

# THE WAY OF HEAVEN

*An Introduction to the Confucian Religious Life*

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## INTRODUCTION

### I. THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF CONFUCIANISM

O great teacher thy virtue surpasses that of a thousand sages  
And thy way excels that of a hundred kings.  
Rivaling the sun and the moon,  
Thy light shines forever.  
Truly there is none  
Like thee among us.<sup>1</sup>

Thus begins a prayer to Confucius, the founder of the tradition that bears his name, a tradition that has played a central role in the cultures of China, Korea and Japan as the major moral and religious teaching at the very heart of each of these cultures. This particular prayer was taken from a small liturgical book used by governmental officials when they were called upon to perform various religious ceremonies. The focus of this prayer is Confucius and the sacrifice that is offered to him twice yearly, in the spring and the fall. The sacrifice is called *shih-tien* in Chinese, *sŏkchŏn* in Korean and *shakuten* in Japanese, each meaning the Twice Yearly Confucian Ceremony.

Whether this prayer is performed with the magnitude and splendor of state ceremony or reflects the quiet and personal feelings of the individual Confucian, its direction is to suggest the reverence and veneration properly paid to Confucius and his teachings.

Even here at the very beginning there is a sense of the private and public, two spheres that will play equally important roles in the understanding of the Confucian tradition. The prayer and ones like it can be recited with the fervent desire of the individual to seek moral and spiritual perfection. On the other hand it points to the community, what Fingarette has called the holy rite of the community,<sup>2</sup> as a mode of religious expression. This sense of community is important throughout the history of Confucianism both in terms of the Confucian community itself and in addition the integration of Confucian thought and practice into the setting of the state with its own traditional ideology and religious world-view. Thus Confucianism is both a personal practice and point of view, and at the same time is also assimilated into state ideology and state cult. Both of these aspects must be fully appreciated if we are to understand the sense of the religious life in Confucianism, a life often equally of the private and the public.

The prayer we have begun with suggests not only the role of the self and the community, it points as well to the seeds of ultimacy of the tradition itself. There has for long been an argument that Confucianism is more properly to be spoken of as humanism, that is, secular humanism, and ethics, a system providing the social cohesion for the cultures of

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<sup>1</sup> Huang K'uei-yuen and J. K. Shryock, "A Collection of Chinese Prayers," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 49 (1929), 129-130.

<sup>2</sup> H. Fingarette, "Human Community as Holy Rite: An Interpretation of Confucius' Analects," *Harvard Theological Review*, 59 (1966), 53-67.

East Asia, rather than a religious point of view. For some the very fact that Confucianism has played a dominant role in the development of East Asian cultures has even suggested that religion has thereby played a minor role in these cultures, simply reinforcing the degree to which Confucianism was looked upon as a philosophical point of view that precluded a religious dimension. Confucius himself has been employed as a part of this argument, suggesting that Confucius was at best disinterested in religion. Confucius states in the *Analects* for example, that one is to attend to the duties of man and to keep the spirits at a distance.<sup>3</sup> When he was asked about death he responded by stating that he had as yet to understand life and most certainly knew nothing of death.<sup>4</sup> It was also said of Confucius that he never discussed prodigies.<sup>5</sup> If the definition of the religion hinges upon keeping the spirits close, talking about death and discussing prodigies, then Confucius would seem to have little to do with religion. If, however, the definition of religion does not focus upon particular components of a pre-defined world-view, but rather religion's soteriological capacity for transformation within a setting of ultimacy, then these particular responses of Confucius become at best secondary to the adjudication of a religious point of view. We simply have to look elsewhere for Confucius' religious foundation.

Confucius referred to himself as a transmitter, not a creator.<sup>6</sup> He meant by this a reinforcing of the extraordinary importance he placed upon the culture of China's past, in particular the culture established by the founders of the Chou Dynasty (1111-249 B.C.). These figures were for Confucius paradigmatic of all that was virtuous and right. Confucius saw his own role as one of trying to advise the various rulers of the feudal states of his own day to return to the ways of virtue embodied by the founders of the dynasty. Salient to his own concern was the presentation and continued transmission of what he felt to be the remnants of the early culture. Particularly important in this respect was the literature that purportedly represented this culture, literature later to become classified as the Classics, *ching*, which for the Confucians was the direct connection with the sages of antiquity.

The Chou dynasty itself inherited a complex religious world view from the dynasty before it, the Shang dynasty (1751-1112 B.C.). Both Shang and Chou kings offered sacrifice to a host of deities, spirits and natural forces. The Chou dynasty, at least as it appears through later literary sources, seems to have been responsible for a rather more fully developed articulation of the official state sacrificial cult and religious ideology. One of the focal points of cult and ideology was *T'ien*, usually translated as Heaven. It appears to be the name of a High God and in certain respects continues to have theistic qualities associated with it, though it also develops in a rather more abstract fashion certain monistic features as well. The important point is the centrality of *T'ien* to the religious world-view and, before entering into a more detailed discussion of ceremony and sacrifice associated with *T'ien* and the state cult, the degree to which Confucius accepted the religious authority of *T'ien*, positing it as a necessary element in the revitalization of the ways of the ancient sages and ultimately affecting as well the individual and his own religious development.

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<sup>3</sup> *Lun yü* 6:20.

<sup>4</sup> *Lun yü* 11:11.

<sup>5</sup> *Lun yü* 7:20.

<sup>6</sup> *Lun yü* 7:1.

Confucius in suggesting that he was a transmitter rather than a creator was stating that it was this traditional religious world-view with its complexity of ceremonial and sacrificial cult and the acceptance of the religious authority of *T'ien* that he favored. In other words, it was precisely the setting of a thorough-going religious state, a theocracy, that followed the Way of *T'ien* or the Way of Heaven through the proper sacrificial and ritual relationship between man and Heaven that Confucius sought to convince the rulers of his day to return to and emulate. In a sense the Way of Heaven had become unglued in the age of Confucius. Power was divided among competing feudal states and the Chou dynasty royal court, while still maintaining symbolic ritual power of rulership, could not present a unified mandate for Heaven's blessing. The sacrificial codes were maintained, often even by the rulers of the various states, but from Confucius' point of view ceremony and ritual were something more than simply the execution of sacrifice with the proper number of animal victims and viand offerings. For Confucius ritual, *li*, was not only the proper performance of ceremony, it was also an attitude and this attitude from Confucius' perspective had been part of the meaning of ritual for the sages of the past. Through ritual announcements and thanks were offered to Heaven. More importantly, however, through the ritual attitude the proper relation was established with Heaven, one that saw man recognize his own existence as ultimately dependent upon the power and authority of Heaven's Way.

It is in a sense a cliché to say that while Confucius viewed himself as a transmitter and not a creator, we know him to be a creator as well. In another respect, however, there is a subtle point in the statement appropriate to the question of the Confucian religious orientation. Confucius inherited the religious world-view of the state cult of the Chou dynasty. There is no way to minimize the import of this world-view upon Confucius' own religious orientation. Here was a world-view that stressed the absoluteness of Heaven and the total dependence of man upon the ways of Heaven. These ways were traditionally celebrated through a complex of ceremonial and ritual behaviors fully inherited by Confucius. While there is a paucity of early articulations of theory and understanding of such ritual behaviors, for Confucius ritual in and of itself was immensely important. Confucius comments, for example, in the *Analects* that while a disciple begrudges the loss of a sheep as a sacrificial victim, were the sheep to be spared Confucius would begrudge the loss of the ceremony.<sup>7</sup> Yet we see him saying as well that ritual is more than just the sound of instruments playing,<sup>8</sup> it is also an attitude, and this attitude reflects the development of the inner moral self. In the social sphere it is similar to Confucius' statement that filial piety, *hsiao*, doesn't simply stop with the nourishing and caring for the parents. True filial piety is an attitude, it is goodness or humaneness, *jen*, the cardinal virtue of Confucianism and the very basis from a Confucian perspective of humanity itself. This attitude is suggestive of Confucius' perspective on ritual. Ritual offers the possibility of manifesting what is ultimately the very essence of man, the true expression of one man to another and ultimately the true expression of feeling of man towards Heaven.

There is a degree to which ritual for Confucius has a kind of efficacy about it. With the correct performance of ritual all is in order and at peace. Shun, the legendary ruler, for ex-

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<sup>7</sup> *Lun yü* 3:17.

<sup>8</sup> *Lun yü* 17:11.

ample, faced south and all was in perfect order.<sup>9</sup> According to the *Analects* when ritual is performed all will naturally respond.<sup>10</sup> It is described as being like the Pole Star with all revolving around it.<sup>11</sup> These are important indications of the power of ritual for Confucius, not necessarily as an “otherness” that has entered the ceremony, but the degree to which ceremony in and of itself possesses power.<sup>12</sup> Here it is difficult to know whether Confucius the transmitter or the creator is dominant. However, the degree to which ritual is seen as a display of inner feelings, first and foremost an attitude, reflecting humaneness as a relation to Heaven itself, is the subtle ground of the Confucian religious dimension, and in turn the creativity of Confucius.

Part of the creativity of Confucius is to have unlocked the term *chün-tzu*, gentleman or nobleman, from the categories of the aristocracy to become a term poised with meaning for the individual self, any self, and its moral and spiritual development. Combining the focus upon the individual with the traditional religious world-view inherited from the Chou dynasty, the seeds of the religious dimension of the tradition begin to manifest themselves. Heaven as the source of absolute religious authority has broadened its sphere from state cult and ideology to individual thought and cultivation. It is, as Confucius says, Heaven that bestowed the virtue, *te*, that is within him.<sup>13</sup> It is difficult and ultimately demanding, but Heaven’s Way is possible. The degree to which Heaven is recognized as the foundation of man’s effort is the degree to which ceremonial and ritual behaviors will exemplify this inner attitude and meaning. Thus there is for Confucius an intimate relation between the traditional religious context and the newfound focus upon the moral and spiritual development of the individual. The religious dimension lies then at the very heart of Confucius’ teachings. The world-view he seeks to preserve sees the ultimate dependence of the state upon the Way of Heaven. Confucius, building upon this relation of state and Heaven, sees the ultimate relation between the individual and Heaven as the true fulfillment of human capacity. This relation of man and Heaven is no better exemplified than in his autobiographical note in the *Analects*. “At fifteen, I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I was firmly established. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the will of Heaven. At sixty, I was ready to listen to it. At seventy, I could follow my heart’s desire without transgressing what was right.”<sup>14</sup> The life portrayed is one of living Heaven’s Way; as such it is a description of the religious life.

### 1. *Human Nature and the Way of Heaven*

The element of religious dimension continues in the major expressions of Confucian thought after Confucius himself, Mencius (371-289 B.C.) and Hsün Tzu (fl. 298-238 B.C.) and the two short works known as the *Ta Hsüeh* or *Great Learning* and the *Chung Yung* or *Doctrine of the Mean*. Mencius, who is now viewed as the key interpreter of Confucius

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<sup>9</sup> *Lun yü* 15:4.

<sup>10</sup> *Lun yü* 12:1.

<sup>11</sup> *Lun yü* 2:1.

<sup>12</sup> Fingarette, 63.

<sup>13</sup> *Lun yü* 7:22.

<sup>14</sup> *Lun yü* 2:4 following W. T. deBary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 24.

through the influence of the later Neo-Confucians, develops the understanding of man's nature and its relation to Heaven. For Mencius man's nature is good. More specifically it possesses the Four Beginnings, *ssu-tuan*, of goodness: humaneness, *jen*, righteousness, *i*, ritual or propriety, *li* and wisdom *chih*. It is man's task to engage in learning and self-cultivation such that these Four Beginnings will become fully manifest, a state in some respects no different from the sages of antiquity for Mencius. To engage in learning and self-cultivation is to fully develop the mind, *hsin*, according to Mencius, and it is the man who has fully developed his mind who comes to understand his nature, *hsing*. This is then placed in its religious context, for it is in understanding the true nature of man that man understands the Way of Heaven. The ultimate context of the individual is the Way of Heaven. Mencius concludes by suggesting that this very self effort, i.e. the preserving of the mind, *ts'un ch'i hsin*, and the nourishing of the nature, *yang ch'i hsing*, is the way to serve Heaven itself.<sup>15</sup>

The *Ta Hsüeh* and the *Chung Yung*, originally chapters from the *Li Chi*, *Book of Rites*, also represent the developing Confucian religious perspective. The *Ta Hsüeh* is essentially a pedagogy for the establishment of peace and order in society, that is, the transformation of society from chaos to the moral order of Heaven's Way represented by the model of the sages of antiquity. There are eight steps to this process and of the eight the first five concern the moral and spiritual cultivation of the individual, thus stressing the Confucian perspective of the ultimate importance of the individual in the transformation of the state. The *Chung Yung* is rather more abstract in approach, stressing the ultimate link between man the microcosm and Heaven the macrocosm. The focus is upon *ch'eng*, translated as sincerity or integrity. The meaning suggests that when man reaches the level of penetration of his own nature such that it is utterly sincere or "authentic" to itself, he then stands in a relation of unity with the macrocosm, Heaven.<sup>16</sup> In many respects these are issues that Confucius remains silent on. One can say that Mencius together with the *Ta Hsüeh* and the *Chung Yung* develop themes already implicit in the *Analects*. They also, however, reach new formulations of Confucian religious thought.

This is even truer of Hsün Tzu, the individual who in his own time was regarded as the major formulator of Confucian thought and practice and whose form of Confucianism was intimately connected with the establishment of Confucianism as state orthodoxy during the Han dynasty (B.C.202-220 A.D.). It is also Hsün Tzu who is most often portrayed as the Confucian rationalist, divorced entirely from religion. For Hsün Tzu Heaven no longer has theistic qualities; it does not intervene on behalf of man or against man. Man's task then according to Hsün Tzu should be to focus upon the activities of man. Such activities of man, however, are set within the context of ritual, and man himself is set within the framework of the triad Heaven, Earth and man. Interpreting Heaven for Hsün Tzu as a purely natural and impersonal force of no relation to moral questions has dominated studies of Hsün Tzu, however, there is no reason the same characteristics cannot be applied to a thoroughly moral and thoroughly transcendent Heaven. This provides a logical framework for Hsün Tzu's own emphasis upon not looking for reaction from Heaven, but

<sup>15</sup> *Meng tzu* 7A:1.

<sup>16</sup> For the most informative discussion of the Confucian interpretation of this work see, Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Chung-yung* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976).

instead action from man. Thus we have the justification for ritual and its importance for Hsün Tzu. To act with ritual for Hsün Tzu provides the basis for the fulfillment and perfection of man. We also have the basis of ritual's authority in the Way of Heaven, not in theistic terms, but instead emphasizing the distance, magnitude and otherness of Heaven. This does not render religion irrelevant for Hsün Tzu, but instead makes his focus upon ritual a thorough partaking of the sacred dimension.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. *Neo-Confucianism — The Quest for Sagehood*

The term Neo-Confucianism refers to the growth and expansion of the Confucian tradition during and following the Sung dynasty (960-1279). It is Neo-Confucianism that is most clearly associated with state orthodoxy in China, Korea and Japan. There are in general two major schools, though with many subtle shadings. The first is the School of Principle, *li-hsüeh*, or the Ch'eng-Chu School. The later name is derived from two of the major figures of the school during the Sung dynasty, Ch'eng I (1033-1107) and Chu Hsi (1130-1200). The second is the School of Mind, *hsin-hsüeh*, or the Lu-Wang School named for Lu Hsiang-shan (1139-1193) of the Sung dynasty and Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529) of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Neo-Confucianism has been felt to be different enough from the earlier tradition to warrant a different designation in its title. This has been based upon the common assumption that Neo-Confucianism borrowed substantial metaphysical interests from the Buddhists. It seems more likely that rather than borrowing, the role of Buddhism is that of a religious paradigm; that is, the Buddhist community provided a model of the religious life which the Neo-Confucians found suitable to emulate, not in the fashion of crypto-Buddhists, but as Confucians fully aware of their own Confucian past and intent upon preserving their Confucian identity. All shades of Neo-Confucianism emphasize the fundamental religious humanism of early Confucianism. They are rationalists in the sense that they believe the universe to be comprehensible by the human mind. They are also concerned with the importance of historical models; the teachings of the sages of antiquity and the records of the sages contained in the Classics. Such works from a Confucian perspective provide a template of Heaven's Way and this is as true for the Neo-Confucian as for the early tradition.

Obviously there are many differences between the schools of Neo-Confucianism. The major division of the School of Principle and the School of Mind has tended to focus upon pedagogical and practical questions of learning and the practice of self-cultivation. For the School of Principle there is to be a step-by-step method of learning in which there is a gradual accumulation in the understanding of the true nature, *hsing*, and its inherent moral structure referred to as the principle, *li*, of the nature. The steps of learning of the *Ta Hsüeh* provide a useful example of this process. For the School of Principle the steps of learning begin with *ko-wu*, the investigation of things, and *chih-chih*, the extension of knowledge. This was interpreted as a call to study broadly and it was felt that through this process there would be an increase in the understanding of principle. The School of Mind, on the other hand, tends to favor a different version of the *Ta Hsüeh* which does not em-

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<sup>17</sup> For one of the few studies that has appreciated the religious dimension of Hsün Tzu see, E. Machle, "Hsün Tzu as a religious philosopher," *Philosophy East and West*, 26.4 (Oct., 1976), 443-461.



phasize *ko-wu* and *chih-chih*, but rather *ch'eng-i*, the sincerity of intention. The difference is crucial for here the focus is upon rectifying what is already inherent within the individual rather than gathering and accumulating from external sources. Thus the School of Principle contends that learning must proceed by a process of broad study from external sources, while the School of Mind sees learning as a process of realization and manifestation of the inherent principle, a process described as innate knowing, *liang-chih*. Even these very broad distinctions are not water tight, particularly as one observes the developments in Ming China and in turn Yi Korea (1342-1910) and Tokugawa Japan (1615-1868).

Perhaps the major element of focus of Neo-Confucianism and one that illustrates clearly the religious dimension of the tradition is that of sagehood, *sheng*. For the Neo-Confucian the object of learning and self-cultivation was the attempt to realize the state of being a sage. This perspective differs markedly from the Classical Confucian tradition where the sages were figures of high antiquity.<sup>18</sup> Even though Mencius states that anyone can become a Yao or a Shun,<sup>19</sup> sagehood was not looked upon as a viable goal of learning and self-cultivation. It is rather in the world of the Neo-Confucian that sagehood is suggested as a goal that can be realized.

This has important ramifications for the private and public sectors that began our discussion. Confucius himself opened the possibility of the individual as well as the state acting and living within the framework of Heaven's Way. For the Neo-Confucian the private and public sectors must both be seen as part of the context of the goal of sagehood. This has occasioned the discussion of different types of orthodoxies,<sup>20</sup> in the largest framework, one oriented towards the state and one oriented towards the individual. Both contexts possess the character of the learning of the sage. Thus from a Confucian point of view the bureaucrat serving in government and acting within the context of state cult and ritual behaviors is potentially as directly involved with the learning necessary to become a sage as the individualistic eremitics of the Ming period who define the extreme individual orthodoxy through their unwillingness to serve the government and their sole attention to rigorous methods of self-cultivation.

The critical issue for the religious dimension of the tradition is the degree to which sagehood is a religious goal within Neo-Confucianism. There is little doubt as to the central role the goal of sagehood plays in the tradition. The *Chin-ssu lu*, *Reflections on Things at Hand*, one of the major works of the School of Principle, and the *Ch'uan-hsi lu*, *Instructions for Practical Living*, containing a number of Wang Yang-ming's writings, are constant in their focus upon sagehood as the proper goal of learning and self-cultivation. I have written extensively on the religious character of the goal of sagehood itself,<sup>21</sup> the fundamental argument posing the ultimate character of the goal as an experience of unity of self with Heaven. This provides a basis for the soteriological or transformational character of learning and self-cultivation. Once the goal itself has been properly identified as religious in

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<sup>18</sup> In the *Analects*, for example, there are eight occurrences of the word sage. All refer to the sages of antiquity with no suggestion that through learning it is possible to become a sage.

<sup>19</sup> *Meng tzu*, 6B:2.

<sup>20</sup> See W. T. deBary, "Introduction," in *Essays in Neo-Confucianism and Practical Learning*, eds., W. T. deBary & I. Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 15-22.

<sup>21</sup> See in particular R. L. Taylor, "Neo-Confucianism, Sagehood and the Religious Dimension," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 2.4 (Sept., 1975), 389-415.

character, then it is possible to see the entire effort of the tradition as pervaded with the religious. We can discuss the Neo-Confucian view of the Classics as an issue of scripture and thus the interpretive tools as scriptural hermeneutics; we can see the sage as a paradigmatic figure sharing a number of characteristics of the saint as a religious figure.<sup>22</sup> Most importantly, however, we can fully appreciate the sense of the secular as sacred, the degree to which those very attributes of rational, humanistic and ethical come full circle in the end not to deny the religious in Confucianism, but to pinpoint and punctuate its most salient characteristics.

## II. CONFUCIANISM AND STATE CULT

We have seen already Confucius' adoption of what he felt to be the religious orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the early Chou period. It was to this world of religious ideology and practice that Confucius felt society ought to return, for in Confucius' mind it was intimately linked with the virtuous rule of the early Chou rulers. The link was ultimately with Heaven and to Confucius, the early Chou rulers saw the importance of maintaining the proper relation with Heaven. As Confucius interpreted the early Chou period, Heaven itself was nothing less than the ultimate religious authority and in the final analysis man himself was dependent upon the Way of Heaven.

The early Chou world-view was focused upon a number of sources of sacred power including ancestral spirits as well as spirits of the natural world. Though the early Shang dynasty perspective is still not entirely clear as to the role of *Shang Ti*, the Lord (or Lords)-upon-High, it does seem rather more certain that for the Chou dynasty rulers *T'ien*, Heaven, was a major High God. Because of this pre-eminent position *T'ien* was the object of religious ceremony and sacrifice at the most important level of the state cult. The Chou dynasty had articulated the relation between Heaven and man in terms of the central focus upon the ruler as intermediary. It was the ruler who was responsible for maintaining the proper relation with Heaven. This was done through acting in the capacity of virtue towards his people and providing as well a model of virtue for the people. Heaven was given the authority of exercising control over the right of rulership, the famous Mandate of Heaven, *T'ien-ming*. As long as the ruler continued to act in virtuous ways, so long as he fulfilled his role with humaneness and proper ritual observance, Heaven would continue to provide the mandate for the ruler to rule. Should, however, the ruler fall from virtuous ways, the mandate would be removed and changed to someone else. Such was the reasoning used by the ruler of the Chou dynasty to explain to the vanquished Shang dynasty peoples why their dynasty had been replaced. In this special relation to Heaven the ruler was known as the *T'ien-tzu*, the Son of Heaven, a clear indication of the religious meaning associated with his authority.

The ritual enactment of this state ideology emphasized ceremony and sacrifice. It is difficult to reconstruct much of the earliest periods because the sources while purporting to represent the Chou period are in most cases material of the Han dynasty. This is particularly a problem with the ritual materials because the ritual classics themselves, the *Li*

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<sup>22</sup> See R. L. Taylor, "The Sage as Saint," in *The Problem of Sainthood in Religious Traditions*, ed., R. Kieckhefer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

*Chi*, *Chou Li* and *I Li*, contain quite late description and interpretation. It is possible to construct basic aspects of the ceremonial complex, but much of the most accurate information comes not from the ritual classics, but from the major Han histories.<sup>23</sup>

According to the *Han Shu* it was the Duke of Chou, the paradigm of virtue from a Confucian perspective, who first instituted rites and music to honor the highest religious authority, *T'ien*, as well as the various high gods, *Shang-ti*.<sup>24</sup> He is said to have named his ritual buildings *Ming-t'ang* and *P'i-yang*. He offered sacrifice, *chiao*, to *T'ien* through Hou Chi, the ancestor of the Chou people. In turn he offered sacrifice to the high gods through King Wen, the founding ruler of the Chou people. The chapter in the *Shih Chi* on sacrifice focuses upon the importance of two specific sacrifices, the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, as a vital part of the developing state cult. These were the sacrifices performed to Heaven and Earth respectively. The *feng* sacrifice to Heaven has traditionally been associated with the ceremonial center known as the *Ming-t'ang*, what Soothill called the Hall of Light.<sup>25</sup> The traditional accounts of the *feng* sacrifice suggest it had been conducted by seventy-two rulers of past ages stretching back to high antiquity and that it had been carried out at T'ai-shan, the most important of the sacred mountains in China particularly in terms of the state cult and the eventual influx of Confucian ideology. There was a record of a *Ming-t'ang* as the foot of T'ai-shan and it was here that this most important of state sacrifices was said to have been performed. According to the *Shih Chi* such legendary figures as Fu Hsi, Shen Nung and Huang Ti had all performed the *feng* sacrifice at T'ai-shan.<sup>26</sup> That the *feng* sacrifice was central to the state cult was without question, for it was the purpose of the sacrifice to announce to Heaven the achievements of the ruler and his reign.

Within the context of the Han dynasty itself, the *feng* sacrifice at T'ai-shan provides an important example of the increasing role played by the Confucians in the state cult. According to the *Shih Chi* it was Ch'in Shih Huang Ti (r.221-210 B.C.) who first asked Confucians to advise him on the proper procedure in both *feng* and *shan* sacrifices.<sup>27</sup> In the Han dynasty Emperor Wu Ti (r.141-87 B.C.) also ordered the Confucians to draw up plans for the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices. Wu Ti carried out the *feng* sacrifice in 110 B.C. at the foot of T'ai-shan and simply used the ceremony that was followed for the suburban sacrifices, *chiao*, to the Great Unity, *T'ai-i*, one of the three major sacrifices of the Han dynasty.<sup>28</sup> He is said to have proceeded to the summit of T'ai-shan with only one attendant to perform a secret *feng* sacrifice after the completion of the major *feng* sacrifice at the base of the mountain. Wu Ti repeated the *feng* sacrifice in 106, 102, 98 and 93 B.C. The role of the Confucians in this complex of state ceremony and sacrifice is perhaps minimal, yet as minimal as the contact appears to be, it indicates that the court was seeking the advice of the Confucians in terms of the major sacrifices of the state, the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth. Let me trace briefly how this relation began.

<sup>23</sup> See *Shih Chi* 28 and *Han Shu* 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Han Shu* 25. See discussion in H. H. Dubs, "The Archaic Royal Jou Religion," *T'oung Pao*, 46 (1958), 221.

<sup>25</sup> W. E. Soothill, *The Hall of Light: A Study of Early Chinese Kingship* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952).

<sup>26</sup> *Shih Chi* 28. See B. Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, Vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press), 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Shih Chi* 28. See Watson, 23.

<sup>28</sup> These sacrifices included sacrifice to the Five Lords-on-High, the Great Unity and Sovereign Earth and the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices.

### 1. *The Growing Influence of Confucianism*

There is an early tradition that states that there were two *Ming-t'ang* ceremonial centers under the Duke of Chou, one in the capital and one in Lu, Confucius' native state. After Confucius' death various traditions suggest sacrifices offered in Lu to Confucius, though many of these are particularly hard to substantiate. All of this serves as background to the sacrifice performed in Lu by Han Kao Tsu (r.202-195 B.C.), the first emperor of the Han dynasty. The import of this sacrifice, if in fact it did take place historically, is the seeming recognition of Confucius by the state and in this case by the emperor. To call Han Kao Tzu a Confucian on the basis of this sacrifice is obviously an exaggeration. On the other hand, to suggest that Han Kao Tsu was maintaining a tradition of sacrifice in Lu is probably an exaggeration. The sacrifice at Lu does represent an acknowledgement of Confucius. It is clear that Confucians assisted Kao Tsu as he wrestled with issues of state cult and ideology inherited from the Ch'in dynasty. The process of the assimilation of Confucianism into the state cult is something that took a number of years and is not the product of a single event, however, these events are important indications of the growth of the recognition of Confucius and his teachings.

It is Emperor Han Wu Ti who may be considered the patron of the Confucians. It is after all Wu Ti who asked the Confucians for details on the performance of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices. Confucian advisors were appointed to his court. It was the Confucians who suggested that he reinstitute the ceremonial center, the *Ming-t'ang*. Though the Empress Dowager blocked some of these efforts, particularly those of the Confucian advisors, after her death the growing influence of Confucianism could be seen in a number of ways. In 132 B.C. Wu Ti established a position for a specialist in the Classics. Much of these efforts were through the influence of the great Han Confucian Tung Chung-shu (c. 179-c.104 B.C.). Wu Ti founded an educational institution called the *T'ai-hsüeh*, a university; the curriculum was Han Confucian and the effort was to produce officials whose primary expertise was to be literary scholars, men who by definition would emulate the ways of virtue defined in the teaching and practice of Confucius.

Increasingly through the Han dynasty the Confucians were given additional authority in prominent positions of advising. As such Confucianism integrated itself into the state cult and the ideological background to state orthopraxy became more and more the prerogative of Han Confucianism.

### 2. *The Cult of Confucius*

It appears that there is no immediate beginning of a cult of Confucius following his death. There are frequent pictorial representations of his disciples in mourning around his grave mound and certain sources indicate the early building of a temple, but in sources where one might expect to find mention of cultic development, for example in the *Mencius* and the *Li Chi*, there is no mention of any such activity. Ssu-ma Ch'ien does comment upon the presence of a temple and indicates that certain artifacts had been preserved, including clothes, hat, lute and other items, but there are serious questions about this particular account.<sup>29</sup> Han Kao Tsu purportedly visited Lu and offered sacrifice in 195 B.C.

<sup>29</sup> *Shih Chi* 47. See the discussion of this passage in J. K. Shryock, *The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius* (New York: The Century Company, 1932), 93-111.

and Kuang Wu Ti (r.25-57 A.D.) sent a minister to offer sacrifice in 29 A.D. at the grave of Confucius. Members of Confucius' family were also given titles during this period. Sacrifice in Lu continued during the Later Han (25-225 A.D.), though certainly somewhat infrequently. These include Ming Ti (r.57-75 A.D.) in 72 A.D., Chang Ti (r.75-88 A.D.) in 85 A.D. and An Ti (r.106-125 A.D.) in 124 A.D. However, as Shryock maintains, it is important to realize that the Confucian temple in Lu is essentially a family ancestral temple at this point and it has only an occasional distinguished visitor.<sup>30</sup>

After the Han dynasty the sacrifice to Confucius continued to grow in stature. In 240 during the Wei period (220-265) Emperor Fei-ti (r.239-254) ordered *t'ai-lao*, the major sacrifice of ox, pig and sheep, to be performed for Confucius. In 267 Emperor Wu Ti (r.265-289) of the Western Chin period (265-317) also ordered *t'ai-lao* to be performed for Confucius.

A fuller incorporation of the cult of Confucius into the state cult itself developed during the T'ang dynasty (618-907). In 619 T'ang Kao Tsu (r.618-626) ordered a temple to be constructed in the capital dedicated to Confucius and the Duke of Chou. He sacrificed there himself in 624. In 628 the Duke of Chou was removed from the temple and only Confucius continued to be the object of ritual sacrifice. In 630 T'ang T'ai Tsung (r.626-649) ordered all districts throughout the country to establish temples dedicated to Confucius. In 647 he ordered tablets of prominent Confucians be added to the temple. The Board of Rites, *li-pu*, was given the authority to add or delete tablets in the temple. The effect of this was to create a setting for the recognition of virtue by the state itself. As the history of such tablets indicates, various individuals were added or deleted throughout dynastic periods, providing often a very visible or tangible indication of what the state considered orthodox. As such the orthopraxy associated with the Confucian temple bore out closely the orthodoxy established by the state itself. The visible aspect of orthodoxy incorporated in the placement of tablets in the Confucian temple was made all the more obvious when in 720 images and portraits took the place of the simple and austere tablets. The presence of images and portraits in the Confucian temple lasted in an official capacity until 1530. It is hard to overestimate the visible authority such figures possessed, for there in the ritual center of the Confucian temple was essentially a gallery of figures deemed appropriate as models of emulation. One of the final acts in the merging of the cult of Confucius and the state cult was a decree in 1072 in which officials were ordered to wear state ceremony robes when attending the ceremonies for Confucius. Thus there was virtually full incorporation of the cult of Confucius into the state cult.

A number of minor changes continued to take place, for example in the number and type of vessels used in the sacrifice, in titles of those worshipped and in the number and type of dancers and dances, musicians and music. In 1530, however, Chang Fu-ching (1475-1539) petitioned the Emperor Chia Ching (r.1522-1567) to introduce more fundamental changes. In particular, he requested that there be a return to the practice of offering sacrifice and worship to tablets alone, rather than the images and portraits that were then in the temple. As a result images and portraits were eliminated from the temple. In addition, while the name associated with the temple in the past had been *miao*, temple, it was now changed to *tien*, hall. Names such as *Hsien sheng miao*, the Temple of the Former

<sup>30</sup> Shryock, 101.

Sage, and particularly *Wen miao*, Literary Temple, continued to be used, however, as general names for the temple. Confucius' own title was changed from *wang*, King, to *hsien-sheng*, Sage of Antiquity, or *Hsien-shih*, Teacher of Antiquity. The title for Confucius was also decided upon, a title that with little variation is what is found today on the tablet at the altar of Confucian temples, *Chih-sheng shien-shih K'ung-tzu*, Master K'ung, The Teacher of Antiquity of Highest Sageliness. Few additional changes were made during the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1912). Thus the Confucian ceremonies and sacrifices attended by early Western observers in China at the end of the nineteenth century closely follow what we have outlined here.

### 3. *Confucian Orthodoxy and State Orthodoxy*

What does it mean to say that the cult of Confucius gradually merged with the state cult? It suggests that Confucianism was becoming a standard of interpretation for official state orthodoxy and that ultimately Confucianism was actually becoming the basis of state orthodoxy itself. Initially there was an increased recognition given to Confucius by certain Han emperors. This increased during the T'ang dynasty, but it is during the Sung dynasty that the complete assimilation gradually became a reality. Important in this respect as well is the nature of Han Confucianism and its relation to later Neo-Confucianism. It can be said that the variety of Confucianism that emerged during the Han dynasty as state orthodoxy was in many ways Confucianism and other points of view, including Legalism, Taoism and other philosophical positions. To say that a given emperor supported Confucianism, did not exclude these other points of view and thus even as so-called state orthodoxy, Confucianism lacked the thoroughness of ideological orthodoxy that it possessed after the advent of Neo-Confucianism.

The transformation towards a thoroughness of ideological orthodoxy occurs during the Sung dynasty, though it is easy to overestimate the dramatic nature of the change, for in many respects it was little more than incipient and only gradually grew to maturity. During the Northern Sung period (960-1126) the Neo-Confucians were primarily concerned to initiate change and reform in governmental institutions and educational systems. They idealized in many respects what could take place through reform efforts and in the end bitterly had to accept the defeat of their efforts. What followed was the defeat of the Northern Sung at the hands of the Jurchen, the subsequent flight of the remnants of the Sung to the south and the establishment of the Southern Sung period (1127-1279). Here was the setting for the development of Neo-Confucianism and eventually the emergence of a Neo-Confucian state orthodoxy. It was in this context that the concept of a Confucian Way and its transmission, *tao-t'ung*, first emerged. To Chu Hsi this was a transmission that had begun in high antiquity, it had passed to Confucius, to Tzu Ssu and to Mencius, but then had gone into decline until its re-emergence with the Sung Confucian learning, i.e. Neo-Confucianism.<sup>31</sup> With this spirit of the maintenance of the direct line of teaching from the ancients, the Neo-Confucians went about the task of the propagation of learning for self as well as society. Some were scholar officials but many were simply private scholars. The avenues of teaching were often private academies, *shu-yüan*, and the task was nothing short

<sup>31</sup> For the *Tao-t'ung* theory see, W. T. Chan, "Chu Hsi's Completion of Neo-Confucianism," in *Études Song - Sung Studies: In Memoriam Étienne Balazs*, ed., Françoise Aubin (Paris: Mouton, 1973), 59-90.

of the total transformation of self and society. The collection of Confucian writings from the Sung and the subsequent Yüan dynasty, *Sung Yüan hsüeh-an*, bears testimony to this direction, a direction fraught with struggle and extraordinary energy on the part of the Neo-Confucians. The *Chin-ssu lu* is almost a guidebook to the implementation of this transformation and one of the most important collections of Neo-Confucian writings for China, Korea and Japan.

The actual acceptance of the School of Principle as official state orthodoxy is highly involved in the growing threat of the Mongol empire and the waning power of the Southern Sung dynasty.<sup>32</sup> In those final years Chu Hsi himself had been declared a heretic and his teachings banned. It was only after his death that the state in 1227 accepted as official orthodoxy Chu Hsi's commentaries upon the basic collection of Confucian writings called the *Four Books*, *ssu-shu*, which included the *Ta Hsüeh*, *Analects*, *Mencius* and the *Chung Yung*. In 1237 the Mongols themselves paid honor to Confucius. In 1234 the Southern Sung placed the major teachers of the School of Principle in the Confucian temple. In 1241 the emperor of the waning Southern Sung officially proclaimed the Chu Hsi school as state orthodoxy. What this meant was the acceptance of the Chu Hsi interpretation of the Classics for the civil service examination system and the presumed spreading of Neo-Confucianism as the officially sanctioned teaching throughout the country. This included the ruler as well and, as deBary's study of orthodoxy has made clear, Neo-Confucians were equally concerned with the teaching of the ruler himself.<sup>33</sup>

In a sense the assimilation of state orthodoxy and Confucian orthodoxy in the years of the Southern Sung and Yüan dynasties is the final and most significant level of assimilation of state cult and the cult of Confucius. It should not be forgotten, however, that Neo-Confucian orthodoxy is far more than a single state orthodoxy. The role of the individual and the goals of personal religious fulfillment and sagehood are equally involved. In the Sung dynasty, but more obviously in the Ming dynasty, aspects of an individual orthodoxy are seen alongside the state orthodoxy. Much of the individual focus stresses even more strongly the sense of attaining the Way, the individual struggle to repossess the Way.<sup>34</sup> Neo-Confucianism cannot be identified with only one of these aspects; it is instead the full sweep that encompasses the Neo-Confucian movement. This is critical to understand as Neo-Confucianism passes through its reformulations in Ming China and Yi Korea before entering Tokugawa Japan.

### III. CONFUCIAN CEREMONY

While Confucius had argued for the retention of the ritual of the ancient rulers, as the state cult of Confucius developed the rituals that had been part of the state cult began to be used in celebration and honor of Confucius himself. It is ironic in a sense that what Confucius had argued for retaining as the proper display of the relation between Heaven and man should have come to be considered the proper display of respect to Confucius himself.

<sup>32</sup> The most thorough discussion of the arising of Neo-Confucianism as state orthodoxy is found in W. T. deBary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy and the Learning of the Heart-and-Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 1-66.

<sup>33</sup> *op.cit.*, 27-38.

<sup>34</sup> *op.cit.*, 187-216.

We are fortunate in having descriptions of state cult ceremonies as well as state ceremonies for Confucius. Some of the dynastic histories provide a good amount of detail<sup>35</sup> in this respect and we also have the accounts of early Western observers of a number of these rites.<sup>36</sup> These sources indicate quite clearly that there was little difference in the ritual and sacrifice performed to Heaven and Earth at the Altar of Heaven, *T'ien-t'an*, and the Altar of Earth, *Ti-t'an*, and that performed on the occasion of the Twice Yearly Confucian Ceremony. The sacrificial offering in the same, that of the *t'ai-lao*, the great offering, which included pig, ox and sheep as the primary sacrificial offerings. The Twice Yearly Confucian Ceremony was and still is (in Taiwan and Korea in particular) held in the fall and the spring. They were to be placed according to the cyclic calendar on the first *ting* day of fall and spring and were held in the early morning hours of the day.

The ceremony itself was sacrifice offered to Confucius and the various categories of Confucian sages and worthies whose tablets (or images and portraits, depending upon the historical period) were housed in the temple. Though there is constant variation in the actual figures so honored in the temple and there have been different numbers as well as differences in persons in respect to different cultures, the temple includes the following categories and representative numbers. Confucius was placed at the main altar or north altar facing south, a direction important for the orientation of the entire temple based upon the tradition of the legendary sage emperors facing south. The *p'ei* or side altars included on the east Yen Hui and Tzu Ssu, on the west, Tseng Tzu and Mencius. The *cheh* altars, one step further removed from Confucius, included six figures on the east and six on the west. The *wu* or cloisters were divided between *hsien-hsien*, Worthies of Antiquity, and *hsien-jü*, Scholars of Antiquity. The Worthies of Antiquity were of slightly higher status and thus closer to the north altar and Confucius himself. In Shryock's study of the Confucian temple he numbered the Worthies of Antiquity, forty on the east and thirty-nine on the west. Among the Scholars of Antiquity were numbered thirty five on both the east and the west for a total of seventy.<sup>37</sup> Obviously the temple housed a very large and impressive assembly of Confucians of all ages, an assembly well suited to the magnitude of the state ceremony conducted.

### 1. *Liturgy and Ritual*

The ceremony was focused around the presentation of three separate offerings to Confucius. The full breadth of the ceremony includes a number of activities prior to as well as after the offerings themselves. The sequence of the ceremony is represented by six liturgical verses, *yüeh-chang*, that are sung, each verse corresponding to a major phase of the ceremony. The verses are each titled, the titles in sequence being, Radiant Peace, Manifested Peace, Regulated Peace, Ordered Peace, Beauteous Peace and Virtuous Peace. There seem to have been several versions of these verses and two of the versions are represented in early accounts of the ceremony. In what follows I am including the two ver-

<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the most thorough is *Yüan Shih* 76.

<sup>36</sup> See the bibliography for references to accounts of the Confucian ceremony by Carus, Doré, Edkins, Moule and Shryock. State ceremony is described by Blodget and of course is represented by accounts in the dynastic histories.

<sup>37</sup> Shryock, 240-260.



sions of each verse to give the reader a sense of the variation as well as the commonality of expression found.

### Verse No. 1

#### version A

Great is Confucius — the Sage  
 His virtue and teaching are exalted.  
 The people reverence him, having felt the renovating effect of his exhortations.  
 The sacrifices are constantly offered;  
 They are pure and without defect.  
 They are plentifully provided.  
 The spirit comes.  
 There is light beaming from the sacred countenance of the Sage.<sup>38</sup>

#### version B

Oh great K'ung Tzu!  
 Prior in perception, prior in knowledge!  
 Coequal with Heaven and Earth!  
 Teacher of the myriad ages!  
 Auspicious portent; silk-skein on Ch'ilin [’s horn!]  
 Utterances answering to [the music of] metal and silk!  
 Sun and moon are sustained [by thee!]  
 Heaven and earth [kept] pure and level!<sup>39</sup>

This verse is sung for the meeting and receiving of the spirit. Prior to this the celebrants, ritual attendants, musicians and dancers have all assembled according to strict ritual codes and have taken their proper places. The music begins and this verse is sung in slow and measured style. Prostrations are made by those who will present the offerings at the command of the ritual attendants. These prostrations are made to Confucius and then in turn to other figures honored in the temple. Music accompanies these ritual acts and each step of the ceremony is announced to the celebrant by the ritual attendants, the celebrant often appearing as a passive element awaiting the next command of the ritual attendants.

### Verse No. 2

#### version A

From the beginning of the human race,  
 Who can fully imagine his abundance of goodness and wisdom?  
 He only can be called the divine and enlightened teacher,  
 passing all former sages in excellence.  
 The offerings of grain and of silk are complete and suitable,  
 While there is no lack of the fruits of the earth.  
 The spirit of the sage listens.

<sup>38</sup> These versions of the verses are from J. Edkins, "A Visit to the City of Confucius," *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.s. 8 (1874), 89-91.

<sup>39</sup> These versions of the verses are from G. E. Moule, "Notes on the Ting-chi or Half-yearly Sacrifice to Confucius," *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 33 (1900-1901), 49-52.

## version B

I cherish thy bright Virtue!  
 The jade-stone closes, the metal [bell] begins the strain!  
 What heretofore among living folk was not —  
 [Thou] didst open up the great accomplishment!  
 Charger and [wooden] bowl [are] of immemorial age,  
 In Spring and Autumn at the dawn of the Ting [day]  
 When the clear wine is bright  
 [And] the incense just then ascends!

This verse, its singing and musical accompaniment, indicates the first presentation of offerings out of the three that make up the ceremony. There are variations in this offering. Here there is reference to grain, silk, and fruit. It can also include jade and wine. The principal celebrant is led to the main altar and here he is presented by the ritual attendants with the various items he is to offer. He raises them before his own face as a form of presentation and they are then placed on the ritual offering tables. He is led back to his place and is then ordered to show proper prostration through a series of kneelings and bowings. Each kneeling involves three bows and the command is given three separate times. Thus the offerer has engaged in nine bows at this stage of the ceremony.

## Verse No. 3

## version A

Great is the wise teacher, who truly from Heaven has derived his virtue.  
 We perform music in honour of him.  
 We present sacrifice without cessation.  
 Our wine is fragrant.  
 Our animal offerings are the best.  
 We offer them to the spirits, surely it may be said that the spirits manifestly appear.

## version B

Make propriety your rule, trespass not!  
 Ascend the hall, repeat the sacrifice!  
 Sound together drum and bell!  
 In all sincerity [lift] tankard and conical cup.  
 Most famous, most eminent  
 [Is] this excellent minister!  
 The ritual [is] graceful, the music chaste,  
 As you observe [it] you grow virtuous!

With this verse there is the second presentation of offerings. These offerings include the sacrificial animals. Often the presentation of the animal sacrifice is made by the celebrant placing his hand upon the animal. Each of these stages of the ceremony is demarcated by the sounding of drums, the ending of each stage receives the playing of the *yü*, the tiger-shaped instrument whose back is stroked with a bamboo brush over a series of ridges or teeth down his back. The celebrant is again commanded by the ritual attendants to make the triple prostration three separate times. The third stage of the ceremony is usually marked by the primary celebrant making a ritual address. The ritual address is referred to as *chu-wen* in Chinese, *ch'ungmun* in Korean and *shukubun* in Japanese. An example of such an address is the following:

“O Ancient Master whose virtue sums up that of a thousand saints, whose method excels that of a hundred kings, who sustainest Sun and Moon in their perpetual orbits, Thou who art what never else was since man was generated, I, a member of the great and brilliant assembly of our learned School, — now when ritual has been harmonized and music regulated, (when) in the Imperial College bell and drum are sounding, and with reverent care they present the sweet incense, and too in the academies of Province and of District still stricter observance is kept, — now in the second month of the spring (or autumn) with my companions all duly habited, most reverently I worship, and commence the sacrificial canon.”<sup>40</sup>

The presentation of the address is also marked by triple prostration. The dancers also perform, usually in both Civil dance and Military dance, though this can at times be limited to simply the Civil dance. In the Civil dance the dancers carry a trident of feathers as well as a flute. The dance consists of executing a number of steps and positions with the feathers and flute.

#### Verse No. 4

##### version A

Honoured teacher of a hundred kings,  
 Ruler of living beings and things,  
 See how vast and various are his activities, how marvellous his repose!  
 And pour out the pure and well tasted wine from the golden cup.  
 This is our third presentation,  
 Thus we complete the ceremonies as they are appointed.

##### version B

From primitive antiquity,  
 The ancient people had the practice,  
 In hood of fur to offer herbs.  
 Oh harmony and joy!  
 Only heaven illuminates the people!  
 Only the Saint is in accord with [his] time!  
 As for the ordinance of the unchanging relationship —  
 To this day is He the call-bell!

This verse accompanies the third and final offering, a special offering of wine. Dance is again performed during this offering. This is also the stage at which the primary celebrant partakes of the wine and the offerings himself, thus representing the culmination of the sacrificial act.

#### Verse No. 5

##### version A

The sacrificial animals are here with baskets and bowls in orderly arrangement.  
 They are fragrant; they are pure.  
 The offerings and the music being complete, men are in harmony and the spirits rejoice.  
 We receive blessing through sacrificing and obey the rules without fault.

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<sup>40</sup> op.cit., 48-49.

## version B

The Ancient Master has said,  
 Sacrifice and so be blessed!  
 Within the Empire in the literary palaces  
 Who dare be inexact?  
 The Rites are done, report for removal!  
 Haste not, be not profane!  
 Oh place where joy is naturally engendered!  
 In the midst of the pain there is pulse.

This verse accompanies the removal of the offerings and the various sacrificial vessels.

## Verse No. 6

## version A

To the grand hall of learning,  
 Scholars from the four quarters of the horizon,  
 Come to show respect.  
 Reverentially they perform the ceremonies of the sacrifice,  
 With all the solemn show required by the ritual.  
 The spirit having enjoyed the fragrant odours of the gifts  
 Returns to its place.  
 The presentation of the offerings is finished.  
 All who have shared in the ceremony enjoy great variety of happiness.

## version B

Lofty are Fu and I,  
 Broad are Chu and Ssu;  
 The high road, one travels on it,  
 The flowing water has no stint.  
 Follow up the radiant service,  
 The service great and bright.  
 Influence our teeming people.  
 Maintain our literary schools!

This verse is sung with the return of the spirit. The scroll of the ritual address is burned at this stage of the ceremony to accompany the spirit in his return. With this act the ceremony draws to a close.

Examining various accounts of this ceremony it is obvious that there are many variations in detail. The acts of prostration, the form of presentation of offerings, the offerings themselves, the role of the musicians and dancers and their particular involvement in the ceremony — all of these are subject to some variation both in terms of the particular historical period as well as the differences found between China, Korea and Japan. Yet it is also the case that there are common features that portray the ceremonial religious life of the Confucian tradition, the act of sacrifice and prostration before the “presence” of the spirit and the degree to which such visible displays of ceremony instilled the deepest sense of Confucius’ own understanding of ritual.

## 2. *Sacrifice*

As far as the actual sacrifice itself is concerned, it is important to recognize again the degree to which Confucian ceremony is in essence the adaptation of state ceremony to the cult of Confucius. For example, according to the *Chou Li*, a Han dynasty work, there are three grades of offerings: *ta-ssu*, Great Sacrifice, which includes silk, jade and sacrificial animals; *chung-ssu*, Middle Sacrifice, which includes metals and sacrificial animals; *hsiao-ssu*, Small Sacrifice, including only the animals.<sup>41</sup> For the Ch'ing dynasty only several sacrifices were included under the rank of Great Sacrifice, these included the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth and to Confucius. Significantly, the second rank of sacrifice included former rulers where one might expect to find Confucius, yet his status was such that it surpassed even that of the former rulers. There is good reason then for stressing the comparison between the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth and those to Confucius and of course the early accounts of these sacrifices testify to their commonality.

Another term used to designate the sacrifice offered to Confucius was *t'ai-lao*, Great Offering. This was opposed to the *hsiao-lao*, Small Offering. The Great Offering consisted of pig, ox and sheep; the Small Offering consisted of just sheep and pig. In both of these there can be a substitution of goat for sheep. Han Kao Tsu, according to the *Shih Chi* and the *Han Shu*, offered *t'ai-lao* or the Great Offering to Confucius, designating pig, ox and goat as the offering. We find the same offerings mentioned in some of the accounts of the sacrifice to Heaven and Earth and of course the same pattern of offerings is reported for the recent observations of Confucian ceremony in Taiwan and Korea. There are, however, variations in the method of presentation of the offerings. Palmer, for example, mentions that in Korea the table of offerings includes an uncooked pig's head, a cooked ox head and an uncooked goat's head.<sup>42</sup> These in turn are surrounded by many other food offerings. The Confucian ceremony in Taiwan offers the whole animal ritually prepared and spread over a wooden frame in a standing position. These animals are positioned behind the celebrant and ritual attendants and facing the altar. Probably one of the most detailed accounts of the sacrifice is found in the *Yüan Shih*, the *History of the Yüan Dynasty*.<sup>43</sup> The chapter on sacrifice includes details on the vessels, the number and the type used, music and dancing as well as a discussion of the sacrificial animals. This includes details on the ritual inspection of the animals, their killing and preparation. The animals have always been killed prior to the sacrifice and thus the killing is not considered part of the sacrificial act itself.

The primary offerings for sacrifice have remained remarkably consistent reflecting the dominant model of state cult and sacrifice. There are, however, numerous changes in details of the offerings in a similar fashion to the ceremony itself. Each dynasty often had its own permutations and when we include the development in Korea and Japan we can expect to see some differences reflecting cultural variations. This is particularly the case in Japan where Confucian ceremony was itself heavily influenced by Shinto and in terms of the offerings most frequently presented, resembles Shinto offerings.

The sacrifice itself is described in the following way:

<sup>41</sup> See discussion in Shryock, 160.

<sup>42</sup> S. Palmer, *Confucian Rituals in Korea* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1984), 48.

<sup>43</sup> *Yüan Shih* 76.

The time is here for us who belong to the Wen Chiao Ch'ang Ming Society to observe the rules of propriety and to make music. Beating the bells and drums of the P'i Ying College, we offer thee sweet incense. Having gotten the water of the P'an, we present it to thee in the Pien and Tou sacrificial vessels. Now it is spring (or autumn), wherefore we respectfully offer thee the sacrifice according to the ancient rites. The reverent and constant observance of thy moral teaching is the expression of our gratitude to thee. Mayest thou enjoy this sacrifice.<sup>44</sup>

Here we see the sense of the joyfulness of the sacrifice to Confucius. There are the bells and the drums, the incense, the sacred libations. It is participation for the individual in something ancient and sacred. It is *li*, a display of ritual and propriety understood both as the beauty of outward form and the perfection of inward feelings and their moral goodness. It is a solemn yet joyful expression of gratitude capturing the participants in a moment of timelessness, a participation in the very nature of the sacred itself.

### 3. *The Meaning of Music*

To state that Confucian ritual was accompanied by music does not capture the extraordinary importance placed upon music by the Confucian tradition. Purportedly one of the classics themselves was devoted to the subject, though is no longer extant. Confucius himself expresses a profound regard for the music of the ancients. He compares the importance of music to that of ritual.<sup>45</sup> He describes one of the traditional pieces of music as perfect beauty and perfect goodness,<sup>46</sup> an indication of the ultimate moral basis of music from a Confucian point of view. It is also recorded in the *Analects* that on another occasion Confucius took no notice of his food for three months after hearing a particular piece performed.<sup>47</sup> His own explanation was simply that he was unaware that music could reach such a level of perfection.

What is it about music that permits this response? Why is it to be regarded as the embodiment of perfect beauty and perfect goodness? Part of the answer lies not in the music itself, but in the context of the music. Confucius was very clear as to his regard for the music of the ancients and equally clear as to his disgust of the music of his own generation. What Confucius preferred was that music associated with the tradition of the sages of antiquity. There is little explanation of the difference between the music of the ancients and his own time, at least as far as the music itself is concerned. He criticizes the music of his own day for violating rules of propriety, particularly the use of melodies that do not create an atmosphere of beauty and goodness.<sup>48</sup> The music of his own day differed apparently in tunes from the ancient music, and the conclusion from this simply suggests that it was the ancient music from the era of the sages that conveyed the proper beauty, harmony and moral atmosphere representative of the era of the sages themselves.

The work that has provided some explanation of music, though of late origin, is the chapter on music found in the *Li Chi, Book of Rites*.<sup>49</sup> It is here that the importance of music is stated as an equal to ritual itself. In fact ritual and music are balanced with each other as

<sup>44</sup> Huang and Shryock, 130.

<sup>45</sup> *Lun-yü* 8:8.

<sup>46</sup> *Lun-yü* 3:25.

<sup>47</sup> *Lun-yü* 7:13.

<sup>48</sup> *Lun-yü* 15:10.

<sup>49</sup> *Li Chi* 19, *Yüeh Chi*.

of equal importance. Ritual is said to display itself in external ways and music remains the possession of the inner qualities of man. According to the *Li Chi* the sages of antiquity recognized these qualities of music and because of this employed music to give harmony to their ways. In this capacity it was coupled with ritual. Ritual was able to give a defined external structure for the individual, but it was music that was able to provide the inner harmony. This sense of the inner quality of harmony is also suggested as a microcosm of the harmony that exists between Heaven and Earth. Music is an echo of such harmony; ritual, in the same sense, is that which maintains the distinction of Heaven and Earth. Both then are essential, for the individual must understand both the distinction as well as the harmony between Heaven and Earth. This understanding of music adds appreciably to the importance of music in Confucian ceremony, for it can be seen that the playing of music by creating an atmosphere of harmony, has for the participants permitted a ritual recreation of the harmony of Heaven and Earth itself and thus a ritual participation in this moment of harmony between microcosm and macrocosm. Thus the solemn occasion of sacrifice performed with ritual and music created in a ritual context the fundamental harmony between Heaven and Earth and equally importantly, the harmony of Heaven and Man.

#### IV. THE SUBTLETY OF CONFUCIAN ICONOGRAPHY

One tends to consider the visible components of a religious system as those associated with its rituals and ceremonies, with the symbolism of its arts and architecture and the iconography of its cult figures. Little has been said to this point of art, architecture and iconography. It is in fact the case that it is very difficult to locate specifically Confucian components. First on the topic of architecture, there is little that can be pointed to as specifically Confucian. If anything, there is a close approximation of Confucian style to the style of state cult ceremonial centers. This is even more obvious in comparing China, Korea and Japan. The Confucian temple and its motifs matches the differing styles of state cult centers in each respective culture. The Confucian temples in Ch'ü-fu and in Peking closely follow the style of the imperial palace complex. Their motifs are derived largely from the dominant imperial style. In Korea and Japan it is equally clear that the style of Confucian buildings follows Korean and Japanese models of imperial splendor respectively, rather than attempting to maintain a rigid borrowing of particular Chinese styles.

In the realm of the arts, can we say that there are specifically Confucian styles of painting or of poetry or of calligraphy? The answer is essentially in the negative. Certainly there is something called the literati style of painting and it may very well be the case that a good number of individuals who painted in this style were Confucians. This does not, however, make it a Confucian style in itself. If a painting is to be judged a Confucian painting the only relevant question is whether the painter is a Confucian, since there existed a plethora of styles and most artists worked in more than one.

There is a similar problem with the interpretation of poetry. It has been popular to call a poet Taoist or Buddhist simply based upon images in the poetry, failing totally to recognize that one might write a poem with Taoist or Buddhist themes simply to engage in that particular style of writing. As such it has nothing to do with the point of view of the

author and most certainly does not represent the over used cliché of syncretism. All of this applies equally well to the possibility of Confucian poetry. The important issue is what the author considers himself to be. If the individual is a Confucian then his poem or his painting or his calligraphy can be called Confucian, though the particular theme or style might vary widely. Thus nature themes can be as appropriate to a Confucian as portraying the scholar in his study.

Unlike architecture and the arts, there are certain iconographic features in the representation of Confucius and his disciples. Confucius can be portrayed in several different ways. He often appears as a high minister. In this style he is portrayed as highly dignified and formal. His dress is formal court attire. As a high minister he is shown holding the tablet (*hu* in Chinese, *hol* in Korean and *shaku* in Japanese) held before the breast in audiences with the ruler. He is also shown, however, as a virtual ruler himself, the king of the learning of the ancients. This is often at the head of his disciples. A very contrasting image is Confucius as the humble yet respected teacher and scholar. In this form Confucius is warm and humble in appearance, his robes showing their age though still dignified. Other Confucian worthies have a similar dual portrayal, playing perhaps to the sense of the Confucian at times the scholar in office and at other times the scholar in retirement. Portraits of Confucians tend to emphasize individual characteristics. Often a line drawing will accompany someone's collected works. Such portraits are very different from each other. This suggests that the individuality had its own importance and thus individual personality was as important to portray in iconographic representation as the commonality of the sagely quest.

## V. SELF-CULTIVATION — RELIGION AND THE INDIVIDUAL

In addition to ritual and ceremony as well as iconographic features, an equally important feature of visible religion is the act of the individual being religious. In a Confucian context the act of individual religiosity is most broadly described as self-cultivation, *hsiu-shen*. Self-cultivation means specifically those activities pursued with an eye to the eventual goal of the tradition itself — the goal of becoming a nobleman, *chün-tzu*, for the Classical Confucian tradition, and the goal of sagehood, *sheng*, for the Neo-Confucian tradition. Whether nobleman or sage, the primary religious nature of the goal is clear, for it is that which provides access to Heaven itself. For the Classical Confucian there is a very different sense of following Heaven's Way than for the Neo-Confucian. To the Classical Confucian Heaven is in many respects theistic and for Hsün Tzu perhaps even deistic. It is still, however, the ultimate source of religious authority and the religious life is defined in terms of seeking to follow its way. For the Neo-Confucian Heaven or Heaven's Principle, *T'ien-li*, is immanent in the very nature of things. Thus the issue for the Neo-Confucian is one of realizing man's potential for sagehood either by a thorough knowledge of principle or a manifesting of the principle felt to be the essential ground of the mind.

Self-cultivation covers the activities and attitudes of the individual in the pursuit of the path of Heaven's Way. For the Classical Confucian this involved the cultivation of moral virtues. Confucius and Mencius discuss the importance of righteousness, *i*, filial piety, *hsiao*, rites and propriety, *li*, and humaneness or goodness, *jen*. To Mencius these virtues are within man, instilled by Heaven, and it is man's task to fully develop them. There is



an expression as well of awe, of humility and dependence in the recognition of Heaven's might. In turn there is a sense of faith, *hsin*, of believing in the ultimate authority of Heaven and of the direction Heaven provides to events. One is to proceed with utter sincerity of intention, *ch'eng-i*, and with faith, *hsin*, in the path Heaven has provided. Thus teaching, learning and studying and simply living itself are part of the religious life, for each is within the context of Heaven's Way and it is the insight of the believer to realize the ultimate orientation of all of his engagements.

For the Neo-Confucian much the same point may be made. There is less of a theistic view of Heaven. Instead Heaven's Principle pervades things and it is the task of the individual to ferret it out and thereby to live in accord with it. We have already distinguished the School of Principle and the School of Mind. For the School of Principle it is necessary to investigate things, *ko-wu*, and extend knowledge, *chih-chih*, in a gradually increasing knowledge of Heaven's Way. For the School of Mind the importance rested with making the intention sincere, *ch'eng-i*, for Heaven's Way was already within the individual and the problem was only a matter of manifesting it. This bears on self-cultivation in terms of a different focus on what was considered most important in the pursuit of Heaven's Way. For the School of Principle it was broad-based learning and study together with a form of meditation called "quiet-sitting", *ching-tso*, that were considered the primary foci of self-cultivation. To Chu Hsi study meant primarily book learning, the mastery of the ancient classics, but it included as well the broadest sense of the investigation of things, *ko-wu*, which meant that Heaven's Principle could be found in flora and fauna, in mountains, in art, poetry, calligraphy — the list is almost endless. One simply had to pursue such study with the proper attitude. According to Ch'eng I the attitude of reverence, *ching*, was essential, for it was only through reverence that one would be placing the object in the proper context to be able to understand its ultimate value. For the School of Mind it was the need to manifest the presence of the innate knowing, *liang-chih*, of Heaven's Way in actual concrete situations of moral action, *kung-fu*. To Wang Yang-ming activity provided a better setting for the realization of sagehood than either study or meditation. Heaven's Way is something inherent within man and if looked at from a certain point of view, man's response to actual situations was the very basis of the sagely path. The environment, the arts, all of these contexts were also part of the individual religious life.

This focus upon the individual and his effort in self-cultivation took many visible forms. In the individual study with a shrine dedicated to one's own teacher or to Confucius one created the atmosphere conducive to the pursuit of the sagely path. In a sense the scholar sitting in his study, reading, writing a poem, practicing calligraphy or sitting in meditation; all of these images are important iconographic representations of the Confucian tradition. In fact they are as important as the execution of the formal state ceremony in honor of Confucius himself. The dual iconographic images, formal state ceremony and the scholar in his study, are ultimately no different from the way Confucius is represented iconographically, the formal ruler or minister, and the humble teacher and scholar.

Frequently the scholar met with people of like mind, most often in private academies, *shu-yüan*. These were centers of learning, the most fundamental sense of learning, what Ch'eng I described as the learning necessary to become a sage.<sup>50</sup> We know from the

<sup>50</sup> *Chin-ssu lu* 2.3.

records of these academies that Confucianism was practiced in a way conducive to this learning. The academies preserved ceremony and ritual including sacrifice to Confucius as well as hymns and music. They provided a setting for study and the exchange of ideas as well as the opportunity for meditative activity and the instilling of a proper attitude of quietness and reverence. Even the act of travel took on a perspective of the religious life for many a Confucian.<sup>51</sup> We have a number of travel journals, particularly during the Ming dynasty, that are essentially pilgrimages. For some it was the visiting of sacred spots of the Confucian geography, for others it was a personal peregrination of transformative capacity in terms of the sheer influence of scenery upon the individual. The sphere of self-cultivation is as broad as the interests of the Neo-Confucians themselves.

It is most important simply to realize the degree to which self-cultivation for the Confucian is virtually ever-present as an intention. And it is through the constant attentiveness to self-cultivation that, from the Confucian perspective, the self slowly treads the sagely path. Thus one of the strongest impressions of the religious life in Confucianism is centered around the study, its quietness and its seriousness. The teacher sits at his desk. He is practicing calligraphy, serious yet joyful, incense burning before the picture of his own teacher. Here in as simple a task as the copying of a phrase from a Confucian classic, one sees the Confucian living the religious life.

We see then in conclusion the focus upon the way of Heaven, a focus that has stretched across the generations of the tradition itself from Classical Confucian to Neo-Confucian and is equally a salient part of the cultures of China, Korea and Japan. Within the splendor of Confucian ritual and ceremony, within the context of responsibility and obligation to official position and familial relationships and within the moral and spiritual development of the individual himself, it is the way of Heaven that remains as if it were the Pole Star itself.

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<sup>51</sup> See J. Meskill, *Academies in Ming China: A Historical Essay* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 41-65.