

comparison with Heidegger"). Chapter 2, 59a and b ("broad comparative framework" and "comparative approach"); Chapter three, 12c ("similarity"); 13b ("structurally similar assertion"); 14 b ("echo"); 17a ("analogous pair of terms"); 24c ("parallels or comparisons"); 29b ("comparative considerations"). The point is that in the broadest sense, the connections are comparative but not "comparativist."

◇Note 3

The worship of Confucius in Japan: introductory reflections

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Confucius has been worshipped in Japan for some thirteen hundred years. The term by which the ceremony is generally known, *sekiten* (Chinese : *shidan*), refers to the placing of an offering to a spirit. This ceremony originated in ancient China, but later spread to Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Its purpose was both to pay homage to and to nurture the spirits of Confucius himself and other figures within the Confucian tradition. It was conducted both at an official level, where the patronage came ultimately from the state, and later at a personal or unofficial level. Institutionally, it has been associated with education, itself implicitly regarded as a preparation for participation in administration and the exercise of political responsibility. It has usually taken place on academic premises, and in a building or space dedicated, at least temporarily, to that purpose. It is as a religious and political ritual that the ceremony is best approached.

Within the Confucian tradition itself, the worship of Confucius has been the subject of devoted and detailed attention from liturgists and scholars. The copious liturgical texts, memorials and other texts written by these men provide the essential primary material for research into the history of the rite. Outside that tradition, however, the ceremony and the associated religious cult of Confucius has, until recently, remained rather little studied. It has been called, 'probably one of the least understood aspects of Confucianism'. In the west, early interest seems to have been largely confined to Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, who were troubled by questions relating to the theological status of the spirit of Confucius as worshiped in the proceedings. Otherwise, it escaped serious scholarly attention until the publication the American scholar John Shryock's pioneer pre-war survey, *The origin and development of the state cult of Confucius: an introductory survey*, in 1932. Even the status of the ceremony as religious veneration has been disputed. The tendency to regard the *shidian* as an act of secular homage rather than an act of religious veneration has been strong. There has been an associated debate over whether Confucianism is a religion or simply an ethical

philosophy.

Within the last decade or so, this neglect has begun to be repaired. Recent work on the Chinese history of the ceremony led by Thomas Wilson of Hamilton College in the United States has demonstrated its importance for a fuller understanding of the political and cultural history of Confucianism. Persuasive arguments have been advanced that Confucianism should indeed be regarded as a religion. The rite is no longer regarded as static and invariant. Progress has been made in analyzing its relationship to changes in Chinese political history, and in particular the balance between imperial autocratic and bureaucratic power.

In Japan, successive versions of the mainland Chinese rite formed the departure point for its development. Its history in Japan, however, is more volatile than in either China or Korea. Pioneer research into the history of the Japanese *sekiten*, largely descriptive in its findings, has been undertaken since the war. This history falls into two parts, corresponding to two major phases in the periodization of the pre-modern Japanese past, and in turn to the history of the rite. Valuable research on the ancient and medieval *sekiten* was undertaken by Iyanaga Saburô, and notably by Midorikawa Fumiko; for the Tokugawa (early modern) period, Sudô Toshio has provided a basic narrative of the observance of the rite in the Hayashi academy and certain domains. Takahashi Akinori of Tôhoku University wrote an insightful article on the early history of the rite in the Hayashi school. In the west, there has been little sustained interest. Only brief mention is made of the ceremony, in the context of the general history of Japanese Confucianism or of education, by historians such as J.W. Hall, W.J. Boot and R.P. Dore. The kind of analysis now being undertaken for the Chinese rite has hardly begun.

A first task is to offer a historical narrative: to provide a basic over-arching view of the liturgical and performance history of this rite in Japan. On that basis it becomes possible to explore the relationship between the underlying purposes and values immanent in the liturgy and the social and political background to practice in Japan. From such explorations, it is hoped, there will emerge a new perspective on the history of Confucianism in Japan, a better understanding of the sometimes problematic nature of the Japanese commitment to this foreign faith and its relationship with other religious traditions. A basic theme is that the values immanent in the ceremony and symbolized by the figure of Confucius sometimes supported, but perhaps more often challenged, the interests of elements within Japanese society and polity. Tension between the ritual and its adoptive society was felt differently by different strata and at different times. The attempt to confront such tension liturgically resulted in a somewhat erratic, often circumspect, approach to this ritual. This in turn resulted in liturgical change and a tendency to isolate the rite and constrain its influence in various and sometimes subtle ways. It may be argued that the rite truly flourished at best only intermittently on Japanese soil.

The historical study of a ritual such as the *sekiten* necessarily raises questions concerning the nature and meaning of ritual, its relationship with society, why and how it changes, and how it is best studied and understood. Many of the most useful insights into these matters have been provided by anthropology. As the liturgical evidence is analyzed, it will be useful to bear in mind some of the most instructive findings of anthropologists into the nature of rituals such as this.

It is essential, first, when considering the transmission of Confucianism to Japan, to bear in mind the central importance of the ritual dimension shared by Confucianism with other religions. This is particularly important since Confucianism has, understandably, tended to be regarded as an aspect of intellectual history or the history of education in Japan. The centrality of ritual is particularly forcefully stated by Victor Turner. Turner stressed the performative aspect of religion. He wrote that, 'religion, like art, *lives* in so far as it is performed that is in so far as its rituals are "going concerns".... For religion is not a cognitive system, a set of dogmas alone, it is meaningful experience and experienced meaning'. In this light, the ritual and performative dimension of Confucian practice, so long neglected, concerns nothing less than the most intense nexus between practitioner and the object of practice and belief. Effective performance is an index of commitment to Confucianism not merely as symbolic of a system of ethics or academic object of study, but as a religion, a system of values and a way of life. No historical study of Confucianism in Japan can properly ignore its ritual dimension.

Associated with Turner's insistence on the central importance of ritual also are his well known theories concerning the structure of rituals and their social meaning. He saw rituals as commonly refracting conditions in society; they address 'social dramas', tensions and conflicts, often generated by structural features of the society of their origin. Rituals resolved these tensions symbolically through a process that brought together the various actors in the particular 'social drama'. This process was 'structured in three stages, a 'tripartite processual form' of withdrawal from society often involving abstinence, the intermediate stage of the ritual itself, and re-incorporation into society. The central stage provided a suspended state of liminality, in which special relations of harmony transcending the divisions of society were created. Turner calls this state 'communitas'. He wrote: 'Rituals *separated* specified members of a group from everyday life [abstinence in some form], *placed them in a limbo* [the ritual itself] that was not any place they were in before and not yet any place they would be in, then *returned* them, changed in some way, to mundane life.'

Though this threefold structure applied primarily for Turner to rites of passage, it is to be seen reflected in the classical Chinese form of the *shidian*. The most prestigious, canonical version of this rite, the *shidian* for the crown prince contained in the eighth-century *Da Tang Kaiyuan li* (732 C.E.), can be analyzed to show that it addressed a particular historical 'social drama'. It brought together in one brief liturgical 'communitas'

the different elements in the Chinese imperial polity that lay in a relationship of potential tension: 'inner' autocratic monarchical power and the 'outer' power of the bureaucracy. In terms of value, the 'communitas' created by the crown prince's *shidian* reconciled the autocratic, hereditary and particularistic power of the monarch with the universalism of the bureaucratic ethos.

This formal three-fold structure of withdrawal (marked by abstinence); *communitas*; and return to society was to underlie the liturgy of all but the most casual versions of the rite in Japan. The social drama that the Tang rite addressed, however, was peculiar to the country of its origin. How then did this original 'social drama' play out in the very different social and political milieu of Japan? What happened when the underlying 'social drama' changed or was acted out in radically different terms, by agents with different purposes, values and expectations? How would a canonical liturgy reflecting the political structure of one particular society retain its capacity to retain the motivation for committed performance when adopted by a society at a different stage of evolution or with a different structure? The long and sometimes erratic history of the Japanese *sekiten* can be seen as, in effect, an answer to this question.

Two further features of ritual need to be borne in mind in the analysis of the Japanese *sekiten*. Both follow self-evidently from Turner's concept of 'social drama'. Both are widely recognized by students of ritual, anthropologists and others. First, the metaphor of drama suggests that participants in rituals are likely to have different perceptions and attitudes to the symbols that their liturgies deploy. Axiomatically, any one ritual will mean different things to different participants or onlookers. It may even mean conflicting, unresolved issues to the minds of individual participants or observers. For, as the scholar of political rituals, David Kertzer, observes, symbols 'mean different things to different people and may, indeed have different sometimes conflicting meanings for the same person'. In the case of the *sekiten*, such divergence of attitude was facilitated by the many ambiguities within the Confucian tradition itself. Most saliently, Confucianism could legitimate both hierarchy and forms of egalitarianism. Thus the interest in the cult of Confucius of the exercisers of political authority is not the same as that of the student participants; Confucius himself carries differing symbolic messages for each party. The different parties may share common ground in certain core beliefs, but interpret them from different perspectives. If this is true of the ceremony in the country of its origin, it will also be true, in different ways, of adoptive contexts.

Secondly, Turner's observation that rituals reflect the societies from which they originate suggests the obvious truth that rituals are deeply embedded in those historical societies. 'Political rituals', particularly, reflect and negotiate societies' historical values and power conflicts. Catherine Bell writes of the 'complex negotiations of power involved in ritual activity' and of 'a multiplicity of purposes, strategies, and performances', for the understanding of which their 'historical context is vital and central'. This historical

rootedness of ritual is arguably particularly strong in the case of rituals associated with political power such as the *sekiten*. The ceremony indeed exhibits features that bind it particularly closely to its historical context. It was not a petitionary or apotropaic rite; it was minimally concerned with supernatural agency or the prospect of an afterlife. It was not penitential; Confucius was not (or rarely) propitiated; nor did he deliver protection; not even academic success. The world view that the *sekiten* sacralized was weak in transcendental referents. The Confucian tradition was, of course, rational in its propositions about society and morality. Its 'ultimate sacred postulate', to borrow the conceptual vocabulary of Roy Rappaport, sacralized an ideal of sub-lunary social harmony closely linked to the natural order. It made relatively weak demands along the axis of belief. Instead, as though a religion values ritual in inverse proportion to belief, Confucianism placed great weight on performative ritual. Moreover, as already stated, the locus of the cult of Confucius was characteristically the school or scholarly community. In East Asian terms, such institutions were traditionally thought of pre-eminently as nurturing men for political service and the exercise of power. The most important consequence was that the original ceremony was ineluctably tied to the values and political and social structures of China, the society of its origin. This feature of the rite is clearly relevant to its transmission from China to the very different society of Japan.

With the recognition of the historical rootedness of ritual there inevitably comes also the recognition that, despite having an invariant element at their core and a tendency to liturgical conservatism, rituals change over time. This truth was always recognized within the Confucian tradition itself; it is well understood by anthropologists. As Bell puts it: 'It is ... appropriate to infer that if a society passes through social and historical changes affecting its world view, organization, economic activities, and exposure to competing ideas, for example, it will probably witness concomitant changes in its ritual system ...' No less, the transmission of a ritual across social and cultural boundaries, of which the transmission of the *sekiten* from China to Japan is an extreme case, is likely to produce changes. Bell also notes, in a comment that may be usefully borne in mind when considering some of the simplified form of liturgy that were to evolve in the later history of the rite in Japan: 'As religious communities expand, sometimes coming to include cultural groups quite different from the one in which the religion originated, there is often a de-emphasizing of ... ritual customs in favor of more cross-culturally manageable ... beliefs'.

Study of historical change in rituals has led anthropologists to draw up typologies of ritual that help link their relationship to historical societies. Catherine Bell's own theory of ritual evolution suggests 'four modes of ritual action' that are 'heuristic models;... neither universal nor exclusive'. They are: 'appeasement and appeal' (or local religion, characterized by magic), 'cosmic ordering' (which 'tends to occur in societies or political systems in which a central monarchical figure is holding together a large and not totally

homogeneous polity', 'moral redemption' (also, more usefully, referred to as 'ethical-moral', in which 'ritual becomes less important than in the previous two since the major form of efficacious religious action is ethical and disciplinary in nature'), and 'personal spirituality' (related to 'privatised spirituality' identified with 'American spirituality').

These types may follow a linear, evolutionary pattern, but may also co-exist. This flexible typology may usefully be applied to the East Asian *sekiten*. Thus the great Tang ceremony for the crown prince suggests the 'cosmic ordering,' type. Its background is the ritual culture of the medieval Chinese empire, centered on the emperor as the principal agent of cosmic order. This type may be said to have been perpetuated in the great state observances of the rite in successive Chinese dynasties. However, in Song times in China, a different, smaller-scale and more personal, version of the rite was created by the Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi. Zhu's reduced liturgy suggests the 'ethical moral' phase of Bell's typology; liturgically, it stressed a personal relationship with Confucius. Significantly, it was conducted in a private, unofficial rather than a public, official space. Here, it seems reasonable to suggest, the 'social drama' aspect internal to large-scale political ritual diminishes. Or rather, in these more personal, often small scale, rituals, the individual subject assumes greater importance than the institutional context. Any 'social drama' or tension is implicit. The tension is not so much with other elements represented within the ritual as between the individual subject and his beliefs and values sacralized in the ceremony on the one hand, and the society at large on the other; the ritual confirms an individual's personal creed and commitment to a set of beliefs, a world view. The ceremony sacralized the ethos of aspiring bureaucrats, but only indirectly addressed their relationship to the larger body politic. This feature makes this type of ritual appropriate for private practice or by members of politically powerless minority groups. It was to appeal particularly to commoners among Confucians in Tokugawa Japan.

Enough has now been sketched of the general character of political ritual and of the *sekiten* in particular to suggest some salient themes that will emerge in a survey of the Japanese ceremony. The historical narrative will necessarily contain an important comparative aspect. While centered on the liturgy of the Japanese ceremony, it will be responsive both to liturgical developments on the Chinese mainland and to the eventful history of Japan itself. It will attempt to identify the values that inform the liturgies of both countries, identify tensions and their liturgical resolutions and try to discover what interests lay behind liturgical change. It will tend to relate liturgical change to issues of power. Within Japan, the radical change in political structure from the ancient, Chinese-style imperial bureaucratic state to the early modern feudal order, in particular, will be an important turning point in the narrative. This profound socio-political change obviously resulted in utterly different conditions for the practice of the ceremony between these two periods. Just as the values of each of these periods of Japanese society were different, so their response to the ceremony will also differ. Yet

little in the story of the Japanese *sekiten* is simple. The change from ancient and medieval to Tokugawa (early modern) *sekiten* is not simply the change from ‘cosmic ordering’ to ‘ethical moral’ ritual. Just as in China the two types co-existed at state and unofficial levels respectively, so also in Japan, albeit driven by a different historical dynamic, they are to be found within the same society.

Axiomatically, as stated above, the rite meant different things to different participants and observers not just across time and space, but also within the same society. From the beginning, different participants will have had different aspirations and different expectations of the rite. As with the passage of time documentation both of the liturgy itself and of other aspects of the cult of Confucius becomes more abundant, so it becomes possible more confidently to recover these different responses to the ceremony among participants and observers. The Japanese *sekiten* retains the conservative cast and self-referential manner characteristic of major liturgical traditions. Yet despite some remarkable continuities, the story will be one of variety: at some times and in some quarters of enthusiastic commitment, at times of instability, wariness, and reaction. Diachronic analysis will reveal the sometimes uncomfortable relationship between the Japanese and the foreign religion in a new light. This heterogeneity is significant. Not least it refutes any notion of an essentialist interpretation. There is nothing truly unique or exceptional about the Japanese response to the *sekiten*.

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