



A Brief Discussion on Confucius' Inheritance and Development of Zhou Rites in *The Analects of Confucius*

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Abstract

Through the in-depth analysis of *The Analects of Confucius*, this paper discusses how Confucius inherited and developed the Zhou Rites. Firstly, this paper points out that Confucius lived in a time when rites were broken and music was broken. He regarded the restoration and promotion of Zhou Rites as an important way to rebuild social order. This paper then expounds on the inheritance of Zhou Rites in *The Analects of Confucius*, which is mainly manifested in the importance of etiquette norms, the maintenance of social order and the emphasis on traditional moral values. However, Confucius did not simply reproduce the Zhou Rites, but innovatively developed them according to the social reality at that time. Confucius put forward the thought of "courtesy to benevolence", emphasizing the unity of internal moral cultivation and external etiquette practice, integrating the concept of "benevolence" into etiquette, making it more humanized and modern. In addition, Confucius also expanded the scope of application of Li, from national politics to daily life, all reflecting the spirit of Li. Finally, this paper points out that these thoughts of Confucius not only enriched the connotation of Zhou Rites, but also laid a solid foundation for the etiquette culture and moral education of later generations in China. Through the study of this paper, we can not only understand Confucius' inheritance and development of Zhou Rites more deeply, but also understand the vitality and value of traditional culture in modern society.

Subject Areas

Culture

Keywords

Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, The Rites of Zhou, To Inherit, Develop

1. Introduction

With the establishment and consolidation of the Western Zhou, the ritual and music system implemented by the Duke of Zhou was gradually formed and perfected. The formation and perfection of the Zhou ritual system played an important role in the economic, political and cultural construction of the Western Zhou society [1]. The Zhou Dynasty was not only a period of transition from slavery to feudalism, but also the origin of the idea of “great unity”. During this period, the Zhou dynasty experienced many destructive blows, but none of them completely destroyed it, fundamentally because of the existence of the Zhou Rites.

The Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, in which Confucius was born, was a time when the rites and music of the Zhou dynasty were in tatters. Born into an aristocratic family in the state of Lu, Confucius was in a position to study rites, music, archery, mathematics, calligraphy, and the imperial court from an early age, and ultimately developed systematic insights into the system of rites and music. It was based on these insights that Confucius deplored the current social reality of the breakdown of rites and music, and therefore strongly advocated the “restoration of rites by self-restraint”, in the hope of establishing a stable social order through the “restoration of rites”.

Confucius’ inheritance of the Zhou Rites in the Analects is reflected in his emphasis on the concept of rites and his recognition of their moralizing function, and in his development of the Zhou Rites by incorporating “benevolence and righteousness” into them and emphasizing their role in social reconciliation [2]. In the Analects, Confucius mentions “rites” many times, and he believes that rites are an important factor in maintaining social order and harmony. Confucius believed that the Zhou Rites were not just superficial rituals and rules, but also a tool for moral education. By following the Zhou rituals, people could develop good moral qualities such as respect for others, harmony, and the maintenance of social order. Although Confucius valued the Zhou Rites, he did not blindly worship the ancient ritual system. While he inherited the Zhou rituals, he also developed and adapted them appropriately. For example, he incorporated the core value of “benevolence” into his understanding of the rites, emphasizing the inner spirit of the rites, *i.e.* “benevolence and unity of rites”. In addition, Confucius also put forward the idea that “harmony is the most important thing in the use of rites”, which indicates that he hoped to re-establish a well-organized social system through the Zhou Rites, and to harmonize interpersonal relationships through the rites.

In general, on the basis of inheriting the Zhou Rites, Confucius, by adding the idea of “benevolence and righteousness”, gave the Rites a more profound moral significance, making them not only formal norms, but also moral requirements in connotation. These ideas have had a profound impact on later generations and have become an indispensable part of traditional Chinese culture.

2. The Rites and the Zhou Rites

1) About Rites

Rites come from witchcraft. Mr. Li Zehou, in his book *From Witchcraft to History, Explaining Rites to Benevolence*, focuses on his basic views on the “tradition of witchcraft and history” (the rationalization of witchcraft): first, “from witchcraft to rites”. The Duke of Zhou creatively transformed traditional witchcraft activities into a whole set of religious-political-ethical institutions in the world of people, giving sanctity to social life under the ritual system. Secondly, “the rituals were released and returned to benevolence”. Confucius creatively transformed this system of rituals into an inner root of human nature, and created the “Way of the Sage within and the King without”, in which “the cultivation of one’s own body is the basis”. This “Inner Sage and Outer King” is precisely the comprehensive rationalization of the characteristics of the ancient witch ruler to dominate the tribe with his own divine magic. It was the efforts of Zhou and Kong that enabled the Chinese tradition to gain a path of practical rationality in terms of both humanism and human nature at a fairly early age.

Rituals are not first and foremost political hierarchies, but derive from the differences between individuals and their relationship to their surroundings, the so-called “rituals of difference” [3]. Each person has a different identity in different occasions: a child in front of his parents, a parent in front of his children, a student in front of his teacher, an elder in front of his juniors, a subordinate in front of his leader, an A in front of a B, and so on. Under various occasions, due to changes in the relationship between people, it is necessary to convert different roles and identities, according to the local conditions, to different people to take different words and behaviors is appropriate, in order to really deal with the relationship between the people around. Recognize the objective existence of differences between people, in fact, is also a kind of respect for the independence of the individual, precisely the necessity of different individuals. This is why “otherness” and “difference” are prominent features of the rite.

The Zhou people inherited the legacy of the Shang Dynasty, making rites and music, and forming a standardized system of rituals. The Zhou rituals are essentially strict hierarchical relationships, but they aim at harmony and order, and the “benevolence” and “righteousness” they emphasize are the basic guidelines for dealing with social relations. The Zhou advocated the “rule of virtue”, replacing natural religion with ethical indoctrination and embarking on the path of revering virtue and respecting rites; establishing the great feudal system of “the son of heaven establishing the state and the vassals establishing their families”; and taking patriarchy as the link to establish a social system of family and state co-structuring. The ritual and music system eventually formed in the Western Zhou Dynasty governed people’s behavior and determined many qualities of Chinese culture.

2) About the Zhou Rites

The Rites of Zhou, one of the Confucian classics and thirteen sutras, is the theoretical form of the ritual and music culture of the ancient Chinese nation, which provides the most authoritative explanation and record of rituals and rites, and

has had the most far-reaching influence on the ritual system of successive generations. The core contents of the Rites of the Zhou are: humanism, order by rites, ruling the country by virtue, harmony by music, self-improvement, loyalty and selflessness, appointing the wise and capable, giving precedence to courtesy, and respecting the old and loving the young. The core connotations of these are the national spirit of self-improvement, the noble quality of loyalty and selflessness, the social criterion of being human-centered, the way of employing the wise and capable, and the ethic of giving precedence to courtesy, which can be said to be the political program for the establishment of the state of the Zhou Dynasty. In the book of Zhou Rites, various systems were set out in detail and clearly, which not only delineated the social classes of the time, but also established the legitimate status of the Zhou Tienzi and emphasized his authority.

The Zhou ritual is an ancient Chinese ritual system, which is mainly embodied in the following aspects: First, the order of respect: the Zhou ritual emphasizes the difference between respect for the inferior and the superior, and the order of the superior and the inferior. In the family, children should respect their parents, and younger brothers should respect their older brothers; in society, subjects should respect the monarch, and subordinates should respect their superiors. This orderly etiquette reflects the basic spirit of the Zhou Rites. Secondly, the etiquette is strict: the Zhou Rites stipulate the etiquette norms for various occasions, such as sacrifices, weddings and funerals, banquets and other occasions have strict etiquette requirements. These etiquette norms are aimed at maintaining social order, reinforcing moral values and reflecting people's pursuit of a better life. Thirdly, etiquette comes first: the Zhou Rites emphasize the importance of etiquette and believe that etiquette is the foundation of the state and the way to rule the world. The Zhou Rites require people to follow the rules of etiquette in their daily lives, treating others with etiquette and teaching their children with etiquette, so as to achieve the purpose of cultivating one's moral character, harmonizing one's family, ruling the country, and pacifying the world. Fourthly, rites and music complement each other: the Zhou Rites believe that rites and music complement each other; rites are used to regulate people's behavior, while music is used to harmonize people's emotions. In the Zhou Dynasty, the education of rites and music is very important. Through learning rites and music, people can cultivate good morals and aesthetic interests. Fifthly, courtesy is precious: the Zhou ritual emphasizes the spirit of courtesy and considers courtesy to be a virtue. In the Zhou Dynasty, people should respect each other and be humble to each other in their daily interactions, treating people with courtesy and getting along with each other with courtesy, so as to achieve the purpose of harmonious coexistence. In conclusion, the Zhou Rites is an important ceremonial system in ancient China, which embodies the basic spirit of orderliness of respect and inferiority, strict etiquette, rites and teachings as the first priority, rites and music complement each other, and etiquette and concessions as the most valuable, and has had a far-reaching influence on the moral concepts and behavioral norms of the ancient Chinese society.

3. Inheritance of Zhou Rites in *The Analects of Confucius*

Confucius' inheritance of the Zhou Rites is manifested in historical continuity: Confucius believed that history cannot be cut off, and that a later dynasty must necessarily inherit the culture and system of the previous one. He thoroughly studied the ritual systems of the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, and believed that the Zhou Rites were revised and perfected on the basis of the rites of the Xia and Shang dynasties. Completeness of the ritual system: The Zhou Rites, on the basis of the inheritance of the Xia and Shang dynasties, were innovated and developed to form a complete and elaborate ritual system and cultural code. Confucius advocated following the Zhou Rites because he believed that the Zhou Rites' ritual and music system artifacts were complete and flourishing. The combination of benevolence and propriety: In Confucius' thought system, "propriety" occupies an important position. In constructing his system of thought, he based himself on ren and focused on ritual. Confucius emphasized the inner spirit of benevolence, while also focusing on the outer form of rites. The two complement each other, reflecting the inheritance and development of the spirit of the Zhou Rites. Inheritance and development: Although Confucius advocated compliance with the Zhou Rites, he did not simply accept them in their entirety; rather, he inherited them while at the same time making some gains and losses. On the basis of retaining the essence of the Zhou Rites, he made appropriate adjustments and developments according to the needs of the times.

1) Inner Obedience to the Rites of Zhou

The ancient man whom Confucius most admired was the Duke of Zhou, whose work, according to him, was in "making rites and music". The system of rites and music can be said to be a kind of law of existence, a kind of display of the regularization of human morality, so it pays great attention to order. Order means that there is a certain position between the front and back, and the ritual without order cannot be considered as a ritual. It is on the basis of this understanding that Confucius attached great importance to rituals and music, believing that there is a difference between the upper and lower levels of rituals, which should not be exceeded. For example, in *The Analects of Confucius*, Confucius said, "Eight rows of rows of dancers in the court, can be tolerated, who can not be tolerated?". The Ji clan, in the position of a great doctor, performed the rites of the Son of Heaven, which was an act of usurpation. Dance column size, no practical impact, on the surface of the matter is very small, will not cause the king of Zhou and the vassals between the status of the problem, but Confucius seems to be very big, because the ritual is only ritual, but from the root of the human heart, the human heart is a mess, then the rituals and music collapse, the world is also a big mess. Confucius believed that rites were the order of society and could not be changed at will. The fact that Confucius vigorously defended the rites and honored the order reflects Confucius's compliance with and adherence to the Zhou Rites from the bottom of his heart.

2) Abiding by the Zhou Rites in Word and Deed

Confucius' respect for the Zhou rituals is not only reflected in his inner compliance,

but also in his adherence to the rituals in words and deeds. Yan Hui was one of Confucius' favorite students. According to *The Analects of Confucius*, Yan Yuan died, and Confucius said, "Yelp! Heaven is mourning for you! Heaven is mourning you!". From this, we can see that the death of Yan Yuan made Confucius extremely sad, even to the point of losing his temper. However, Confucius was opposed to his disciple's move to bury Yan Yuan, saying, "Hui also regarded Yu as his father, but I shall not regard him as my son. It is not me, but the two or three sons of the husband". This is because, according to the provisions of the rites, Confucius could not bury Yan Yuan in the same way as he buried his own son. From this incident, we can see that Confucius would not do anything against the rites and laws just because he was emotionally attached to it, and even if he deplored Yan Hui, he still had to abide by the rites of Zhou in his words and deeds [4]. Anyone has a good reason to find a hundred excuses for overstepping the norms of etiquette, but Confucius never overstepped the norms of etiquette in his words and deeds, and this shows the greatness of Confucius!

According to *The Analects of Confucius*, Confucius believed that funeral and burial should be based on mourning and sincerity, and that Yan Yuan's family was poor, so he should have been buried according to his ability, and a thick funeral would have violated the frugality of the rites; and Yan Yuan was poor and simple during his life, and had always behaved according to the rites, and a thick funeral after his death would have been contrary to his original intention. Confucius has always advocated the use of rituals, separating personal feelings from social rituals very clearly [5]. He opposed any behavior that exceeded the rites and firmly upheld the sanctity of the rites. We can see Confucius' adherence to rites in all his words and deeds.

3) Conducting Politics and Practicing the Rites of Zhou

Confucius was not only a great thinker and educator, but also a politician. The political thought of Confucius was to advocate the rule of virtue and the rule of rites. According to *The Analects of Confucius*, Confucius said, "To govern with virtue is like the North Star, which resides in its place and is shared by all the stars". Confucius discusses the main moralization of politics, the big picture and the big events are on the moral level, and advocates that those in charge of the government should be a model for the people of the country in terms of character and virtue, which is called the rule of virtue. According to Confucius, when the leader of the state puts the important virtues in place, the state government will naturally be on track.

The most important political philosophy of Confucius is to rule the country with propriety, which can be seen everywhere in the Analects. *The Analects of Confucius*, which explains the idea of "governing the country with propriety", is the most concise summary of Confucius' idea of governance by propriety. According to the first chapter of Lun Yu, Zi said, "The first to advance in the rites and music, the savage; the second to advance in the rites and music, the gentleman [6]. If I use it, then I will advance from the advanced". Confucius believes that the later

generation of too much false text, not as simple and lovely as the predecessors, so do the rituals would rather be as simple and unwritten as the predecessors, not as literate as the later generation, as can be clearly seen from this sentence, Confucius is a reverence for the Zhou rituals.

Confucius advocated to follow the system of King Wen and King Wu of Zhou, and to govern the country with rites and music. Confucius believed that to establish oneself and rule a country, one must have rituals, so there are 74 places in the book *Analects* to elaborate on the connotation of rituals. Confucius said, “To rule a country with etiquette, and to rule a country without etiquette, is like plowing without ploughing”, which means that etiquette is the law of governing a country, just as important as scales, ropes and ink, and rules; to rule a country without etiquette is like plowing a country without ploughing.

4. Conclusions

From the *Analects*, it can be seen that Confucius inherited the Zhou Rites, but this inheritance is not a simple inheritance, but an inheritance of the Zhou Rites, which has been abandoned. In *The Analects of Confucius*, the rebellion of Gong Shan Fu was a real transgression of the ritual system, but Confucius did not care about it, because Confucius believed that if he could revive the Tao, it did not matter if the rituals, as a form, were transgressed. The relationship between Confucius and the Zhou Rites is that firstly, the collapse of the rites and the destruction of the music caused Confucius’ dissatisfaction with the status quo, and secondly, Confucius tried to rebuild the rites and music system, and then he thought about the Zhou Rites in a new way, and then he gave the rites a new spiritual connotation, and finally, a new rite based on benevolence was created.

The *Analects* is one of the most important texts in the Confucian canon, and is the most direct material for the study of Confucius’ thought. It is due to the formation and dissemination of the *Analects* that Confucius is credited with the transmission and development of the Zhou ritual. It must be seen that Confucius’s thought on Zhou Rites, whether in ancient times or in modern times, has been a spiritual bond running through Chinese civilization, playing an important role in the development of civilization in all periods of time, and an important source of thought for the revival of a state of etiquette in contemporary China.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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