

From “Rites, Reason” to “Rites, Public Heart”: Xu Heng’s Reconstruction of Confucian Rites Ontology

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 28 July 2025

Accepted: 23 September 2025

Published Online: 30 September 2025

Keywords:

Xu Heng

Confucianism

Ritualism

Ontology

ABSTRACT

Xu Heng, as an important representative of Yuan dynasty science, creatively transformed the ontology of Confucian etiquette from the abstract “Divine Principle” to the concrete “Public Heart” on the basis of the inheritance of “Ritual is also Reason” from Cheng Zhu’s science. The public mind”. This paper analyzes Xu Heng’s critical inheritance of Zhu Xi’s theory of “reason”, the practical transformation of the core of Confucianism and Mencius’ etiquette, and the political practice of his ontology of “public mind”, revealing how Xu Heng, through the “heart with all the reason”, “seeks in return for the truth”, “seeks in return for the truth”, “seeks in return for the truth”, and “seeks in return for the truth”. It reveals how Xu Heng, through propositions such as “the heart has many reasons” and “seeking the heart”, pushed Confucian ritualism from philosophical discourse to political governance, and ultimately constructed a system of rituals adapted to the Yuan dynasty’s multi-ethnic regime.

I. Theoretical Origin: The Tradition and Limitation of the Science of “Rites, Reason”

1.1 The Philosophical Connotation of Zhu Xi’s “Rites are also Reasons

Zhu Xi admired Cheng Yi’s interpretation of “Ritual is also rationality,” believing that Cheng Yi elevated ritual to the same status as the Divine Principle and provided an ontological basis for ritual. However, Zhu Xi consolidated Cheng Yi’s argument in the Essence of the Lunar Memorial, “If we restore the rites, then the world will call us benevolent, and it will not take more than a day. Or ask: how is it benevolence to restore propriety to oneself? He said, “If it is not a matter of propriety, it is a matter

of selfishness, and if it is a matter of selfishness, how can one be benevolent? All people must be to restrain their own private, only when the ritual, only then is the place of benevolence. Mr. Chang’s handwriting changed the cloud: Kegel to return to the rites for benevolence, that is to say, the exhaustion of their own selfishness, all return to the rites, is benevolence also.^① “ Adjusting the statement to better fit the scripture, changing “only when the rites” to “all return to the rites”, emphasizing the inseparability of rites and reason. Zhu Xi further combined “rites” with “heavenly principles”, proposing that “rites are the rules of heavenly principles and the ceremonial rules of human

^① (Song) Zhu Xi, “Essentials of the Analects and Mencius,” Essentials of the Analects, Volume 6, Part II, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 3.

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beings.^① “Rites, is the formation of the laws of nature of the ritual system, is the human social activities of the law of conduct, that the rites are in line with the Tao and the behavioral norms of the matter. However, its “reason” more point to the abstract ontology, although the “reason” interpretation of the “ritual”, but did not break through the ethical level, the lack of practical path, which Zhu Xi, although he emphasized that Although Zhu Xi emphasized the concept of “to make things simple”, he did not make clear how to transform “reason” into a concrete political system or means of social governance.

1.2 Xu Heng’s Critical Inheritance of “Reason” Theory

Xu Heng recognized the universality of “reason”, but pointed out its limitations in “Reading the Four Books”: “The reason for everything in heaven and earth is in the heart. Zhu Zi said, “To know the heart is to know the heart, and to know the nature is to know the nature of things. Therefore, if you know the nature of the heart, you will have no doubt in the world’s words. However, so the heart to know the nature of the person, all because of the words of the Ming sages and get, and then to be the world’s words, then the right and wrong are all clear.^② “The proposed reasoning is contained in the heart, to achieve the heart to know the nature, then for the world’s speech will have no doubt. He proposed “the heart has many reasons” through the “Lusai Remaining Book”, and believed that “reason” is not an abstract existence outside the heart, but a moral code internalized in the heart. Xu Heng distinguishes between “honoring virtue” and “learning by the Way” by saying, “Therefore, a gentleman honors virtue and learns by the Way. Respect means to hold respectfully. Virtue is the righteousness that man receives from Heaven. Dao is the way. To ask about learning is to inquire and lecture. respect virtue, so to store the mind and the greatness of the Tao. Dao ask learning, so Zhi Zhi Zhi and exhaust the Tao body of fine. These two pieces are the big program of cultivating virtue and condensing Tao.^③ “That Zhu Xi “Dao Qiao Xue” has some branch, and then advocate “respect virtue and Dao Qiao Xue”, emphasizing the heart as the main, the “reason” into an operational “The public mind”.

① (Song) Zhu Xi, Compiler of “The Collected Works of Hui’an,” Volume 60, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 30.

② (Yuan) Xu Qian, “Readings on the Four Books,” Readings on Mencius, Volume 1, “Gongsun Chou I,” Four-Part Collection, Continuation Edition, Jingyuan Edition, p. 16.

③ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 5, Zhongyong Zhijie, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 63.

Reconstructing the Path: The Ontological Transformation from “Reason” to “Public Heart

2.1 The Proposal of “Public Heart” as the Ontology of Ritualism

Xu Heng, in Luzhai Zhaoshu (The Remains of Lu-zhai), explicitly stated that “the public is the way for people to be benevolent.^④ “Xu Heng, in Lu Zhai’s Posthumous Writings, clearly stated that “the public heart is the way for people to be benevolent.^⑤ “Xu Heng’s discussion combines the “public mind” and “benevolence” to build up the foundation of the theory of heart nature. Xu Heng said, “A human being is only a six-foot body, and his heart is the same as the heart, which is the same as the heart of heaven and earth. There are only two things in the world, either one’s own affairs or the affairs of others.^⑥ “And to Kublai Lie suggested that “although the scale of the ancient and modern statehood is different, but its main point is to get the heart of the world. Get the heart of the world has no other, love and public only carry on. Love is the people’s heart is smooth, public is the people’s heart service. Both smooth and service, in order to rule also what?^⑦ “A ruler and his ministers should use love and fairness to win the hearts of the world, and turn “fairness” into the core principle of political practice. According to Xu Heng, “A minister should always keep his heart in the king, take the king’s heart as his heart, be obedient, and wish that the affairs of the country can be accomplished, which is the most public heart, and it can be called benevolence. As a son, one should always be mindful of the father, take the father’s heart as one’s heart, and wish for the fulfillment of the family’s affairs, which is the most public heart, and can be called benevolence.^⑧ “From the aspect of being an official and being a son, “public spirit” is defined as a concrete manifestation of benevolence.

2.2 The Integration of the Theory of Mindfulness and Ritualism

Xu Heng mentioned in his discourse, “He asked, ‘One heart can rule over all things, and one reason can unify all

④ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 1, Yulu Shang, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 4.

⑤ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 5, Zhongyong Zhijie, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 35.

⑥ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 2, Yulu Xia, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 2-3.

⑦ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 7, Shiwu Wushi, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 2.

⑧ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 2, Yulu Xia, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 8.

things.’ Mr. Xu Heng said: ‘It is said that one heart can rule over all things, and one reason can unify all things.’^① “He believed that the heart has many reasons, through the inverse of the heart, that is, “push the word analogous to some pain in the body, from the top to the bottom, all over the body to search for the so-called push yourself, as if you use your own work. A person of benevolence knows where the pain and itch are, and does not need to search for them.”^② “The way to realize the inner cultivation of rites. Xu Heng recognizes Mencius’s view that “this unspoken nature is the nature of heaven’s destiny, and the reason for everything under the sun comes out of it, the body of the Tao, and so is the great foundation of the world. The harmony of the middle section of all this hair is the way of straightforwardness, the common way of the world, the way of the world’s past and present, and the use of the Tao, so it is the world’s great way.”^③ “In order to achieve this, the government requires that the officials and the ministers should be fair to the world in their words and deeds, reflecting their fairness through the system of rewards and punishments, and that they themselves should “hold respect” to restrain their bodies and minds, so that their “fairness” can become a natural flow, and this kind of fusion not only deepens the connotation of Confucius and Mencius, “It is benevolence to return to propriety and honor. This kind of integration not only deepens the connotation of Confucius and Mencius’ “to be benevolent by restoring oneself to propriety”, but also pushes the study of propriety from moral norms to political system.

Practical Dimension: Politicization and Institutionalization of Ritualism

3.1 The Practice of Ritualism in the “Execution of Han Laws

Xu Heng, through education, implemented the “Great Principles of Primary School” in the State Zi School, and he believed that “in ancient times, when people’s livelihood reached the age of eight, the sons and daughters of kings and dukes down to the common people were enrolled in elementary school, where they were taught the rules of sweeping, responding, advancing and retreating, and the arts of etiquette, music, archery, imperialism, calligraphy, and numerology.”^④ “In ancient times, when

children reached the age of eight, the children of princes and nobles down to the commoners were all enrolled in elementary schools, and “rites”, as one of the “six arts” in ancient times, was the main content of school education at that time. In the law, the development of rituals and music system will be “the public heart” into a specific system, that “respect for relatives of the rituals, not only in the court, but also to promote the system for the rituals and laws, passed in the world, so that all the world for the vassals, for the great doctor, for the scholar and the people, each can respect their relatives.”^⑤ He also through a reward and a punishment to realize the public in the world, advocating the cultivation of the body as the basis for the requirements of the ruler and the ministers of a word and a move can be the law of the world. This practice provided a paradigm for the spread of Confucianism in minority regimes in the special context of the Yuan dynasty.

3.2 Application of Ritualism in Ethnic Relations

Xu Heng used the saying, “The so-called goodness of the world is one family, treating everyone equally, and there is nothing that can be done without goodness.”^⑥ “Xu Heng used the concept of “one world, one family” to reconcile ethnic conflicts and put forward the principle of treating all people the same. He also believed that “Heaven and earth are just a living creature’s heart, and the saint is just a heart that loves things, which is similar to heaven and earth’s. The intention of a hundred different things is just like this. This is the only way to realize the intention of all the different aspects of the world. Rituals, music, punishment and government are all the same.”^⑦ “Heaven and earth are fundamental to the creation of all things, and the sage takes love and care of all things as the starting point, and all means of governance should be based on this love and benevolence. He opposed the distinction between Chinese and barbarians, emphasizing that “the Yuan is the longest of the good.” Xu Heng thought that “Yuan” is the first place of goodness, and the Confucians in the previous generation interpreted “Yuan” as “big”. He slowly thought about this sentence and felt that the meaning is very far-reaching, and that we should gradually Sincize the idea of Mongol Yuan. He felt that the meaning of this phrase was very far-reaching, and should gradually sinicize the ideas of the Mongol Yuan, , and extend the “common mind” to the field of ethnic relations. This kind

① (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 2, Yulu Xia, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 9.

② (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 2, Yulu Xia, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 9.

③ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 5, Zhongyong Zhijie, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 5.

④ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 3, Xiaoxue Dayi, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 1.

⑤ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 5, Zhongyong Zhijie, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 29.

⑥ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 2, Yulu Xia, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 31.

⑦ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 2, Yulu Xia, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 32.

of inclusiveness not only adapted to the needs of social change in the Yuan Dynasty, but also promoted the adaptive innovation of Confucian etiquette in the multi-ethnic regime.

Dialogue with Confucius and Mencius

4.1 Inheritance and Development of Confucius' Unity of Benevolence and Rites

Confucius took "benevolence" as the core of rites and emphasized that "the use of rites, and harmony, is the most important."^① Xu Heng believes that "if a person is not benevolent, what is the meaning of rites and music? Ritual and music have nothing to do. There is no basis for it."^② "If a person does not have the heart of benevolence and love, how can he deal with rituals and music? There would be no way to implement and enforce rites and music. Without the root, they cannot be established. The "root" here refers to "benevolence", emphasizing that benevolence is the foundation of ritual and music, without which, ritual and music cannot be truly established and effective. In ancient times, rites and music were important guidelines for maintaining social order and regulating people's behavior, and the support behind them was "benevolence"; without benevolence, rites and music would become empty forms, and "benevolence" was concretized into "public spirit", and through political practices. The concept of "benevolence" was crystallized into "public spirit" and its operability was strengthened through political practice. Xu Heng further proposed that "peace" should be based on "public spirit", advocating that "the world is at peace when the saints touch people's hearts. Sage harmony is accumulated in the center, and issued as rituals and music, and the basis of rituals and music lies in this."^③ "When a saint touches people's hearts, there is peace in the world. The saint's harmony and obedience is accumulated in the middle, and it is issued as rites and music, and the essence of rites and music is in the Yes. Therefore, it is said that rites and music are not purely external forms, but are the external embodiment of the saint's inner realm, which highlights the important role of rites and music in the transmission of social culture and the moral education of the society.

① (Southern Song) Zhu Xi, Collected Commentaries on the Four Books, Analects, Volume 1, Zhu Xi's Collected Commentaries, Learning First, Engraved Edition, p. 6.

② (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 2, Yulu Xia, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 11.

③ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 1, Yulu Shang, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 22.

4.2 Practical Transformation of Mencius' Theory of Goodness of Nature

According to Mencius, "benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom are rooted in the heart."^④ Xu Heng, through his theory of cultivation, "The key to cultivating oneself is to keep one's heart and cultivate one's nature."^⑤ Xu Heng, through his theory of cultivation, transformed the theory of goodness of nature into a practical path of ritual governance. He proposed that "if the heart is right, then the body will be repaired, and if the body is repaired, then the family will be in order, this internal and external cultivation will also be complementary to each other, but the heart must be the main focus." The shaping of personal character and the harmony of the family must be led by the integrity of the heart, emphasizing the dominant role of inner cultivation in the external practice of etiquette. Xu Heng also believed that "when the people are old, they are filial; when the people are long, they are young; when the people are orphaned, they are not doubled. The word "superior" refers to the ruler of the people. The old is the parents. Lao Lao means to fulfill the rite of serving the elderly. Xing, is to rise. The elder is the elder brother. Chang Chang, is to fulfill the rite of serving the elder."^⑥ "If the monarch serves the old man in the way of honoring the old, then the people will rise to filial piety; if the monarch honors the elders, then the people will obey and love their elder brothers; if the monarch cares for the orphans, then the people will not go against the morality of human ethics. The perfection of personal conduct will also promote the formation of good morals in the society, and everyone will follow the way of filial piety and brotherly love without violating the common sense of human ethics.

V. Academic Value and Historical Significance

Xu Heng transformed the abstract "Divine Principle" of Cheng Zhu's theory into the concrete "Public Heart", emphasizing that "Public Heart" is the core of governing the country. He proposed that "there is no other way to win the heart of the world, but love and justice."^⑦ He believed that monarchs should govern the world with love and fairness, and pushed the science of philosophy from

④ (Yuan) Wang Chongyun, Four Books of Confucian Classics: Resolving Doubts and Achieving Understanding, Volume 6, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 2.

⑤ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 13, Yuchan Ci, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 8.

⑥ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 4, Daxue Zhijie, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 31.

⑦ (Yuan) Xu Heng, Lu Zhai Yishu, Lu Zhai Yishu Volume 7, Shiwu Wushi, Siku Quanshu Edition, p. 2.

philosophical discourse to political practice. By reconstructing the ontology of rituals through “public mind”, Xu Heng integrated “public mind” into the construction of rituals, emphasizing that rituals are the institutionalized manifestation of “public mind”, laying the foundation for the officialization of the Yuan Dynasty rationalism, and providing an insight into how the rulers of Mongolia applied Confucianism to the pluralism of governance. It laid the foundation for the officialization of the doctrine of the Yuan dynasty and provided practical guidance to the Mongol rulers on how to apply Confucianism to the governance of a multi-ethnic state, thus making Confucianism the theoretical support for the political legitimacy of the Yuan dynasty.

In the special context of the Yuan dynasty, Xu Heng’s reconstruction of ritualism provided a paradigm for the spread of Confucianism in the minority regimes. Xu Heng provided a systematic program for the founding of the Yuan dynasty through the Five Things of the Time, including the scale of the founding of the state, the main points of the central book, the difficulties of being a ruler, the agricultural and mulberry schools, and prudence. He advocated the “implementation of Han law”, promoting the Yuan dynasty to adopt the political system and culture of the Chinese dynasty, the official system, the establishment of laws and regulations, and the creation of calendars and laws. At the same time, he also participated in the formulation of the rituals of the imperial court and the official system, integrating Confucian rituals into the political system of the Yuan Dynasty and laying the foundation for Rigaku to become the official philosophy. His theory of “public mind” emphasized inclusiveness and practicality,

adapted to the needs of social change in the Yuan Dynasty, and had a profound influence on the later Ming and Qing systems of etiquette and governance.

Conclusion

Xu Heng realized the transformation of Confucian rites from philosophical ontology to political practice by transforming “rites are all about reason” into “rites are all about the public mind”. This reconstruction not only deepened the connotation of Confucianism and Mencius, but also provided theoretical support for the officialization of rationality in the Yuan Dynasty and the governance of multi-ethnic states. Its ideas played a key role in the development of Confucian etiquette in later generations, reflecting the adaptability and vitality of Confucianism in the context of multiculturalism.

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