

Michal Vázal:
*The Confucian Ideal of Harmonious Community according to the Norms of the Wu
Lineage from Mingzhou*

Abstract

Abstract: This paper aims to characterize the structure and values produced by rituals in a kinship community, and how these characteristics subsequently helped to shape a harmoniously working community and its ideological relationship with the state in terms of local governance. The rituals in question are partially confined in time and place, as they are observed on one particular community, and are examined only in the extent of the primary source named „The Norms and Rituals of the Wu Lineage of Mingzhou“ (Mingzhou Wu Shi Jiadian) – a ritual manual authored mainly by Wu Di (died 1736) from the village of Mingzhou, which belonged to the Huizhou prefecture (the south of the present day Anhui province). On the other hand, this text is largely based on Zhu Xi’s “Family Rituals” (Jiali) which were viewed across the country as the ritual standard. The most essential rituals used to govern the lineage were coming of age ritual, wedding rituals, funeral rituals and sacrifices to ancestors. A unifying principle behind the structure and values these rituals created was seniority. The lineage structure was created mainly by the system in which the branches of firstborn sons were superiors to other lineage lines (zongfa), and the most dominant value was filial piety (xiao). The structure and values produced by these rituals reinforced affection among lineage members, and promoted both close and distant kinship ties, upon which two types of networks were built in order to assist relatives in need thus creating a more harmonious community. The text of Jiadian promoted the rituals also as a vehicle for administration of whole society. The support for this philosophy and the self-organization ability of lineages could be found in the Confucian canonical writings as well as in active state policies, as they appear in imperial edicts (shengyu). The court attempted to delegate the responsibilities pertaining to local governance to lineages, in order to alleviate burden of its administrative apparatus, which lacked personnel, and to reduce a need for social interventions from the state. Family rituals thus produced a social reality beneficial both to the lineage and the state.

Keywords: China, Huizhou, Qing dynasty, lineage, ritual, ritual manual, ancestor worship, Confucianism, Zhu Xi, harmonious community, welfare, local society, grassroots society, governance, state, imperial edict, shengyu, zongfa, zongzi, dazong, xiaozong, xiao, filial piety, Family rituals, Jiali