingtong* 宋刑統 and *Qingyuan tiaofa shilei* 慶元條法事類, for monks and nuns as well as Fan 蕃 and Yi 夷 people, the practice of cremation and return of remains to one's native place (*shao gu huan xiang* 燒骨還鄉)<sup>23</sup> was a feature of cultural identity recognized by the law of the state. Here, the Confucian value system was a practical concept of behavior. Only through confirmation of this concept by Confucian scholar-officials could the Confucian way of life gradually become clear.

22 Jiang Shaoyu 江少虞, *Songchao shishi leiyuan* 宋朝事實類苑 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 23.275–76, 32.413.

23 Dou Yi 竇儀, *Song xingtong* 宋刑統 (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 1999), 18.327; Xie Shenfu 謝深甫, *Qingyuan tiaofa shilei* 慶元條法事類, Seikadō Bunko Library Collected Volumes 靜嘉堂文庫藏本, 77.559.

## 2 From “Reviving Rituals of the Three Dynasties” to “Copying the Ritual View of the Ancients”

Whether the focus of reconstructing Confucian daily life lay on “rejecting heresy” or “distinguishing Chinese from Yi,” explaining how the standardization of daily life itself oriented to Confucian principles became a problem that Song Confucians needed to confront when formulating family rituals. The standardization of daily life was practical and empirical. It was not at all like Han Yu’s 韓愈 (768–825) view of establishing Confucian orthodoxy. It was necessary to subject the genealogy of Confucian cultural inheritance to logical confirmation and falsification.<sup>24</sup>

However, reconstructing the order of daily life was not just the establishment of specific details of behavior; it was also the process of finding justifications. In that case, what kind of historical experience can we rely on? Just as Confucius (551–479 BCE) had appealed to the rituals of the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–256 BCE) in the face of societal disarray, Song Confucian scholars’ reconstruction of the ideal order of life was based on the “rule of Three Dynasties” – that is, the Xia (ca. 2070–1600 BCE), Shang (ca. 1600–1046 BCE), and Zhou dynasties. Consequently, standardizing daily behavior tended toward reliance on a presupposed, idealized history. Rituals of the Three Dynasties, including those in *Yi li* 儀禮, *Zhou li* 周禮, and *Li ji* 禮記, became important reference points in the formulation of family rituals, and the choice among them held special meaning.

Hu Yuan’s 胡瑗 (993–1059) *Ji xiong shuyi* 吉凶書儀 on the study of ritual appeared relatively early in the Northern Song Confucian revival. It “generally relies on ancient ritual, but also includes ceremonies from today’s books of ritual.”<sup>25</sup> Subsequently, the “two Cheng brothers,” Cheng Yi and his brother Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), Zhang Zai, and Sima Guang all compiled family rituals. Zhu Xi wrote:

The rituals that Zhang Zai created are mostly not based on *Yi li*; he authored some portions himself ... the two Cheng brothers and Zhang Zai mostly adhered to ancient rituals, while Sima Guang mostly drew on *Yi li*, adapting it to what was feasible for his time. To sum up, the rituals

24 See Lu Minzhen 陸敏珍, “Lun Han Yu ‘Shi shuo’ yu zhong Tang shidao yundong” 論韓愈“師說”與中唐師道運動, *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰線, no. 1 (2009): 137–43.

25 Chao Gongwu 晁公武, *Junzhai dushu zhi jiaozheng* 郡齋讀書志校證, annot. Sun Meng 孫猛 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), 8.329.



that Sima Guang established are relatively reliable; their content does not differ much from ancient rituals and is 70 or 80 percent good.<sup>26</sup>

In Zhu Xi's view, the foundation in the *Li yi* had become an important basis for judging the quality of family ritual texts. If we expand the historical period under observation, Zhu Xi's confirmation of *Yi li* as the main foundation for scholar-officials' reconstruction of Confucian daily life becomes very important.

Changes in the method of selection by the Imperial examination since the Tang dynasty (618–907) resulted in scholars gradually neglecting *Yi li* as the “respected model” (*zhuangjing kaimo* 莊敬楷模) and *Zhou li* as the “standard for governance” (*jingbang zhi guize* 經邦之規則).<sup>27</sup> The decline and decentralization of ritual studies had, since the mid-Tang dynasty, caused a transformation in Confucianism from external ceremony to internal morality. After the Song dynasty, with the development of the Confucian goal of re-establishing social order, the external ritual (*li* 禮) of regulating life and the internal reason (*li* 理) on which it was based became two mutually constitutive aspects of the Confucian revival movement.<sup>28</sup> Through the advocacy of Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), *Zhou li* became the basic theoretical foundation for state reform, and inspired a number of works of research on it.<sup>29</sup> Sima Guang, however, chose *Yi li*, which Wang Anshi had proscribed, as the basis to rebuild a Confucian order of life.

Zhu Xi accepted this approach, stressing that, “in *Yi li*, ritual is the basis,” and that in ancient books of ritual, “only *Yi li* is a complete ancient text”; furthermore, “if you are studying ritual, first read *Yi li*. Books like *Zhou li* and *Wang zhi* are systematizing works.”<sup>30</sup> In his view, *Zhou li* was not suitable as a basis for the reconstruction of a Confucian order of daily life. Meanwhile, *Li ji* was “messy and not suitable for daily use,” and “if one reads *Li ji* without reading *Yi li*, many of its principles have no fixed place.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, of the three classics of ritual, the one most relevant to the daily needs of human relations was *Yi li*.

26 Li Jingde, *Zhuizi yulei*, 84.2183.

27 Du You 杜佑, *Tong dian* 通典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 15.355.

28 See He Jun 何俊, “You li zhuan li yihuo yi li he li: Tang-Song sixiang zhuanxing de yige shijiao” 由禮轉理抑或禮合理：唐宋思想轉型的一個視角, *Beijing daxue xuebao* 北京大學學報, no. 6 (2007): 36–42.

29 See Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊, *Jingyi kao* 經義考 (Taipei: “Zhongyang” Yanjiuyuan Zhongguo Wen-Zhe Yanjiusuo Choubiechu, 1998), 122–23.387–422.

30 Li Jingde, *Zhuizi yulei*, 84.2186–87.

31 *Ibid.*, 87.2225.



In addition to composing family rituals, providing explanations or comments on the contemporary way of daily life according to Confucian “reason,” thus marking them as “Confucian,” was also important work. A typical example comes from Sima Guang’s comment on the Daoist cap (*dao shi mao* 道士帽) that was popular at the time: “Regardless of what Daoist scholars wear, the clothing of native Chinese scholars remains the same.”<sup>32</sup> In Sima Guang’s view, phenomena of daily life that were taken for granted, such as Daoist caps, had to be explored so that the Confucian way of life could be made clear. When the Confucian pattern of daily life was lost and became the standardized ritual of Daoist practitioners and monks, Confucians resentfully called this “theft” (*qie* 竊). Shi Shengzu 史繩祖 (1192–1274) rebuked the shallowness of “corrupt Confucians” who were not only unable follow the ritual, but even referred to Confucian ritual as Buddhist ritual, as having “never read a book.”<sup>33</sup> Consequently, labeling heretical rituals as “Confucian” imbued them with “rationality” in daily activity. This became an important step in Confucians’ plan to standardize everyday behavior.

It should be noted that, in the reconstruction of regulations for daily life, the Northern and Southern Song showed different tendencies, which we see in Zhu Xi’s evaluation of the Northern Song Confucian rituals noted above. Zhu Xi singled out Sima Guang’s rituals for praise because Sima Guang did not copy antiquity by rote, but rather “adapted it to what was feasible for his time.” This evaluation is worth exploring more deeply. The statement “ritual is practice” emphasized that ritual must be implemented in behavior. As Zhu Xi put it clearly: “The so-called essence of ritual is putting it into practice and adhering to it.”<sup>34</sup> In establishing rituals, scholar-officials considered the changes between ancient times and their own.

However, the contradiction they were unable to resolve between “text” (*wen* 文) and “practice” (*shi* 實) was the main problem of this renewed idea of ritual which led it to being characterized as “unsuitable to the world.”<sup>35</sup> Daily life was not a fixed text, but a simple, easy-to-follow practical operation. If we say the rituals established by Northern Song Confucians had a deep tendency toward learning from and reviving antiquity, the Southern Song Confucians, especially Zhu Xi, laid more emphasis on “putting them into practice.”<sup>36</sup> When

32 Sima Guang, *Sima shi shuyi*, 2.28.

33 Shi Shengzu 史繩祖, *Xuezhai zhanbi* 學齋佔畢, coll. Tang Qinfu 湯勤福, in *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2017), 8.3: 2.70–71.

34 Zhu Xi, *Huian xiansheng Zhu Wengong wenji*, 74.3585.

35 Zhu Xi 朱熹, “*jia li xu*” 家禮序, in *Zhuzi quanshu*, 7: 873.

36 Zhu Xi, *Huian xiansheng Zhu Wengong wenji*, 83.3920.

compiling family rituals, Zhu Xi directly incorporated “Jijia zayi” 居家雜儀 – an appendix to the “Hun yi” 婚儀 volume of *Shuyi* 書儀 – into his “Tong li” 通禮. At the same time, he emphasized that it was only through diligent practice of ceremonies in daily life that the ceremonial protocol system of family ritual became meaningful.

To achieve the goal of “putting it into practice,” Zhu Xi believed that “timing” (*shi* 時) was key:

“In ritual, timing is of utmost importance.” For sages and virtuous individuals to conduct rituals, they must not just adhere to the ancient rituals. It is doubtful they intended only to reduce and eliminate the ancient rituals and adopt rituals according to contemporary customs ... It would be impractical to insist on adopting every detail of the ancients’ clothing, headwear, and footwear.<sup>37</sup>

In Zhu Xi’s view, the guiding principle for scholars establishing rituals should be to “simplify the ancient rituals and adopt rituals according to contemporary customs.” The former was just a reference; only the latter was fundamental. With respect to consulting and synthesizing ritual texts, he said: “Reading *Li shu* 禮書, I see that the ancients were very sophisticated: nothing was insignificant, they had a rationale for everything. But cultivation is necessary to understand the ancients’ meaning.”<sup>38</sup>

To sum up, the specific details of behavior were only the final step of the ritual text; the deep discussion of the ritual was not in the specific ceremony, but in the rationale behind the ceremony. Zhu Xi asserted that even if a sage were to formulate a ritual of Zhu Xi’s own time, “I am afraid that it could never be completely as laid down by the ancients. These days, the important thing is to grasp the general outline; fully implementing the finer details is more difficult.”<sup>39</sup>

For this reason, when Zhu Xi formulated a ritual, he did not privilege any one school but took every school into consideration. In the standardization of daily life that Zhu Xi formulated,

The capping ceremony (*guanli* 冠禮) is taken mostly from Sima Guang; the wedding ceremony (*hunli* 婚禮), however, cites Sima Guang and the two

37 Li Jingde, *Zhu Xi yulei*, 84.2185.

38 Ibid., 84.2186.

39 Ibid., 84.2185.

Cheng brothers. The funeral ceremony (*sangli* 喪禮) is based on Sima Guang's writings ... But as for the discussion of grave moving (*fuqian* 祔遷), that is taken from Zhang Zai ... [The discussion of] sacrificial ritual (祭禮 *jili*) draws both from Sima Guang and the Cheng brothers ... While [his description of] the holiday sacrifice (*jieci* 節祠) follows the example of Han Qi.<sup>40</sup>

In the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1421–1495) agreed: “Zhu Xi used Sima Guang's *Shuyi*, referring to the two Cheng brothers and Zhang Zai's commentary to write the book *Jiali* 家禮.”<sup>41</sup> Putting aside specification of “finer details,” and striving for the essence of ritual, this “copying the ritual view of the ancients” was the basic attitude of Southern Song and subsequent scholars toward the rituals of the Three Dynasties.

Zhu Yi 朱翌 (1097–1167) believed that “Three Dynasties rituals are not practical in the present day,” but also emphasized that “ancient rituals that have been preserved ... cannot be discarded.” However, the ritual that could not be discarded was not the ritual text itself, for, “It is not the sages' intention that we trivially cling to ancient texts.”<sup>42</sup> Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (ca. 1254–1323) also said that, if there were great sages in the afterlife to organize ancient rituals, “it is not necessary to follow the complexities of the ancients exactly. Instead, they can simply imitate the ancients' general idea and make the rituals simple and easy to practice.”<sup>43</sup> To sum up, only by consulting and synthesizing the “reason” behind the “ritual” could one better guide real life and rebuild the Confucian social order.

### 3 From Formulating Family Rituals to Implementing Them in Life

Clearly no one person, not even the great Neo-Confucian synthesizer Zhu Xi, could have created a “pattern of life” for his era. On the other hand, the scholar-officials who formulated family rituals emphasized that, “it is not possible to go even one day without developing one's culture and education.”<sup>44</sup>

40 Ma Duanlin 馬端臨, *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 188.1602.

41 Qiu Jun 丘濬, “*Wengong jiali yijie xu*” 文公家禮儀節序, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jing bu* 四庫全書存目叢書 • 經部 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997), 114: 430.

42 Zhu Yi 朱翌, *Yi juebiao zaji* 猗覺寮雜記, in *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 1.38.

43 Ma Duanlin, *Wenxian tongkao*, 180.1551.

44 Qiu Jun, “*Wengong jiali yijie xu*,” 873.

But even Zhu Xi did not necessarily insist on complying with all the ritual rules that he had formulated.

Since the Song dynasty, the contradiction between institutionalized ritual and practical customs – that is, between “ritual” and “custom” (*su* 俗) – has been a topic of considerable interest. When scholar-officials formulated rituals, whether it was “using ritual to preserve custom” or “formulating ritual on the basis of custom”, it often involved compromise. However, behind this compromise they always considered and adhered to Confucian values.

Take Zhu Xi, for example. In his view, the Confucian order of everyday life was the cornerstone of the whole society. Therefore, he emphasized “making tactful explanations” (*wei qu kai shi* 委曲開釋) to convince those who believed in Buddhism to return to the Confucian way of life. However, he also believed that customs changed only very slowly. Things that seemed very basic and reasonable to scholars who faithfully followed the Confucian way of life would take time for those immersed in Buddhism to gradually recognize.

More importantly, Zhu Xi said that whether to follow Buddhism was only a matter of external appearance, while “respect and love for one’s parents” (*fu qin yi* 孝親意) was the original meaning of filial piety. Therefore, in the conflict between contradicting values, rather than attaching importance to the external ceremonies of ritual, it was better to follow inner virtue, giving prominence to the spirit of filial piety over the external form of ritual. Later, when Zhu Xi’s mother asked him to conduct a Buddhist funeral for her, he upheld this spirit, saying, “In my family, since the time of our ancestors, we have not followed Buddhism, but now we respectfully follow it.”<sup>45</sup>

Since ritual serves to regulate everyday social behavior, if there is no group identity, ritual becomes a meaningless display and can even have a counter-productive effect. *Juanyou zalu* 倦遊雜錄 records:

Chen Lie 陳烈, a native of Fuzhou 福州, learned and erudite, did not follow established rituals of his time, but stubbornly followed ancient rituals. Cai Xiang 蔡襄 was in mourning in Putian 莆田. Chen Lie went to offer his condolences. As he was reaching the place, he said to his followers, “Is it not written in *Shijing* 詩經, ‘When ordinary people suffer bereavement, prostrate yourself and offer them help’? Now I am going to conduct this ritual with you.” Then Chen Lie put on sackcloth, and together with his more than twenty students, he waited at the gate. They touched the ground with their hands and, crawling on their knees and wailing in grief, they went in. There were women in the hall where the

45 Zhu Xi, *Hui'an xiansheng Zhu Wengong wenji, bieji*, 3, 4878.

coffin was laid; seeing this scene, they all ran away. Cai Xiang, hiding a smile, received Chen Lie and his students' condolences. Shortly after, Li Gou 李遘 painted *Pu fu tu* 匍匐圖.<sup>46</sup>

If “ritual” was separated from the social context that produced or developed its background and meaning, it became only the specific, detailed rules and regulations of a schematic, simplified, apparent “ritual.” Under these circumstances, there was a high possibility of conflict between the “state of the times” (*shitai* 時態) and “ancient ritual” (*guli* 古禮). This could even make scholar-officials who sought to revive “ancient rituals” to express their Confucian values into the butt of a joke in *Pu fu tu*. Zhu Xi wrote:

Of the four rituals, the capping ceremony is easiest to perform; it is a matter for your own family, so you can make your own decisions. As for a wedding ceremony, two families are involved, and if your family wants to conduct it, but the other family does not, each family hinders the other. Conducting a funeral ceremony is very complicated and detailed. Moreover, if a person goes into mourning, he or she is in sorrow. It takes time to carry out the many courtesies. A sacrificial ritual is the same: when you conduct the ritual, it takes a lot of people. Once I saw someone who insisted on conducting a ritual. I understood the procedure myself, but the people carrying it out had never received any training or instruction. People watching the ritual laughed and no one paid attention; even people conducting the ritual could not help but laugh. What's the point of performing such a ceremony! These are all points in which a ritual's quality does not match its text. It would be better not to perform such ritual at all.<sup>47</sup>

Although this passage is based on the actual practice of ritual, it can also be seen that it was difficult to find the ideal balance between the formulation and practice of ritual. This was because, since the symbolic meaning of ritual had not become a universal principle that was understood and accepted by society, courtesies conducted by those “without training or instruction” were just a kind of awkward behavior, and eventually descended into farce so that people could “not help but laugh”. The practice of Confucian rituals in the late

46 Zhang Shizheng 張師正, *Juanyou zalu* 倦遊雜錄, in *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記, (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2017), 8.9: 210.

47 Li Jingde, *Zhuizi yulei*, 23.562.

Southern Song dynasty showed that it was quite challenging to find a good fit between the formulation and practice of rituals.

In fact, complete construction of a way of life required a long period of evolution. Take cremation, for example. The reason why Buddhist funeral ceremonies were so deeply rooted in Chinese people's lives cannot be fully explained by a widespread adoption of Buddhism. The regulation of daily life involved not only issues of "reason," but also practical, manipulable technical factors – from cremation equipment, place of interment, and types, quantity, and specifications of funerary objects to the dedicated cremation site, and even to economic and other considerations.<sup>48</sup>

All these factors required long-term penetration and accretion at all levels of life. It was one thing for scholar-officials to reconstruct Confucian daily life through texts, and another thing for the Confucian pattern of life to re-enter the lived practice of ordinary people. From this point of departure, all the family rituals that Song Confucian scholars compiled appear more as Confucian intellectual knowledge about the order of daily life, rather than fully accurate authentic representations of daily life. Whether the compiler found historical support from ancient rituals or drew his logical basis from real life, the real value of Song Confucian scholars' formulation of family ritual lay in prompting the recording and preservation of the Confucian order and meaning of life; creating an orderly world according to Confucian ideals; constructing a pattern of Confucian daily life; and providing an intellectual and value-based foundation for the ordering of real life.

Of course, this understanding of the value of Song Confucian scholars' compilation of family rituals does not negate the possibility and effectiveness of specific cases in the practice of daily life. In fact, there were many examples of effective rituals formulated by individual families. However, these rituals were primarily practiced within each individual family, each one preceded by the name of a family or clan. Such family rituals, carried out independently within the household and clan, cannot be equated with broader Confucian practices of daily life. As far as history itself is concerned, the real establishment of Confucian daily life, with Zhu Xi's *Jiali* as the representative work, was mainly completed by the early-mid Ming dynasty. The Ming dynasty's state book of rituals drew on Song dynasty family rituals and fixed the Confucian pattern of daily life by decree.<sup>49</sup> Confucian scholars were unanimous in demonstrating fidelity to Zhu Xi's Rationalism and fixed their main task and mission on its

48 See Gu Yanwu 顧炎武, *Rizhilu jishi* 日知錄集釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), 15.898–902.

49 See Long Wenbin 龍文彬, *Ming huiyao* 明會要 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 14.235.

practice – in their words, “After Zhu Xi, the Confucian principle has become clear; it is no longer necessary to bother with writing, it is only necessary to practice it in one’s own life.”<sup>50</sup>

The Ming academic climate of “act conscientiously, adhere strictly to the regulations” as well as its scholarly style of “if you inherit from a teacher, your work will be neat and orderly”<sup>51</sup> played an enormous role in making family ritual part of everyday life. In society at the regional level, clans that emphasized using ritual for clan governance often made Zhu Xi’s *Jiali* into both a principled regulation to be universally followed, as well as a concrete requirement. For this reason, local communities employed multi-channel and multi-level methods to disseminate family rituals, such as annotations, section compilations, supplementary compilations of *Jiali*, and ritual illustrations. This allowed knowledge of family rituals to penetrate to ordinary people.<sup>52</sup> As local officials intervened to alter existing customs, *Jiali* also became an important manual for action.<sup>53</sup> Local traditions cultivated in the Ming dynasty appear to have been maintained into the Qing dynasty (1616–1911).<sup>54</sup>

It was through all kinds of government guidance, as well as the practice of Confucian scholars at every level, that the family rituals that had appeared in the Song dynasty as intellectual texts were gradually transformed into real daily life: knowledge was implanted into the lives of the people. Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695) wrote:

The common people’s auspicious rituals (*jili* 吉禮) and funeral rituals (*xiongli* 凶禮) are all conducted according to Zhu Xi’s *Jiali*. Ordinary people do not need to know the regulations for mourning apparel, the dimensions of a wood memorial plaque, the pattern for clothing and head coverings, or the size and shape of the chamber. The education official determines these and gives them to the artisans of the city shops. In

50 *Ming shi* 明史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 282.7229.

51 *Ibid.*, 282.7222.

52 See Zhao Kesheng 趙克生, “Xiushu, ketu yu guanli: Ming dai difang shehui de jiali chuanbo” 修書、刻圖與觀禮：明代地方社會的家禮傳播, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究, no. 1 (2010): 125–44.

53 See Wang Xun 汪循, “Yi shang xingli chuhai shu” 擬上興利除害疏, in *Wang Renfeng xiansheng wenji* 汪仁峰先生文集, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu* 四庫全書存目叢書·集部 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997), 47: 1.189; Hai Rui 海瑞, *Hai Ruiji* 海瑞集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 188.

54 See Kong Yuji 孔毓璣, “Fengsu zhi” 風俗志, in (*Yongzheng*) *Changshan xianzhi* (雍正) 常山縣志 (1724), Qing Yongzheng ernian keben 清雍正二年刻本, 11.11a.



places outside the city, schoolteachers explain the rituals to reform existing customs.<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, even if *Jiali* had become the text on Confucian norms for daily life accepted by the whole society, the mediation of education officials and schoolteachers was still needed for it to inform the actions of ordinary people. Only when the knowledge of “ritual” was matched with daily life could the Confucian reconstruction of daily life really become a true way of life, rather than a text or diagram.

To sum up, the Confucian reconstruction of daily life – which family rituals symbolized – passed through a long historical process. During this process, the family ritual, as a component of the Confucian cultural system, completed the unfolding from ideas to implementation in life. The Confucian reconstruction movement, which began in the middle and late Tang dynasty, began with a revolution in ideas. In the process of these ideas turning into daily life, they underwent a process of intellectualization; the completion of Zhu Xi's *Jiali* represented the end of this process. Although a gap remained between intellectual ideals and the practice of daily life, Song Confucian scholars' achievement in intellectual ideals later formed the basis for the construction of a real Confucian daily life in the society of the Ming dynasty.

*Translated by Brook Hefright*

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