

# A Joyful Union: The Modernization of the Zhu Xi Family Wedding Ceremony

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During the disordered Eastern Zhou, Confucius 孔子 (551–479 B.C.E.) once remarked that if he could properly conduct an ancient state ritual, he could turn the world as easily as the palm of his hand;<sup>1</sup> today, a descendent of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) implies that if he can properly modernize an ancient family ceremony, he could help reorient Chinese society towards humanitarian virtues – after not only the modern critiques of traditional ritual, but also the spiritual devastation of the Cultural Revolution. The 1950s PRC Marriage Law urged couples to do away with traditional, elaborate wedding ceremonies because couples should rely upon the legitimacy of law instead of the respectability of a public performance.<sup>2</sup> But with the economic reforms and increasing prosperity since the 1980s, Chinese families are again spending lavishly on weddings while drawing upon an eclectic mix of Chinese and Western rituals in their ceremonies. In this context, Zhu Jieren 朱傑人, a senior member of the Institute for Studies of Ancient Books and Writings at East China Normal University and chief editor of that university’s press, hopes to foster social civility (and strengthen civil society) based on the modernization of Zhu Xi’s wedding ritual, which he plans to popularize first within the World Federation of Zhu (Xi) Family Associations 世界朱氏聯合會 and ultimately throughout Chinese

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1 See the statements in the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (“Doctrine of the Mean”), transmitted as text no. 31 of the *Liji* 禮記 (“Book of Rites”), and in chapter 3 of the *Lunyu* 論語 (“Analects”).

2 Honig and Hershatter 1988, 137.

society. We will examine this wedding ceremony as a case study for the efforts of Zhu Jieren to modernize and revive Zhu Xi's wedding ritual as the first step in updating and propagating Confucian family rituals in the *Zhuzi jiali* 朱子家禮, which informed ritual practice for much of society in late imperial China since the Yuan era – and which, Zhu Jieren hopes, may one day revive self-cultivation and reintroduce traditional values in contemporary China.

## Methodology

We agree with the Zhus that weddings may sometimes be public expressions of the *significance* of marriage, but we also acknowledge that there is no clear model that determines the nature of a marriage (*hunyin* 婚姻) in terms of the liturgy of a wedding (*hunli* 婚禮). As Professor Patricia Ebrey notes, the Zhu Xi rituals reverse ordinary expectations about social rank because the rituals celebrate the person whose status is being changed; by allowing him or her to wear elaborate clothing and to receive special treatment, the rituals accord that person with more deference and respect than he or she could expect at any other time in life.<sup>3</sup> Since the ritual ceremony thus marks an extraordinary occasion, instead of representing ordinary relationships, it is difficult, if not impossible, to characterize the nature of a marriage on the basis of an analysis of the wedding ceremony. While some feminist scholars have analyzed PRC marriage law alone as a basis for commenting on gender relations,<sup>4</sup> we rely instead on oral interviews to indicate what the participants wished to convey about issues such as gender equality and Chinese traditions. Thus, this article assumes that the Zhu wedding ceremony can be read as a public statement that seeks to define the lineages, their traditions, and the structure of their relationships.

In order to understand the significance of this ritual, we rely on historical context, oral interviews, liturgical texts, and a CD recording of the ceremony, and we organize our paper according to the structure of the ceremony. A major source of information is a video-recording of the wedding ceremony itself and the accompanying booklet, *Zhuzi hunli xiandaiban* 朱子婚禮現代版, “The Modern Version of Zhu Xi's Wedding Rituals,” which was later published in the Association's journal, *Zhuzi wenhua* 朱子文化.<sup>5</sup> The wedding, which took place in Shanghai on December 5, 2009, was divided into three different sections: the traditional Chinese wedding; the romantic Western wedding; and congratulatory speeches. Our interpretation of the wedding video draws heavily on oral interviews with the participants them-

3 Ebrey 1991a, xxvi.

4 For instance, please see Kristeva 1977.

5 Zhu 2010a. Since the journal article is available publicly, it will be cited instead of the wedding booklet.

selves, especially Zhu Jieren, his son (the groom) Zhu Qi 朱祁 (John), and his daughter-in-law Zhong Ming 神明 (Cathy), as well as informants about other weddings in contemporary China. Our interpretation of the wedding video also draws upon our understanding of the historical development of wedding rituals that were generally ascribed to Zhu Xi, the context of contemporary Chinese weddings, and the commitment of Zhu Jieren to the World Federation of Zhu Family Associations. Although we feel that it is important to understand the wedding as a whole, we organize the paper in these subcategories, especially placing the Chinese wedding within the context of the historical development of Zhu Xi's family rituals, the Western wedding in the context of contemporary weddings, and Zhu Jieren's speech within the context of his goals to ameliorate contemporary society through his involvement with the Zhu Family Association. In our analysis of all three aspects of the wedding, we argue that he hopes to use the rituals in order to assert a statement about their lineage's connection with the past and the potential for reviving Chinese rituals and values.

### The *Zhuzi jiali* and the Modern Version of the Zhu Wedding

Although many contemporaries would mistakenly characterize Zhu Jieren as resurrecting a static tradition, Zhu Jieren actually follows Zhu Xi's precedent of updating and popularizing Confucian rituals. As Zhu Jieren observes in the introductory paragraph to his revised version of the wedding rituals, the ancient rites in the Classics had become impractical by the time of the Song dynasty, so Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) and Zhu Xi had to revise and simplify the rituals.<sup>6</sup> Zhu Xi himself modernized the rituals based, in part, upon Sima Guang's liturgy and Cheng Yi's 程頤 (1032–1086) focus on the meaning of the rites. We might insert a specific example: whereas the ancients waited for three months before presenting the bride to the family shrine, Sima followed a popular Song custom of presenting the bride immediately upon her arrival at the groom's family home, and Zhu Xi changed it to the third day;<sup>7</sup> however, Zhu Jieren has the wedding itself performed in front of an altar symbolically representing the hall for offerings to the ancestors of both families. As Ebrey points out, Zhu Xi further simplified the rituals of his predecessors by omitting ancient (and still popular) rituals for asking the bride's personal name and birth date, as well as divining for auspicious dates for the marriage and then requesting the bride's family to select the wedding date; however, he allowed the common practice of having music at weddings despite a Classical prohibition which Cheng

6 Zhu 2010a, 18. For a recent, detailed study of Zhu Xi's thought about rituals, see Yin 2009.

7 See Ebrey 1991a, 54 n. 22, 63 n 70.

Yi had sought to reinforce.<sup>8</sup> Even Zhu Xi's disciple Chen Chun 陳淳 (1153–1217), who praised Zhu's family rituals for "selectively bringing the ancient into the present," cautioned people against a literal approach to Zhu's text because some details were not practical in all areas; furthermore, he urged people to make their own decisions on the basis of the core meaning of the whole text.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Zhu Jieren emphasizes what he considers to be the core significance of the rite,<sup>10</sup> while further simplifying its steps and modifying some elements. Zhu Jieren's diligence and sincerity in retrieving the core of the rite is perhaps graphically represented by his textual research in Song sources to recover the proper way that the couple should exchange cups during the wedding ceremony; each should drink half of their own cup before exchanging cups.



Exchanging cups

Zhu Xi's motives and purposes for modifying the ancient rituals and accepting some non-canonical contemporary customs have been interpreted differently by various scholars. Most exceptionally, Christian de Pee has sharply attacked modern Chinese and Western scholars (particularly Ebrey) for arguing that Zhu Xi adapted some contemporary practices in order to strengthen the elite through broader social acceptance of its ritual status and its program for society. Professor de Pee argues that Zhu Xi's commitment to simplicity was

8 Ebrey 1991a, 53 n. 17, 61 n. 60.

9 See Ebrey 1991a, xxvi. Lau Nap-yin 柳立言 kindly loaned us his copy of an illustrated Chinese and English bilingual overview of the diversity of traditional Chinese wedding traditions in Hong Kong. See the exhibition volume produced by the Hong Kong Museum of History 1987. See also Lu 2000.

10 Zhu 2010b.

[...] not a matter of convenience or of accommodation of contemporary practice. Rather, it connotes a condensed representation of ancient ritual, a weighed reduction of the number of steps, not a compromise with the practices of the day.<sup>11</sup>

However, de Pee's analysis is here based on taking at face value a comment in which Zhu contrasted himself and others. Similarly somewhat overdrawn is de Pee's condemnation of modern scholars for focusing on the social context and status implications of the elite's attention to rituals. Nonetheless, we would agree with de Pee that Zhu Xi was concerned with achieving "the proportionate reduction of canonical ritual" and the "symmetry" that would utilize ritual time and space to enable people to embody ritual practice in daily life. Yet, we doubt that highlighting such hermeneutical points really invalidates the approaches and findings of Ebrey and other modern scholars.

Zhu Xi simplified these rituals in order to render them not only more practical, but also more accessible than before to a larger audience, and later Chinese intellectuals continued in this trend. Ebrey cites Professor Gao Ming's conclusion that Zhu Xi combined principles with rules and theory with practice, but adds that Zhu Xi went even further in "his efforts to deal with the problem of how to get people to perform the rites."<sup>12</sup> Yet, Ebrey also notes that Zhu Xi's liturgical texts do not offer an easy manual for following the steps of the ritual, because they lack an ethnographic description of how to actually perform the rites.<sup>13</sup> Among the new Ming-era ritual texts which were presented as edited versions of Zhu Xi's, the one by Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1421–1495) was among the most important because its illustrations made it easy to consult.<sup>14</sup> Zhu Jieren expands upon this trend by providing a CD video-recording as an ethnographic description and liturgical model.

This effort to popularize the rituals was part of a larger agenda by major Confucian intellectuals of the Song era to assert a higher status for themselves through rituals. Mindful that dynastic laws prohibited anyone except high ranking officials from having ancestral shrines, they spread the practice to lower officials and commoners by using the term "offering halls" (*citang* 祠堂). Despite much more rigid Classical and Han-Tang restrictions on the number of generations of ancestors to which people of different status ranks could sacrifice, Song Confucians widely agreed that every social class could make sacrifices to four generations of ancestors. By making these claims in such sweeping terms, Song Confucians provided a somewhat enhanced acceptance of social mobility than had been the case under the Han and Tang, when particular rituals were restricted to those of a certain governmental rank. Overall, despite some

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11 Pee 2007, 72–87, esp. 79. See also the reviews by Lau (2008) and Nylan (2010).

12 Ebrey 1991a, xv, 53 n. 17, 61 n. 60; Kao 1986.

13 Ebrey 1991a, xiv.

14 Qiu Jun, *Jiali yijie* 家禮儀節; see Ebrey 1991a, xxii–xxiii.

countervailing trends and shortcomings, we might say that Song changes in marriage rituals made considerable progress toward a slightly greater degree of “egalitarian” accessibility to ritual customs, and Zhu Jieren’s revisions further continue in that direction because he wants all Chinese people to enjoy access to their ritual traditions and to the more egalitarian character of his modernized version of Zhu Xi’s wedding ritual.

Despite these relatively “equalitarian” trends in Song wedding culture, gender hierarchies remained so entrenched that it was difficult to alter them. Ebrey has summarized the problem of how rituals were seen as teaching complementarity and differentiation of male and female:

In the Classics, weddings were said to promote social morality by illustrating the distinctions or differentiation between men and women. The idea here seems to be that by going through the ceremonies, which repeatedly had the man or his family take the lead, the young groom would be impressed with his authority, the young bride inspired to comply and demur. Or as Sima Guang put it, “the boy leads the girl, the girl follows the boy; the duty of husbands to be resolute and wives to be docile begins with this.”<sup>15</sup>

Other symbols of gender differentiation were also implicit in the structure of rites. For instance, only men could address the ancestors, while women could only silently serve food.<sup>16</sup> Although Zhu Xi embraced these gender roles, he also included a couple of occasions where the groom knelt and bowed to the bride’s presiding man or father at their home, as well as a couple of other occasions where the groom saluted the bride on their wedding day.<sup>17</sup> Even though saluting the bride might appear to us as an empty gesture, the salute provoked strong objections from some commentators in late imperial China (thus signaling that Ming and Qing Chinese were in some ways more rigid in their gender expectations than Zhu Xi). This example demonstrates the complexity involved in modernizing the rituals to include more “egalitarian” gender relations. As Professor Hans van Ess notes in his essay in this volume, the most problematic issue of Confucianism is its authoritarian structure of power, especially in terms of gender hierarchy. The modernized Zhu wedding ceremony is, in part, designed to address gender concerns because it expands upon symbolic acts to provide some enhancement of the bride and her family’s status, but the overall structure of the wedding ceremony nevertheless stresses the importance of patriarchal lineage and filial piety.

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15 Ebrey 1991b, 82. In the text, we have changed Wade-Giles spelling to standard *pinyin* for the convenience of the reader.

16 Ebrey 1991b, 23–24.

17 *Zhuji jiali* 3.899, 901; also see Ebrey 1991b, notes and text on 58–60 and 64.

Zhu Jieren's wedding liturgy retains many elements of authority-centered hierarchy and gender inequality that would trouble many contemporary Westerners and Chinese alike, but he has also modernized the ceremony to make allowances that revise the authoritarian proclivity of mainstream Confucianism in fundamental ways. Zhu Jieren retained some conservatively traditional elements of the Chinese ritual, especially in terms of the liturgical script that is read aloud.



Zhu Jieren reads the liturgical script from *Zhuzi jiali*

These statements are copied directly from the *Zhuzi jiali*. The wedding proceeds only with the permission of the parents, who instruct and empower their children to marry; there is no hint of initiative on the part of the young couple. For example, the groom's father tells him,

“Go welcome your helpmate, so I may fulfill my duties to my ancestors. Do your best to lead her, with due respect, for you then will gain steadiness.”

Thereupon, the groom declares:

“I will. My only fear is that I am not equal to the task. I will not dare to forget your command.”<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, when the bride's parents instruct her about her marriage, the bride also responds with the same promise never to forget her parents' orders. The parents also pay respect to the ancestors by reporting all these family matters and by pouring out libations of wine, but they pour the wine onto a cloth rather than on the reeds that were described in Zhu Xi's wedding rituals.<sup>19</sup>

18 *Zhuzi jiali* 3.898; Zhu 2010a, 19; also Ebrey 1991a, 57.

19 *Zhuzi jiali* 1.878; also Ebrey 1991a, 15.

The liturgy thus retains a differential in status power between the bride and the groom, and the structure of power remains clearly traditional: from ancestors to descendants, from parents to children, and from groom to bride. In our interview with the couple, the bride and groom also pointed out that the modern version still emphasizes respect for parents and their authority; nonetheless, the couple also stressed that the ceremony has been adapted to “fit with modern times.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Zhu Jieren’s wife on another occasion remarked that the modernized ceremony “elevated the status of women a great deal.”<sup>21</sup>

Although the Modern Version of the Zhu Family Wedding recopies some condescendingly hierarchical elements of Zhu Xi’s liturgy, these elements are softened because they are reprinted rather than performed in public. The scripted correspondence between the groom’s family and the bride’s family is recopied in Zhu Jieren’s booklet and in the Association’s journal article, but it is omitted from the public performance. For example, when the bride’s family receives the letter purposing marriage, they reply:

“My child is stupid and we have not been able to teach her. If his honor orders it [the engagement], I dare not decline.”<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Zhuji jiali* made provisions to omit the word “stupid” (*chunyu* 蠢愚) in cases in which the presiding man was the nephew or the younger brother of the bride.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Zhu Jieren might have extended upon that precedent to omit the pejorative word, but he chose not to erase this gesture of “humble politeness.” Furthermore, the diction stresses that the “order” comes from the groom’s family, which indicates its greater authority relative to the bride’s family. When the bride’s family receives the engagement gifts, their written response concludes,

His honor, following the ancestral regulations, is conferring on me these precious valuables, which I do not dare decline. Dare I refuse his commands?<sup>24</sup>

This wording repeats the sentiment that the groom’s family has relatively more power and authority than the bride’s. However, these words are not publicly performed in the modern ceremony, and Zhu Jieren’s liturgy also omits the directions in the *Zhuji jiali* for the bride’s presiding man to bow when receiving or acknowledging letters from the groom’s family. In John and Cathy’s wedding, the bride’s widowed mother is the one to report to the ancestors of her husband, a role of addressing the ancestors that in the past (as mentioned above) could only be per-

20 Personal interview, April 2, 2010.

21 Personal comment, March 22, 2010.

22 *Zhuji jiali* 3.896; Zhu 2010a, 19; also Ebrey 1991a, 52.

23 *Zhuji jiali* 3.896; Ebrey 1991a, 52.

24 *Zhuji jiali* 3.897; Ebrey 1991a, 54.

formed by a man. Furthermore, the modernized wedding ceremony has also adopted somewhat more egalitarian rites and symbols.

Despite the traditional, conservative nature of the texts, the modernized Zhu wedding ceremony pays particular respect to the bride and her family on an aesthetic level. In the modern Chinese wedding ceremony, the groom kneels and pays his respects to the bride's mother (while the bride stands beside her mother), but the bride does not kneel to the groom's parents.



Groom kneeling to pay respect to bride's lineage

Of course, one might cite the precedent in the *Zhuzi jiali* of the groom kneeling and bowing to the bride's presiding man and father when arriving to receive the bride. Nonetheless, there are still two significant differences: the case of the groom kneeling in the *Zhuzi jiali* is in the privacy of the home, while the modernized liturgy includes this scene in the public wedding ceremony; furthermore, Cathy stands beside her presiding person, thus including her among those to whom the groom is kneeling and paying respect. The modernized liturgical text also choreographs *both* of the bride's parents to receive the groom's respect, so the text clearly directs future weddings to pay this homage to the mother as well as the father. In Zhu Xi's text, the bride bows to the husband twice as many times as the groom bows to her,<sup>25</sup> but in the modernized ritual, the bride and groom bow to each other the same number of times, at the same time, and at the same level.

25 *Zhuzi jiali* 3.899; also Ebrey 1991a, 12, 60 n. 50.



Bride and groom bowing to one another

At the conclusion of the traditional ceremony, they also stand together as a couple to bow to the ancestors, to Heaven and Earth, and to each set of parents. Thus, in terms of this symbolic practice of bowing, the bride and the groom seem to be on equal terms.

Even though the bride is joining the groom's lineage and therefore submitting to it, her lineage is nevertheless shown considerable deference and respect. The men in the family demonstrate courtesy to the women in the ceremonies. Out of consideration for the widowed mother of the bride, the mother of the bride and the mother of the groom walk together, preceding the father of the groom, as they enter and exit the hall before and after the speeches in the last portion of the wedding. Although these aesthetic gestures may arguably seem less "contractual" than the liturgical texts, they are more easily "read" by the guests than the quotations from the classical Chinese texts; thus, the overall impression of the wedding may appear to be more egalitarian to the guests who attend the wedding ceremony than it might to someone who only reads the wedding liturgy.

Both the aesthetics and the liturgy, however, stress the specifically Chinese nature of the wedding ceremony. In the preface to the Modern Version of the Zhu Xi Wedding Ritual, Zhu Jieren says that he is profoundly worried about the popularity of Western wedding ceremonies that he blames for having "cut off tradition and have changed and disordered China's family rules (*jiafa* 家法)," and thus have "led our people to be unaware that our country has its own tradition of wedding rites,

with elegant rituals and profound meaning.”<sup>26</sup> Zhu Jieren notes that one of the few places in which he adapted “Western elements” into the Chinese rite was the inclusion of bridesmaids and groomsmen.<sup>27</sup> Two bridesmaids march into the wedding hall before the bride because, in reality, the entire setting of the wedding differs from the Chinese tradition, and the processional aisle more closely mimics the structure (but not the function) of a church.<sup>28</sup>



Bride enters hall

Zhu Jieren seems to have included the bridesmaids in consideration for the bride, and his most important modern revisions are to include more people (who previously would have been excluded). While these changes may appear minor, this inclusivity has important ramifications for the structure of authority inherent in the wedding ceremony.

Most significantly, Zhu Jieren’s ceremony departs from Zhu Xi’s system by re-defining who may serve as the “head of household,” when representing the family by performing such rites as giving the bride away. Zhu Xi’s ritual system focused heavily on “ritual primogeniture,” i.e., the status of the *zong* 宗 descent line (of the eldest main-line son), so the male in the senior line of descent must preside over

26 Zhu 2010a, 18.

27 Zhu 2010a, 20 n. 2.

28 The use of a public hall, with family heads, was a part of the choreography of the Republican Period wedding ritual post-1927, but the Guomindang replaced the portraits of the family ancestors with the founding father of the Republic in an attempt to increase the presence of the state; see Glosser 2003, 81–133.

ceremonies, in which he “pledges” the young by offering them wine and instruction.<sup>29</sup> Rather than restricting the presiding man to senior descent lines that may come from distant and lateral branch families, Qiu Jun had in the fifteenth century also loosened the focus on the *zong* descent line by allowing natal fathers to preside over capping, pinnings and weddings. However, no one had altered the gendered aspect of the presiding man; for example, one nineteenth-century guidebook stresses the important point that “neither women nor the groom himself serve as presiding man.”<sup>30</sup> Under those regulations, Cathy would have to be given away by one of her father’s male relatives. However, Zhu Jieren allows the bride’s mother to serve as her “presiding man,” despite her gender. Thus, Zhu Jieren further sets aside the tradition of the *zong*, which had forcefully combined both gender and generational hierarchy. Zhu Xi’s emphasis on the *zong* had enhanced the authoritarian penchant within the Confucian tradition (and made it a major target of early twentieth-century radical critiques). Despite the complexity of the so-called “one-child policy,”<sup>31</sup> Zhu Jieren acknowledges that the government’s planned birth policy has now rendered this idea of the *zong* essentially irrelevant (because male siblings now no longer compete for status). Thus, his wedding ceremony not only makes considerable effort to fit with modern times, but it also indicates a willingness to move in a more egalitarian direction.

The mother of the bride acts fully as both the presiding man and the mother of the bride. For instance, she assumes both roles when she reads the instructions of the father and the mother, even though they are structurally so similar. She first offers the father’s instructions,

“Be respectful, be cautious. Morning to night, never deviate from the commands of your parents-in-law.”

And then she continues with the mother’s instructions,

“Be diligent. Be respectful. Morning to night, never deviate from the proprieties of the women’s quarters.”<sup>32</sup>

The script then requires the mother to adjust the bride’s clothes. According to what the bride later told us in an interview, that moment was for her the most touching

29 Ebrey 1991a, xxvii. We borrow the term “ritual primogeniture” from de Pee (2007, 77).

30 Li Yuanchun 李元春, *Sili biansu* 四禮辨俗 (*Four Rites Differentiating Popular Customs*); see discussion in Ebrey 1991a, 50 n. 4.

31 For example, rural farming families can give birth to a second child if the first one is a girl; however, if the second is also a girl, they should not have a third one. Moreover, according to current regulations in all provinces except Henan, if both husband and wife in urban areas are the only children of their parents, the urban couple may have two children.

32 *Zhuji jiali* 3.898–899; Zhu 2010a, 20; also Ebrey 1991a, 58.

part of the ceremony. When her mother arranged her clothing and joined her hand with her husband's, Cathy felt ready to cry. In comparison, she did not feel as moved when her mother gave her away in the Western portion of the wedding – even though her mother hugged her at this point in the Western ceremony. This example indicates the ways in which even brief ritual gestures can be profoundly meaningful.



After straightening the bride's clothes, her mother joins the bride's hand with the groom's.

Although Zhu Jieren's ceremony retains strong elements of age hierarchy, the organization and production of the ceremony itself reflects a greater deal of latitude between generations. Even though the children kneel and bow to their parents, they nevertheless controlled some of the aesthetic decisions in the wedding ceremony itself. For example, the bride and groom chose and ordered the traditional garb. Following some current trends to don Han-dynasty clothing in clubs, the couple selected traditional Chinese clothing from that era. Because the Han dynasty seldom had dyes, they opted against the more popular "Chinese" wedding color of red, and chose instead light beige.<sup>33</sup> In his later public presentations about the wedding ceremony, Zhu Jieren feels obliged to explain that it was the couple's decision to use imperial yellow, and even remarked that the couple had said that since China no longer has emperors, ordinary people should be empowered to use this color.<sup>34</sup> In our earlier interview with the couple, they referred to the color as light beige and emphasized that the color was more subdued and better reflected their personality.

33 The couple was outfitted by a social group that wears traditional Han dynasty clothing.

34 Zhu Jieren's comments when elaborating on his paper Zhu 2010b.

Thus, we could characterize their decision as concurring with Sima Guang's notion that weddings should be marked by solemnity rather than symbols of the bride's fertility and sexuality.<sup>35</sup> Zhu Jieren was fortunate that the young Zhu couple, especially the bride, appreciated and enjoyed these family traditions.

On a personal level, the couple felt that it was important to have a ceremony, especially the one that followed Zhu Xi's principles since those principles are so important to the groom's father. The groom underlined that he felt married from the time that he and Cathy had registered at the city's marriage bureau and exchanged rings there; nonetheless, he was very willing to have the public wedding rituals because of his respect for the extended families, as well as his desire to please his bride.<sup>36</sup> The bride insisted that a wedding was a rite of passage that helped the couple to articulate their views of themselves and their marriage, and to commit fully to their lives together. "The process of going through a ritual can give you strength and courage," the bride said, but she was surprised that the Chinese portion of the wedding was especially meaningful and important for her. Because standard wedding packages emphasize Westernized customs, her friends and guests also felt most intrigued and moved by the Chinese portion of the wedding. Nevertheless, John and Cathy supposed that most young Chinese couples today would still prefer a standard "Westernized" ceremony, rather than the modernized version of the Zhu family wedding because of the prevalence of Western aesthetics.<sup>37</sup> The Zhu couple placed greater emphasis on the Chinese rituals, but they also performed a Westernized ceremony following their Chinese ritualized wedding.

## Modern Context for the Romantic Western Ceremony of the Zhu Wedding

It is important to note that Zhu Jieren has contributed these innovations during a time of great flux and change for Chinese ceremonies. For example, UC Berkeley anthropologist Xin Liu 劉新 argues that after the 1980s economic reforms, many people have started to draw on "traditional" practices in their rites, even when these traditional forms have revolutionary meanings or "modern features."<sup>38</sup> The commercialization of contemporary rituals has further complicated standard vocabularies of symbolic meaning, since wedding companies offer packaged deals that draw from various traditions. In this context, Zhu Jieren's wedding ceremony follows contemporary trends to "invent tradition," but his reading of those symbols is more

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35 Ebrey 1991a, 82–83.

36 Personal interview, April 2, 2010, and emphasized when reiterated on July 10, 2010.

37 Personal interview, April 2, 2010.

38 Liu 2000, 81.

deeply rooted in the classical tradition. Because Chinese society itself is currently in flux, it is difficult to calculate and orchestrate a wedding, so much so that the traditional system of community-supported weddings has become almost untenable. Given that the economic boom has created a volatile set of social expectations about the public nature of weddings and community support for marriage, the Zhu wedding is also an attempt to reintroduce and standardize a shared set of expectations among a particular community.

The importance of weddings, as markers of social status and perhaps as expressions of self-identity,<sup>39</sup> can be indexed by their increasing cost in the reform era. In the late 1980s, Professor Tsai Wen-hui 蔡文輝 reported,

Perhaps the most revolutionary change we have seen in recent years as a result of the improving standard of living under the Four Modernizations program is the re-emergence of expensive weddings and dowry gifts.<sup>40</sup>

Although customs vary greatly according to region, it is considered “traditional” for the bride and groom’s families to exchange gifts at the time of their engagement, and to give gifts to the women and children attending the wedding. One of our Beijing informants said that the bride’s family receives an engagement gift of 1001 RMB or 10001 RMB (千裏桃一 *qianli taoyi*) because she is more special than “one in a thousand.” “*Yiqianjin*” is a euphemism for a girl, and “*yiwán*” is a traditional euphemism for a boy. The groom’s family receives an engagement gift of 999 RMB or 9999 RMB to signify “to remain for a long time without change” (*tianchang dijiu* 天長地久) because the word “nine” sounds like the word *jiu*, “for a long time.” According to Professor Tsai, a bridegroom’s cash gift increased from 800 *yuan* in 1983 to between 3,000 and 4,000 *yuan* in 1986; wedding expenses rose from an average 3,619 *yuan* in 1981 to 5,069 *yuan* in 1986.<sup>41</sup> Since the early reform era, the price of weddings has continued to rise exponentially. Two separate Shanghai informants estimate that wedding ceremonies usually cost as much as 5000 RMB per table, and it is not uncommon in Shanghai to invite as many as 500 guests. Another Shanghai informant notes that it is now difficult for young men to marry because they have trouble saving not only for a wedding but also for an apartment – necessary capital for making them eligible marriage partners.<sup>42</sup> The Chinese state frowns upon these excessive displays of wealth, but does not directly enforce sumptuary laws.<sup>43</sup> Thus,

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39 Maris Gillette (2000, 100) writes, “The lavishness or paucity of weddings influenced the social standing of the families involved.”

40 Tsai 1989, 239.

41 Tsai 1989, 239.

42 Personal interview, June 29, 2010. See also Jacobs 2010.

43 Gillette 2000, 104.

there is no external check to stabilize the increasingly lavish weddings of the post-reform era.

These large weddings often place extreme economic pressure on couples and their guests. Theoretically, cash gifts (given in *hongbao* 紅包) allow the community to share the costs of weddings and funerals. Depending on the estimated expense of a wedding, it is customary in large cities to give 600, or 800, or 1,000 RMB, so weddings are often a huge economic burden for guests. One Beijing informant needs to attend weddings because her husband's government job requires extensive contacts. In some months, she spends 4,000 RMB on weddings – which is more than her entire monthly income, including not only her salary (of less than 1,800 RMB), but also her lunch stipend (200 RMB), and money from her pension from a previous job (2,000 RMB). Thus, the couple sometimes has to devote the wife's entire income toward weddings and subsist on her husband's income alone. A university professor in Shanghai reported that he avoided weddings because “three weddings would consume an entire month's salary.” However, it is difficult and uncomfortable to reject invitations, especially given the extreme social pressure to help alleviate the cost of weddings. For example, a Beijing informant did not wish to go to an acquaintance's wedding, so she did not respond to the invitation. After multiple phone calls by the wedding party, including one on the day of the wedding, she and her husband attended. Despite such extensive efforts by the wedding organizers, there were three entirely empty tables at the banquet. These empty tables were served full meals, so their cost had to be covered by the wedding party. Thus, even though the cost of Chinese weddings should be compensated by gifts, the wedding party cannot be entirely sure about how to plan and calculate the *amount* of wedding gifts.

In response to this situation, many contemporary couples have chosen to simplify their weddings, even at the expense of social recognition and in disregard of traditional norms. One couple decided to have a *luohun* 裸婚, i.e., civil registration without wedding attire or formal ceremony. Because the government's marriage registry is now open on weekends, they did not have to excuse themselves from work in order to marry. Thus, this couple also decided to have a *yinhun* 陰婚, or “hidden marriage,” by not publically announcing their wedding and marriage to bosses and colleagues. They wear wedding rings only on weekends. It is not clear if these couples feel pressure at work to remain single, and/or if they want to refrain from pressuring their guests to contribute to wedding expenses. Even though their parents thus lost the opportunity to recoup some of their contributions to many weddings over the years, these and other parents expressed respect for the young couple's perspective and decision. Our informants emphasized that marriage is principally an affair between two people, rather than other members of society.

Thus, they disengage from the social aspect of marriage while mitigating the community investment in weddings.

In addition to such individualism, weddings can also assume political importance. In her article, “What’s in a dress?”, anthropologist Maris Gillette argues that Western-style Hui weddings offer young Muslim women, who are ordinarily forbidden from wearing provocative clothing, an opportunity to express their gender identity by wearing “‘immodest’ clothes.” In spite of the criticism of family, religious and state authorities,<sup>44</sup> these women choose “Western-style” weddings (rather than traditional Hui weddings) in order to employ a vocabulary of “modernity” that allowed them to “resist state categorization of them as ‘backward.’”<sup>45</sup> Gillette concludes,

The agency displayed by wedding gown consumers – in particular their ability to define and present their own identities without government intervention, and in the case of the Hui, against the government’s own perception – suggests that with the urban consumer revolution, China has taken a critical step toward the creation of a public sphere.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, the young Zhu couple has made a conscious effort to show honor and respect to their families during the wedding ceremony. They described the wedding as principally a “family affair,” and allocated only three of the twenty-eight tables for their own friends and teachers. However, they defined “family” to include many members of the Zhu Family Association, so a much “extended” version of their family attended the wedding. Even though some of these Association members may have had limited contact with the bride and groom, the couple tried to speak to each guest to make him or her feel especially welcomed. From their perspective, they tried their best to simplify the wedding, which they paid for themselves, giving the small residual “profit” to their parents. Even though the Zhu wedding was certainly large and expensive, the foremost goal of the wedding was not to seek or display wealth; rather, the couple wished to share their marriage with family members, and to introduce their families to each other.

Because they were committed to honoring the traditions that were prized by the father of the groom, they tried to simplify the “Western-style” portion of the wedding. They rejected much of the wedding planners’ standard package, including slicing cake, toasting with wine, and tossing the bouquet, rice, and garter; they limited their “Western-style” wedding to a short performance in which the bride’s mother handed her to the groom, who presented her with flowers. They also recited vows

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44 Sometimes religious and state authorities overlap. Gillette (2000, 103) cites the case of Liangxun, “the Hui vice-director of the Shaanxi Bureau for Religion and Nationality Affairs,” who criticized the weddings for their excessive expense.

45 Gillette 2000, 195.

46 Gillette 2000, 106.

and exchanged rings, and (at the suggestion of the wedding planners) later re-entered the hall walking together while holding a bowl containing a lit candle, which they extinguished together upon reaching their destination. They reported that they also took into consideration the demands of time, and tried to keep each section of the wedding within twenty minutes so that guests would not feel overwhelmed or bored.

Even though the couple stressed the aesthetic value of the Chinese portion of the wedding, they retained a “Western wedding” portion in order to pronounce their vows and to express their love in a romantic way. As in most modern East Asian weddings, the Western portion of the ceremony helps to express romantic love rather than Christian piety. In fact, the couple rejected Zhu Jieren’s suggestion that they kiss at the conclusion of the traditional Chinese ceremony, which implies a strict segregation in their minds (if not in Zhu Jieren’s) between the solemnity of the East Asian ritual and the romance of the Western one. The young couple borrows Western symbols of purity and chivalry, in terms of dress, flowers, kisses, unveiling the bride and the groom’s bowing at the knee. More specifically, the Western wedding used Chinese customs that had been adapted (rather than simply imported) from the West, such as including within the wedding a staged scene of the engagement. Thus (even though the institution of monogamy is rooted in the Western tradition), the West offers a vocabulary for affection, but China provides a structure for commitment.

## The Wedding’s Message to the Zhu Family Associations and Larger Audiences

The young couple wanted to host a Chinese-style wedding, in part, in order to honor Zhu Jieren’s involvement with the Zhu Xi Family Association. The ceremony was not simply a scholarly or even academic exercise in “reviving Confucianism,” but it was also a specific ritual for a particular family. In the last portion of the wedding ceremony, the father of the groom concretely articulated his vision of his family’s unique heritage and identity. Zhu Jieren not only represented his branch family, but he also projected the values and practices that he would like the entire Zhu clan to adopt. Because Zhu emphasizes marriage as a union of two families, he defines his family traditions as unique vis-à-vis not only the West, but also contemporary Chinese culture. Within that family tradition, the wedding ritual offers a means for cultivating personal virtue, filial duty, and civic responsibility and patriotic sentiment.

Zhu Jieren’s eighteen-minute speech helps to articulate the relationship forged between the couple and their families. Zhu Jieren begins his speech by thanking

Cathy's entire family – her father's Zhong family *and* her mother's Yuan family – for agreeing to let their precious daughter join his clan. He then congratulates his daughter-in-law on her discernment of her many options and excellent choice of a groom. Zhu further says that his greatest achievement was having his son Zhu Qi, but his biggest defeat was not having a daughter, so he must thank his son for bringing such an intelligent, beautiful, spirited, and insightful daughter into the family. His words are not only in keeping with the chivalry of the entire wedding, but they also indicate Zhu's emphasis on marriage as an opportunity to unite families. Accordingly, parents must agree to allow their children to marry, and thus are thanked and recognized for their contribution to the next generation; at the same time, the contributions of the young couple are also affirmed.

Zhu Jieren champions traditional Chinese family values and explicitly contrasts them to what he perceives in the West. He criticizes Western society for the prevalence of divorce, and proclaims the Zhu family rites as a model of mutual responsibility to encourage enduring affection and respect. Because the Zhu ritual emphasizes families in addition to individuals, Zhu Jieren notes, it is distinctive from Western weddings. He commented that Western marriages celebrate the sacred union between one individual man and one individual woman, beyond the bounds of outside criticism or policing. Because of this individual freedom, he complains, Western couples “can cohabit extramaritally, remain childless, or divorce casually.” Zhu champions Confucian traditions for preserving the family, by – he explicitly states – defending against those “Western ills and the ills of modernization.”<sup>47</sup> He thus critiques not only the West, but also those whom he perceives as following the West without considering what he regards as the larger family's and society's moral authority and needs.

By emphasizing Confucian traditional family morals, Zhu Jieren critiques many contemporary trends among young urban elites in China today. As we indicated above, largely in response to the financial and social burdens of marriage ceremonies in China today, many young urban elites and their parents currently view marriage as “an affair between individuals,” even to the point of “hiding” their marriage status from their bosses and co-workers. Some of our informants, including parents, expressed empathy for young couples making such decisions in response to the financial and social burdens of wedding practices in contemporary China. Nevertheless, Zhu emphasizes public celebrations as venues for uniting families as well as individuals in marriage. Quoting the *Mencius*, Zhu Jieren highlights the tradi-

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47 Zhu 2010a, 17 and 18. In his essay responding to our draft, Zhu Jieren further elaborated on his purposes for producing his modernized version of Zhu Xi's wedding rituals. See Zhu 2010b. Since that elaboration is *post facto* and unpublished, we will not further discuss its elaborations here.

tional notion that the most unfilial act is not to produce descendents;<sup>48</sup> he thereby expresses the joy of welcoming not only a daughter-in-law, but also future grandchildren. Thus, he criticizes Chinese young urban elites, who are often portrayed as wanting to remain childless in order to maintain their lifestyles. When he thanks his father and ancestors for passing down the special heritage of Zhu Xi, he places this young couple in that line of succession. Thus, he emphasizes the unique position of the Zhu lineage as inheritors of China's Confucian values and traditions.

In order to introduce his family to Cathy's, Zhu Jieren then begins to explain his family lineage and legacy. As both a description and a prescription, Zhu notes, "We are a very unusual family because when we have any money, we buy books and antiques." He states that he had only one request of Cathy, that she cultivate her personhood according to Zhu Xi's *Family Instructions* (*Zhuzi jiaxun* 朱子家訓) and conduct her wedding according to Zhu Xi's family rituals. Zhu proudly noted that Cathy enthusiastically embraced these requests, so he is confident that she will serve as a good daughter-in-law to the Zhu family. (In fact, of all the members of the Zhu Family Association whom we have thus far interviewed, Cathy expressed the greatest degree of clarity about and sympathy for Zhu Jieren's larger agenda. Despite attempts to attract the younger generations, the organization's demographics center on senior male patriarchs; given this fact, Cathy's exceptional empathy seems all the more striking.) Zhu Jieren likewise praises his mother for accepting Zhu family values and thanks his wife for supporting his activities in the Zhu Family Association. After recognizing the women in the family for their contributions, he then begins to eulogize his father. By praising these various individual relatives, Zhu celebrates the ways in which marriage and family bind them together.

During the wedding speech, Zhu Jieren explains the relationship between filial duty and civic patriotism in his family. His speech contains a eulogy for his father, who had passed away three years earlier. His father's dying words were "Taiwan," which Zhu Jieren interprets as a last request to be notified once Taiwan returns to the China Mainland. To underscore his point, Zhu alludes to the Southern Song poet most famous for zeal to reunify China, Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210), whose dying request was that his sons come to his grave to report the reunification of China. Thus, in keeping with the spirit of the libations in the wedding ceremony, Zhu presents the ancestors as present beings with vested interests in their descendents, so he encourages all members of the audience to report the news of reunification to their ancestors as well. Zhu further claimed that it was only when he heard about his father's dying words that he finally understood him – the father's reasons for risking his life to go to northern Jiangsu in order to seek shelter from the Communist New Fourth Army, and the father's reasons (during the Cultural Revolution) for

48 *Mencius* 孟子, chapter "Li Lou" 離婁上.

allowing three of his four children to go to Heilongjiang and Jilin to develop those regions, etc. Furthermore, Zhu can see the ways in which this legacy has impacted both him and his son in terms of their strong commitment to education and their patriotic sentiment for China. Zhu Jieren praises his son for returning to his ancestral land to teach at Jiaotong University after receiving a Ph.D. in the United States, instead of profiting from work abroad. Zhu was moved by both his father's and his son's patriotism and civic responsibility, because they embody Zhu Xi's philosophy and values.

Zhu Jieren implicitly rectifies his father's memory, given his father's complex political history. Although he mentions that his father had taken extreme risks to go to northern Jiangsu to submit to the New Fourth Army, Jieren does not explain why his father needed to brave such dangers. Because the father was educated, he had been drafted to be a military recruiter for the Guomindang shortly before its army withdrew from his home area of southern Jiangsu, and was therefore always an object of suspicion by the CCP. Given the importance of public eulogies for defining not only the life of the deceased, but also its legacy for the descendants in China, it is striking that Zhu Jieren uses this opportunity to articulate the memory of his father. His activities in the Zhu Family Association also help to rehabilitate the memory of Zhu Xi, which was tarnished by twentieth-century critiques, especially during the New Culture Movement after 1915 and the Cultural Revolution's attacks on Confucianism in the 1970s. During the Cultural Revolution, Zhu Xi was criticized for lack of patriotism and for failing to support wars to liberate lost territory; however, except during the Cultural Revolution period, most scholars in China have acknowledged that Zhu Xi did support national unification, albeit not as fervently or actively as some Southern Song war hawks.<sup>49</sup> Even though Zhu Jieren defensively stresses his own stance on national unification, it is the ethical philosophy (rather than the specific politics) of Zhu Xi that helps to conceptualize and justify family responsibility, civic duty and patriotic commitment.

Beyond the wedding day, Zhu Jieren also promoted the wedding ceremony within the Zhu Family Association. At an Association meeting in Malaysia, for example, he played the CD video-recording of his son's wedding, which he reported had elicited considerable interest and favorable response. Furthermore, the Zhu Family Association's journal reproduced the entire script of the wedding ceremony, as well as Zhu Jieren's speech. The journal prefaced the text by citing the MC, who said that he had never heard a "toast" that lasted for eighteen minutes and was amazed that the guests had listened so attentively and were obviously very moved by Zhu's words. The editors further noted that the journal was making the

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49 See especially Yang Rongguo (1975), and the counter argument by Zhu Ruixi (July 1978), pp. 72–77. See also the discussion in the last chapter of Tillman 1982.

text accessible to the entire Zhu family clan for thought and reflection. The editors added that the liturgy was “also worthy of even more families and people to reflect upon.”<sup>50</sup> In addition to the classical quotations in the wedding ceremony, Zhu Jieren’s text also provides a translation of these quotations into modern Chinese. Even though one might say that some of these translations could be a little more colloquial, he has already taken a major step in providing common access to the key quotations of the classical wedding ceremony. In meetings of the Zhu Family Association, members sometimes ceremoniously in unison read Zhu Xi’s Family Instructions, which are reprinted with modern translations on multiple flyers, cards and objects. At the Zhu Family Association’s July 2010 conference in Kuala Lumpur, its leaders dedicated a publicly displayed stone inscription of the Family Instructions in Chinese and English; moreover, they held a competition for school children to memorize and write the Family Instructions in Chinese. Thus, the Zhu Family Association is attempting to render the classical tradition accessible to everyone in the organization and beyond.

Despite the public and moralistic nature of the speech, there is a surprisingly abrupt change in tone at the end. Concluding, he addresses his son directly:

Since you are bringing Cathy into the family as your wife, you need to fulfill your responsibility to her, devotedly loving and protecting her, just like part of your own life. On this point, do not take your father as a model; your father failed as a husband because he didn’t take adequate care of your mother. So definitely don’t be like your father, or else you will face a lifetime of regret.<sup>51</sup>

Although everyone at the wedding would know that John’s mother died when he was young, the father’s self-criticism shows how heavily it still weighs on his heart. This sharp self-criticism also helps to explain his warmth in welcoming and cherishing the women in the family. Furthermore, his emotional appeal helps indicate that Zhu genuinely feels a profoundly personal connection to the principles of self-cultivation and filial piety.

Overall, Zhu Jieren’s speech offers a thoughtful statement on the meaning of marriage as the bedrock for the relationships that connect an individual couple to the clan, the ancestors, society and the nation through a complex set of filial and civic duties. He cites Zhu Xi’s essentially direct quotation from the ancient ritual classics:

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50 Zhu 2010a, 16.

51 Zhu 2010a, 18.

“Marriage is for the good relations of two surnames that are joined. Above, it allows one to serve the ancestral temple; below, it provides for the continuation of descendants.”<sup>52</sup>

Extending from this passage, Zhu Jieren asserts that a wedding is an affair of the family, the clan, the society, and ultimately the whole country. In his view, weddings teach people that they have a responsibility, not only to their own parents, but also to the larger family, the entire society, and to nature; thus, the couple report to their ancestors, bow to their parents, and pay their respects to the Heavens and the Earth. Much like the steps of the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), there are thus connections between the individual couple, the family, the society and the world. This parallelism (from individuals to family to ancestors to society and on to the Chinese world) is also reinforced through the mirrored organizational structure of the first part of Zhu Jieren’s speech about marriage and the second part about his family legacy. As in the *Great Learning*, Zhu Jieren tries to accomplish many goals by integrating the steps from individual to society. Not only does he want to introduce one family to another, but he also wants to unite the past with the present, and to tie the individual couple with the national society. Given the instability of social expectations about the public nature of marriage in contemporary China, Zhu Jieren aims for nothing less than rebuilding the Confucian foundation for the creation of a civil society in China. In short, Zhu Jieren’s ambition here is no less than the one expressed in the Preface to the *Zhuzi jiali*. There, Zhu Xi expressed the hope of putting the rituals into practice, so that “we might possibly again see the way the ancients ‘cultivated themselves and regulated their families,’” and thus the ritual manual might “make a small contribution to the state’s effort to transform and lead the people.”<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

Since Chinese intellectuals such as Yan Fu 嚴復 (1853–1921) and Chen Huanzhang 陳煥章 (1881–1933) failed in their attempts to propagate a “state religion of Confucianism” in the early twentieth century,<sup>54</sup> many scholars have pointed out the inherent problems of “reviving Confucianism.” Most trenchantly, Joseph Levenson (1920–1969) argued that after the modern turn, allusions to the past become merely “traditionalistic” rather than purely “traditional.” In other words, modern Chinese began to value Confucianism because it was Chinese (“*meum*”) rather than because

52 Zhu 2010a, 17; see Ebrey 1991a, 55, using Legge, *Chinese Classics*, vol. 2, 428.

53 *Zhuzi jiali*, Preface, 873; Zhu 2010a, 20; see Ebrey 1991a, 4. Of course, the quotation about cultivating themselves and regulating their families is from the *Great Learning*.

54 For Hoyt Tillman’s views, see especially Tillman 2003 and 2008.

it was true (*“verum”*). Once Confucianism became a cultural artifact, there was no way to revive it without reinventing it, thus reifying an already moribund past.<sup>55</sup> Contemporary state efforts to honor Confucius (e.g., in the opening ceremony at the 2008 Olympics) may also appear utilitarian rather than genuine. Yet, among contemporary efforts to revitalize Confucianism, Zhu Jieren’s efforts seem especially significant in terms of the focus on the particular legacy of Zhu Xi, in terms of the emphasis on the family as a cornerstone of contemporary society, and in terms of the use of rituals as a venue to revive tradition.

Zhu Jieren tries to “revive Confucianism” or to relay the Confucian foundation of Chinese society by redefining his own particular family lineage and legacy. He does not claim to completely rectify the entire tradition, but simply to reintroduce aesthetic and moral values. We think that he is perceptive in focusing on family rituals as his starting point. Historically, the family was very important for the vitality of the Confucian tradition. For instance, Confucianism was for the first time instituted as state orthodoxy in 136 B.C.E. by the Han dynasty; however, as the dynasty eventually became increasingly inept at solving problems in China’s polity and society, Confucianism itself lost legitimacy by the end of the Han, and China fell into division and disorder. During the period of disunity from the late Han to the restoration of the empire in the Sui and Tang, what enabled Confucianism to survive was (we would suggest) primarily its close association with Chinese family rituals because family values provided a basis for society’s (particularly the aristocratic clans’) cohesion and order. Zhu Xi reformed family rituals in an effort to strengthen the vitality of Confucianism through the institution of the family. Likewise, Zhu Jieren is trying to rebuild the Confucian foundation of the family through these rituals; however, it is because he sees not only Confucianism, but also more importantly, the Chinese family, as in crisis.

Although Zhu Jieren’s critique of contemporary society is based on widely noted problems, he employs particular means of addressing the issue of individual alienation from the traditional Chinese family and society. Government officials and other individuals have commented on the threat of “Western ills” to modern Chinese society, but they have tried to combat “spiritual pollution” through political campaigns and censorship. Not only is the Zhu Family Association a grass-roots organization, but Zhu Jieren’s main tools for strengthening social civility are to promote a shared vocabulary of mutually intelligible etiquette and decorum. He thus promotes the “public” nature of weddings and marriages in a social environment in which financial pressures tend to alienate or separate individuals from the traditional wedding customs of the larger society. Ultimately, Zhu Jieren does not only want to campaign against the “spiritual pollution” of “Western ills,” but he

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55 Levenson 1968.

wants even more to reconnect generations with their ancestors and their society through hierarchical respect. Because Zhu Jieren believes that Confucianism *is* (and not just *ought to be*) the foundation of the Chinese family, he assumes that the fate of the family as an institution and its role in society is directly tied to the fate of Confucian practices of self-cultivation. If Confucian rituals become meaningful again (according to this line of thinking), then they will no longer be moribund, and they will breathe new life into the institution of the traditional Confucian family, which would again serve as a bridge between individual and society.

As Zhu Jieren revitalizes ritual practice for the family and society, the tradition becomes “alive” again. On one side of a contemporary “debate,” some scholars, such as Professor Tu Wei-ming 杜維明, speak of Confucianism largely as an intellectual tradition that can be revived through textual study. On the other side, Professors Yu Yingshi 余英時 and Zheng Jiadong 鄭家棟 are critical of overly abstract and reified efforts by intellectuals to revive Confucianism. According to these latter two scholars, Confucianism cannot be revived since it is no longer a lived practice; or in Professor Yu’s imagery, Confucianism is likened to a “wandering ghost” (or “lost soul”) who grows hungry due to its neglect by the living descendants.<sup>56</sup> Zhu Jieren is aware of this “debate” among major contemporary scholars; moreover, his response is to focus on ritual practice. And as Cathy’s reflections clearly indicate, ritual practice, however special and exceptional, is a form of living practice that allows participants to reconnect on an emotional level to traditional aesthetics. These traditional aesthetics, ritual gestures, and physical movements offer a venue for expressing and extending textual liturgy into social practice, and therefore actually molding the hearts and behaviors of people as they interact with one another. It is Zhu Jieren’s hope that, as in the *Great Learning*, these social interactions will build a foundation that integrates the individual with society.

Although Zhu Jieren, like many other Chinese, frames marital trends as a part of the moral decay of contemporary Chinese society, there are also political, institutional and economic factors involved in contributing to these trends. Zhu Jieren admits that Zhu Xi’s *zong* family system has become irrelevant in a country in which most families have at most only one son. Indeed, we might add that young couples may define “family” in terms of their small, three-person households rather than their larger extended families; thus, the tendency to register for a marriage license, accompanied only by parents, may in fact reflect China’s current family structure, in which nuclear families constitute narrow branches that are increasingly dispersed. “Hidden weddings” might simply be a manifestation of this atomization.

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56 Yu 1997, 32. Yu Yingshi’s point was picked up as the title in Makeham 2008. See also Zheng 1997, 6, 51–52, 87; and also Zheng 2001, 6, 7, 100–101, 154, 155. Thanks to Professor Makeham for bringing Zheng’s work to our attention.

In addition, social conservatives complain about the pressure some brides' families put on the groom to adopt their surname. However, this practice is rooted in the traditional custom of "the groom marrying in" (*ru zhui* 入贅) and is invigorated by the one-child policy, which has left many families with no other way to fulfill the filial admonition to pass down their surname. Moreover, because of the injunction to bear only one child, there also may be fewer perceived advantages to marrying early, without much dating experience. Furthermore, the economic costs of weddings and marriages may encourage some couples to experiment with new relationship structures. Thus, it may be frugality, rather than opulence, that contributes to some forms of non-traditional relationships in China today. Yet mainstream Chinese ethicists have long assumed an inverse relationship between economic privilege and social morality, and contemporary China struggles with a desire to promote both in its hopes to maintain social and political stability. The fact that so many continue to think in such traditional terms, while tending to overlook some of the consequences of state policies, reveals the degree to which some trends in Chinese intellectual thought have continued to this day. Thus, even though Zhu Jieren sees Confucian morality as a practical device to solve social problems, it may in fact really function as a set of strongly held traditional beliefs.

Despite Levenson's apt critique of latter-day Confucianism, Zhu Jieren clearly values Confucian principles because he regards them not only as his own personally inherited tradition, but also as fundamentally true and useful. Given that wedding companies and couples are free to "reinvent tradition" or to adapt foreign customs, it would be unfair to criticize Zhu Jieren for usurping authority to modernize tradition, especially when he follows a precedent offered by Zhu Xi himself. Beyond rearticulating his own family lineage, he also organized and performed these public ceremonies in a profoundly personal way, which has resonated with his daughter-in-law and their guests. Zhu Jieren makes this effort because he clearly sees and articulates a central pillar for reconstructing Confucianism.

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