DOI 10.3868/s110-004-015-0033-8

明清江南家族教育：多元视角研究 [*A multi-perspective study of clan education in the Ming and Qing dynasties to the south of the Yangtze River*]. 蒋明宏等著 [Minghong Jiang et al.]. 北京，中国：知识产权出版社 [Beijing, China: Intellectual Property Publishing House], 2013. 322 pp., (paperback), 68¥, ISBN: 978-7-5130-2531-7.

This is a collection of research findings concerning Ming and Qing dynasties clan education in Southern China, compiled by Dr. Minghong Jiang, professor of Jiangnan University, together with his colleagues and graduate students. The book discusses the area south of the Yangtze River, specifically the Taihu Lake Basin, encompassing Suzhou, Wuxi, and Changzhou.

While the imperial examination system, which lasted for over 1,300 years, functioned to select candidates for the state bureaucracy, clan education in Southern China aimed to promote practical knowledge. In the late Qing dynasty in particular, most of the nobility and landed gentry in this area believed that practical philosophy and learning were even more valuable than the study of the Confucian classics. As the seeds of capitalism gradually sprouted in this area, the elite sought to improve society and make the country strong and rich. Independent of the imperial examination system, some clan businessmen in industrial and commercial circles took a leading position, with the help of schools run by certain clansmen councils and usually opened in clan free estates. Clan education has long been seen as a significant issue in this region, yet few studies deal with the development and disappearance of clan education related to the system. The achievements of Jiang's research project stand out all the more against this backdrop.

This book consists of four parts with different focuses: (a) a general survey of clan education in this region in the Ming and Qing dynasties; (b) the changes and features of elementary textbook curricula concerning clan education in this region from the late Qing dynasty to the early Republican era; (c) the influence on clan education of marriages arranged between culturally and educationally prominent families in the region; and (d) cultural and psychological structural analysis of clan education in the early modern age.

The authors have paid close attention to the roles played by knowledgeable women in family education in these changing times and transitions. Being willing to play assisting roles in families, these women worked as instructors

training their kids in good manners, ritual, and filial piety, which helped their husbands focus on their family businesses and serve the prospering private economy.

There are at least two new historical findings that appear in this book: First, the ideas of Donglin Academy, located in central Wuxi county, effectively infiltrated the clan education of the dynasties even up to the early 20th century. Second, comparatively speaking, the economically developed areas of the Yangtze River Delta were strongly supported by clan education, as well as being based on the prosperity of Confucianism and family education, rather than solely by a mixture of clan/family economic values and authoritarianism. Later, most of the clan schooling survived the historical changes and merged into the modern educational system. Ancient Chinese educational documents and archives, which Dr. Jiang has collated or cited in this monograph, vividly portray the heritage of nearly 600 years of clan education in the area.

This book has the potential to become a classic in clan education research, if readers take the time and have the patience to focus on its historical detail and the cultural findings that are laid out. These include many useful materials, such as those dealing with the ideas and values of regionally prominent families in the Ming and Qing dynasties, which will be beneficial for understanding the evolution of China's education system. In addition, it will encourage educators to incorporate educational thought and operational modes from this era into contemporary Chinese schooling.

Coming from authors with creativity, critical thinking, moral reasoning, and innovation, this timely book is a very informative and comprehensive study for those interested in clan education in the Ming and Qing dynasties or indeed the curriculum reforms which are currently underway in China.

As clan education in the Ming and Qing dynasties is a very large topic, it would probably make sense to focus more specifically in future, possibly making further studies on clan education for those with a particular surname for example. In that way, contemporary educators would get a more nuanced understanding of Chinese educational heritage, with more operable implications.

Samuel Shu-Sheng HUANG
Educational Institute of Wuxi
E-mail: suphd@163.com