

# Chapter 6

## Ritual: Meaning and Recognition

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### 6.1 General Meanings of Ritual

What is ritual? There can be many answers to this question reflecting the different perspectives of different scholars (this can be demonstrated if one regards the perspectives of different scholars, such as V. Turner, M. Mead, E. Freud, E. B. Tylor, J. G. Frazer, Levy-Bruhl, Malinowski and the so-called Cambridge School of Criticism including J. Harrison, G. Murray, A. B. Cook and F. M. Cornford). While it is difficult to determine a unified and comprehensive definition of ritual, a close examination of its general meanings enables one to grasp its essence and begin to answer the question, “what is ritual?”.

From the perspective of Chinese Confucianism, the concept, “Li” (礼), is similar to “ritual”, however, traditionally, Li was often explained as a principle and its practice, which was true at least in Zhou Dynasty (黄仁宇, 1992, p. 13). In most cases, Li was also translated as polite, courteous, protocol, gift, ceremony or rite in Latin. However, Confucianism treats Li as the fundamental means of both governing the state and cultivating a moral sense. For example, the important Confucian classic entitled, *Book of Filial Piety*, points out: “Nothing is better than music at changing prevailing habits and customs, nothing is better than Li at keeping the State in order and governing the people” (《孝经·广要道》). As far as its function is concerned, Li keeps the political and social order in place by putting into practice a system of behavioral norms. In the process of exercising Li, individuals keep a tight rein on their feelings, emotions, and desires as a means to restraining their behavior to meet the standards of communal life. For example, in the Chinese ceremony of jubilation, the participants usually avoid expressing their unhappy emotions and do not speak unfortunate words. For this reason, Confucius insists that self-restraint is a precondition for returning to rites. As rite (Li) and music are only two of the basic tools or means of realization of Ren (humanity),

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Confucius also thinks we should not see, hear, talk or do anything that is not in accord with rite (孔子《论语·颜渊》). Centered on Ren, Li is not just a sensible, external and prescribed act, but the real bearer and embodiment of the spirit of Ren.

Practically, in a Confucian society, a well-ordered government depends upon the effective exertion of Confucian moral principles ritualized through a set of fixed standards consisting of gestures, language, tools, and other symbolic elements. Philosophically, the Confucian idea of Li is based on its view of the world and a theory of human nature. In accordance with Confucianism, the nature of ritual lies in various orders including the order of mind, the order of community and the order of society. Similar to Spinoza's conclusion that the order of the mind is correspondent to the order of the external world because of their common origin, from the Confucian principle of the unity of Heaven and Earth, one can deduce that Li (ritual) is the embodiment of the cosmos. This conclusion can be observed in *The Book of Rites*, which describes: "Music is the harmony of Heaven and Earth; ritual is the order of Heaven and Earth. Because of harmony various things change; because of order all things differentiate from one another" (《礼记·乐记》). It is from this idea that Cheng Yi, a Confucian philosopher of China's Song Dynasty, developed the conception that "complete comprehension of both god and the change of all things derives from the perfect knowledge of ritual and music" (程颢, 程颐, 1981, p. 225). According to Yi, rituals exist everywhere. Even robbers and thieves have rituals. If ritual is destroyed, the state will be on the brink of collapse because ritual brings about order, peace, and regulation by constraining the terrible and destructive power that originates from personal impulses.

It appears that ritual provides us not only with the basic patterns of our ordinary lives, but also with a source of creative inspiration for myth, dance, music, drama and painting. Many Chinese cultural achievements find their origins and motivation for further development in a variety of rituals. Rene Gerard has even made the assertion that "all religious rituals spring from the surrogate victim, and all the great institutions of mankind, both secular and religious, spring from ritual." (Gerard, 1977, p. 306). In ancient China, the ritual of public punishment fulfilled the Confucian principle of Justice under normal social conditions; rituals of oath fulfilled the principle of Loyalty; and the rituals of offering sacrifices to ancestors reinforced and still strengthen the principle of Filial Piety. In others words, Chinese rituals may be understood as the bearers and guardians of the Confucian system of morality.

It is a well-known fact that in the long history of China the Lingqing System lasted for more than 2,000 years. According to this system, once an Emperor died they were to be carried into a huge mausoleum with a vast cemetery, which was built far in advance of the Emperor's death, where special officials from the fixed administrative organ were to offer daily sacrifices in accord with the Confucian principle that "the living generation should respect and serve the dead ancestors as if they were still living". In almost every Chinese dynasty, important political activities were related to this system in some way, including

a series of rituals that embodied the Confucian ideas, such as those of family, order, state, Humanity, Justice, Loyalty, and Filial Piety.

According to Confucianism, a country is a big family. In fact, the Chinese term “国家”, meaning “country” in English, is the combination of the Chinese word “国” (country) and the Chinese word “家” (family). The ancestral memorial tablet and the correspondent ritual of offering sacrifices on festival and other important days, such as a marriage or the birth of a baby, can often be found in the hall of every Chinese family in the vast countryside and serves as a micro-form of the Lingqing System. Without the ritual of offering sacrifices, that is without offspring, one is in serious violation of filial piety because to be without offspring means to be without the burning of incense or a memorial tablet and one is therefore unable to continue the family lineage. To be unable to continue the family lineage is referred to as being “without burning incense or joss stick” and is considered to be an evil curse in areas of the Chinese countryside. Even today, the continuation of the practice of burning incense is a cultural element that continues to influence the social governance of China. The Chinese ritual of offering sacrifices strengthens the Chinese principle of filial piety and therefore the continuity of family lineage whose symbol is the continuous burning of incense before a tomb or memorial tablet. Only after one is familiar with this ritual and its significance can one understand the cultural reason why many Chinese peasants desire sons, making population control difficult in the Chinese countryside. However, an additional reason why peasants desire sons in the countryside is because they are the primary bearers of physical labor.

It is well recognized that the great majority of rituals are carried out by a collective, group, or community, not by a single individual. Even if some rituals appear to be performed individually, they should still be recognized as an individualization of a collective experience because they are nothing more than the repetition of a common experience or procedure shared by every person. This is certainly the case in China when an individual offers sacrifices to one’s ancestors. Therefore, ritual is essentially a collective activity that follows certain fixed patterns and procedures. This is recognized by Durkheim’s view of ritual as an expression of the collective conscience and by Hans H. Penner when he states, “Ritual is a certain kind of action which represents, or presents once again, a collective emotion or desire which has been blocked even though the emotion is intense” (Penner, 1996, pp. 334–335).

The definition of ritual as formalized gestures or procedures with sacred meanings, which highlights one main dimension of ritual, is fundamentally derived from research pertaining to the religious experiences of primitive societies, as is found in William James, and clearly fails to recognize secular rituals and their differentiations from religious rituals. However, despite these differences, most secular rituals can be traced back to ancient religious rituals because almost all human activities in ancient China were closely related to the gods. This latent connection between secular and religious rituals can be seen by our etymological examination of Chinese term “礼仪” (Liyi), which roughly corresponds to the English word “ritual”. Just as the term “ritual” has undergone a

slow change of its signification, the Chinese term, “礼仪”, has had a continuous renewal of meanings. The expression “礼仪”, a combination of two Chinese words “礼” (Li) and “仪” (Yi), appeared very early in the first collection of Chinese poems entitled, *Poems*. Although the words li and yi initially had similar meanings, li stresses the intrinsic aspect of ritual while yi emphasizes the extrinsic aspect of ritual. However, in most cases, ancient Chinese scholars used the words li and yi separately. According to textual research conducted by Wang Guowei, “礼” (Li) was the same as “禮” (Yi) in ancient times. Some inscriptions were found on bones and tortoise shells from the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th B.C.–11th B.C.) in which the right part of the word “禮” took the shape of “豐” in which “豆” signified the sacrificial vessel (not “bean” in modern sense), “丰丰” signified “two strings of pearls”, and “冂” referred to the sacrificial utensil. Because “示” signified “god”, “礼” meant to respect the gods by offering pearls to them (王国维, 1959, pp. 290–291). In the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.1100 B.C.–C.771 B.C.), “礼” was gradually bestowed with the meaning of “respect for person” and corresponded in meaning to the French word “etiquette” and the English words of “courtesy”, “protocol”, and “ritual” (顾希佳, 2001, p. 70). As Li Anzhai aptly states, the “Chinese word ‘礼’ seems to include folkways, mores, institutions, ceremonies and government decrees” (李安宅, 2005, p. 3). Furthermore, before the Qin Dynasty (221 B.C.–206 B.C.) “Li” also included a series of moral norms and standards of right and wrong. Therefore, at that time, “li” had a more content-full meaning than the English term, “ritual”. If one extracts out the general character of multiple rituals, including political, military, educational, medical, diplomatic, even economical rituals, one may find that ritual is not only the expression of individual or collective emotions, but the expression of social relations. In this way, ritual is not only concerned not with the relationship between individuals and groups to which they belong or the relationship between humans and nature, but with one’s encounter with ultimate reality. The word, “ritual”, embodies within it the quartet of Heaven, Earth, humans, and gods. One might even say that ritual is, to a certain degree, the embodiment of morality and ideology and a response to nature and the rhythms of life (think of the rituals of birth, coming-of-age, marriage, and death).

Due to the enlightenment turn towards rationality and secularization in modern society, the quartet previously mentioned is in a state of disintegration. As a result, many rituals have become external procedures or “empty shells” due to their lack of sacred significance and mythic value. As human beings become the center of all creatures, more people lose reverence for the gods, Heaven, and Earth. It has even become the case that symbols of sacredness, such as oblations and altars, have lost their significance in the eyes of many to the extent that rituals, which should be bestowed with sacred meanings in festivals, have become pure plays. Due to this tendency, some rituals have become increasingly formalized. As ritual continues to be commercialized in modern society it creates a market and, in turn, turns itself into a market. Today, an example of this may be found in Korea and China where the younger generations contract

with ritual companies to cry the mourning rituals when their parents pass instead of performing the ritual themselves. These individuals say that they have no time to cry or are unwilling to cry, even though crying was part of the mourning ritual of the Confucian tradition, which was even medically affirmed as therapeutic. Given the subtle changes of the attitudes of modern individuals towards traditional rituals, one must take into consideration the impact of their ways on modern social life and its formation.

As is commonly recognized, there are two diverse approaches to ritual, one taken by extreme romanticists, like J.J. Rousseau, and the other, a pan-moralist attitude taken by the Confucians. According to the extreme romanticist's approach, ritual is a non-natural performance that suppresses the nature of the person, stifles his individuality, ruins his purity, and causes hypocrisy. When the performance of ritual becomes second nature, all individuals must wear their masks to live in a value-community, which is harmful to one's liberty, honesty, and vitality of spirit. Accordingly, in his famous paper, "On Science and Art", J.J. Rousseau wrote: "There is an evil and hypocritical uniformity prevailing in our custom as if the minds of all persons were founded after the same model. We are always forced to act by ritual and continue to live under the orders of custom. We never follow our own nature but follow these kinds of custom" (Rousseau, 1964, pp. XXII–XLI).

Alternatively, according to Confucianism, human beings are beings of ritual. As a symbol of morality and civilization, ritual embodies the value and dignity of human beings. As a tacit normative performance, ritual unites individuals and serves to distinguish human beings from other animals by embodying a universal moral framework and providing social regulation. This is demonstrated in the well-known sayings of Confucius in *The Book of Rites*. He said, "it is by ritual that human beings exist as human beings" (《礼记·冠义》); "a man is unable to be a real person, unless he knows ritual" (孔子, 《论语·泰伯》) and "a man is unable to be a real person without learning ritual" (孔子, 《论语·尧曰》). However, it is most important to acknowledge the moral dimension of ritual stressed by Confucianism. For example, Xunzhi considers ritual as the highest point of humanity (《荀子·礼论》). Other Confucian philosophers differ in their perspective of Ren (Humanity) and ritual, but all of them stress the impossibility of morality and Ren without ritual.

The constantly renewed idea of ritual reflects the historically varied motivations, which led to various changes in the social life as well as a reconstruction of its ideology. It is necessary to examine how society could be conceived of without ritual and, consequently, why ritual is needed for social organization in a broad sense.

Confucianism becomes a substantial approach when one recognizes that it encompasses not only a theory, but practice and practical wisdom. In this sense, rituals constitute the structure of Confucianism. Therefore, the decay of ritual is tantamount to the decay of Confucianism. As a result, one can see how the gradual disappearance of those rituals in China associated with the theoretical and practical aspects of the Confucian system has a negative impact.

Neo-Confucianism has not been influential in modern society because it neglects the great importance of ritual and limits itself to the realm of abstract theory. As a result, it appears that the renaissance of Confucianism and the development of Neo-Confucianism depends upon whether their rituals can be carried out in modern society. This observation may be more readily understood if one looks to three classic Confucian books, the *Yili* (《仪礼》, *Rites*), the *Zhouli* (《周礼》, *Rites of Zhou Dynasty*) and the *Liji* (《礼记》, *The Book of Rites*), which provide detailed discussion of almost all rituals. Additionally, other Confucian classics discuss the essence, significance, and function of ritual.

Theorizing about ritual is as old as Confucianism. Malinowski's (1926) remarks on myth are also true of the Confucian view of ritual, "It expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for efficiency and contains practical rules for the guidance of man" (Kluckhohn, 1996, pp. 346–354). In effect, Confucian rituals (li) "were constituted in imitation of perceptible cosmic rhythms as a means of strengthening the coordination of the human being and his natural and spiritual environment. They were used to reinforce a sense of human participation and context in the regular process of existence" (Hall and Ames, 1986, p. 86). In the Zhou Dynasty, the focus of ritual shifted from man's relationship with the supernatural to the relationship among social members. However, these rituals never lost their sacred significance. On the one hand, they regulated the interpersonal relations in the courts and on the other they functioned as a coordinator among members on all levels of society. Within the scope of this chapter, it is not possible to discuss the various aspects of Confucian theories of ritual, but it is possible to say that for Confucianism, generally, ritual not only has pedagogical value, but also a normative significance, it not only serves as a means to displaying and developing communication among social members, but also serves as a means for self-cultivation and individual expression of emotion. Additionally, ritual is a vehicle for establishing political authority, realizing social control, and changing or defending tradition. In other words, ritual is a structured pattern of actions for dealing with the relationships among human beings, gods and nature.

However strange it is, ritual is a part of human life. There is good reason to believe that wherever a human community exists, ritual also exists. Ritual will remain indispensable to humans so long as they live a religious life, encounter ultimate reality, require coordination and cooperation among group members, are in need of a collective identity, seek the realization of self-esteem and a sense of value from their community, require security, and anticipate social order, stableness and foresightedness for their future.

Naturally, everyone has a different image, experience, and understanding of ritual. As a structured social practice, ritual indicates different meanings for different groups. For instance, kneeling down has different meanings at different times in China. Sometimes, it means high respect, sometimes supplication, sometimes humiliation, and sometimes loyalty. Consequently, ritual is a formalized perspective of the world and a programmed representation of life ideas embodied in a well-organized series of behaviors. Due to ritual's formal



character, changes in ritual occur very slowly in comparison to social life. An example of this is the fact that there has been no significant change to the rituals of marriage or mourning in the Chinese countryside for thousands of years.

A great deal of anthropological evidence suggests that almost every important human activity was ritualized in primitive societies. In primitive tribes, ritual was seen as providing refuge for the spirit as well as providing the power with which they could face risks and survive the challenges of their environment. Even today one can observe the influence of ritual on human production and life. Consequently, one may accept the following explanation of ritual: “Ritual is a human phenomenon. It makes human mutuality possible through dealing with basic issues of existence. It leads to assurance and order, as well as death. It enables the world to become simpler and more manipulable, and thus makes decision-making easier” (my translation from German, Cf. <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritual>).

Since ritual belongs to a group, organization or community, there is no private ritual in a real sense. Even though some rituals appear to be performed by the individual, they should still be regarded as a kind of individualization of the collective because they are constituted by nothing more than the repetition of common experiences or procedures. For instance, one may observe an individual offering sacrifices to an ancestor in front of a tomb, which you often see in China, but the ritual should still be regarded as public because the individual’s performance of the ritual is completed in a fixed way, familiar and common to the community to which he belongs.

Ritual is a symbol of the rhythm of human life and production. As is well known, there are many festivals in almost every country, which usually have corresponding rituals of celebration. In the past, these rituals have been connected to the change of seasons and agricultural production, the birth and/or death of religious figures, or significant historical events. At present, some rituals are celebrated at the beginning and end of big projects, however these rituals appear to be more and more for public entertainment. The strongest case for demonstrating how ritual works as a symbol of the rhythm of life is the “rite of passage”. Undoubtedly, the rituals for birth, coming-of age, marriage, and death not only signify the different stages of life, but also demonstrate how these stages are not simply natural events, but social events signifying one’s entrance into new social relationships with others. In this case, ritual has the double role of transforming individual affairs into public affairs and natural events into social events.

As a language of behavior, ritual is not only a dialogue of bodies, but a dialogue of minds. According to *The Book of Rites*, ritual originated from human eating activities. However, ritual is also the coordinator among minds, which can bring one pleasure, warmth, kindness, and affinity, while also bringing one a sense of distance, mystery, sublimity and even sacredness. The goal here is not to work out a psychology of ritual, but to explain how ritual overcomes the naturalness or wildness of human beings by helping to constrain natural desire and overly strong passions. Ritual helps to decrease the

psychological pressures of persons by reducing psychological distance, eliminating the strangeness or otherness many feel, and promoting confidence and friendliness among them. In this sense, one can conclude that ritual is a means to social cohesion, to use Durkheim's terminology, because it promotes the unity and harmony of a group. In addition, one can see that ritual functions as a kind of ideology, making social control possible. we can conclude that ritual is a "social cohesive means" in the terminology of Durkheim because it promotes the unity and harmony of a group. In addition, ritual functions as a kind of ideology that makes social control possible.

## 6.2 Ritual and Symbol

Although there is agreement among some scholars who regard ritual as similar to non-cognitive myths for different reasons, this chapter will take a different approach by considering ritual to be a system of symbols conveying limited cognitive meanings with reference to actual and historical human conditions. In a sense, ritual can be considered a symbol of our life, regardless of whether the original meanings of some rituals are forgotten or misunderstood. Even simple ritual acts, such as an oath, a handshake or a farewell, show their symbolic meanings. Some anthropologists like Victor Turner, including Margaret Mead, find the symbol to be the smallest unit of ritual. According to Mead's definition, ritual is "the repetition of those symbols which evoke the feeling of that primordial event which initially called the community into being with such power that effects our presence at that event – in other words, represents the primordial event" (Mead, 1972, p. 127). In an overwhelming majority of rituals, especially those that are religious, symbols are used to create or evoke deep emotions or to purify the minds of the participants. The role of catharsis is played by such symbols as mask, gesture, and incantatory language by drawing the participants away from their ordinary lives and developing their capacities for reflecting upon and understanding the experienced event even if they do not know the exact symbolic meanings of the ritual. This explains the old maxim, "symbols give rise to thought".

In ritual, the various objects, images and gestures are well organized into an overarching symbolic system. Just as a word may have no meaning apart from a sentence or context, an isolated act may be meaningless when taken apart from the symbolic system of ritual. This perspective is in agreement with Israel Scheffler's statement that "Rites are multiple rather than singular symbolic entities. That is, rites are identified by practice not with single performances, but rather with groups of performances satisfying certain specifications." (Scheffler, 1982, p. 151). As a matter of fact, the symbolic system itself may be reinforced by every performance of ritual. It is through such a symbolic system that ritual is capable of providing institutionalized gratification for the various emotional, political, and social needs of a particular society. In the absence of codified law and a perfect moral system, ritual helps to preserve



social cohesion through the symbolic system. This is illustrated by Clyde Kluckhohn with his statement that, “Ritual is an obsessive repetitive activity, often a symbolic dramatization of the fundamental ‘needs’ of the society, whether ‘economic’, ‘biological’, ‘social’ or ‘sexual’ (Kluckhohn, 1996, pp. 243–278).

Historically speaking, the symbolic meanings of ritual are determined by a particular culture. For this reason, the same object used in different rituals has different symbolic meanings under different cultural conditions. For example, “white” is a symbol of pureness for Western weddings, while it is often avoided in Chinese weddings because it symbolizes sadness for many Chinese. Similarly, the color red is used in many Chinese celebratory rituals because it symbolizes good luck, along with the numbers four, seven, eight, and nine.

Because ritual is a living framework of culture, the change of the ritual roughly implies cultural change. Even the decay of a ritual can lead to the disappearance of its symbolic system, as is seen with young couples from big Chinese cities accepting Western wedding practices. However, changes in ritual is slow in comparison to other cultural components because, as a series of prescribed acts, ritual provides one with a pattern of action, a vision of the world and a kind of mutual enlivenment through the different symbols that constitute a relatively stable structure rooted in one’s ordinary life, ideas and customs. Usually, the more important a ritual is, the more magnificent its occurrence is, and the more complex its procedures are, the more power it generates from its symbolic gestures and objects. The Chinese mourning ritual for the death of male elders, which tends to last many days in the Chinese countryside, demonstrates this. To explore this, take an example from the author’s experience:

In 2005, my family, properly speaking, my clan composed of hundreds of members, held a burial ritual for my father who had passed away in 2003. This ritual lasted two days, although a longer mourning ritual with very complex procedures had already been held previously in 2003. Due to limited space, I cannot give a detailed description of the first mourning ritual for my father and expound on its enigmatic symbolic meanings. But, I will explain the symbolic process that preceded in the second ritual for my father by offering a picture of my experience.

In May of 2005, I was informed of the date of the ritual, which was determined by a famous local specialist who was believed to be able to choose the location of the tomb after a complicated assessment of the omens. In November of 2005, a burial ground for my father was meticulously chosen.

The morning the burial ritual was held, the coffin for my father was carried on stout poles by four people from its temporary resting place to the eternal burial ground, followed by my brother, my sisters and me as well as other relatives, friends, and members of my clan. First, the coffin for my father was opened after the president declared the beginning of the burial ritual, and when we saw the white bone of my father we were very sad, but we were not allowed to cry. This was quite different from what had happened during the first ritual in 2003 because this burial ritual was meant to signify that we had found the

eternal place for the peaceful sleep of the dead, which we were supposed to feel happy about, even though we still wore white clothes symbolizing mourning on our heads. In this case, the seemingly contradictory acts of the ritual symbolized the complex emotions in our hearts. However, our sadness was much more substantial than our happiness at that time.

To my astonishment, after the president very carefully washed the skull of my father with alcohol, I was asked to take a little blood from my finger and to put it on the nose bone of my father while an umbrella shaded the sunlight, which is said to be bad for the dead in either world. Immediately after the coffin was closed again the second procedure, called “heating the grave”, was undertaken with the noise of a firecracker, meant to imply that the dwelling place for the dead was warm and comfortable enough to live in. Next, the coffin was slowly removed into the grave. We were asked to go down on our knees, repeating “Father, please accept this place!” over and over again while kowtowing towards the grave.

During the third procedure, many meaningful gestures were made as the president sang a mournful song, spoke incantatory words and threw us a lot of rice and bean meant to symbolize fortune and riches.

Lastly, the participants in the ritual were provided with noodles and meatballs, which were said to symbolize long life and happiness respectively. The grave was filled with much slaked lime and soil after the president expressed good wishes to us. Once the tombstone with the epitaph was set up, the burial ritual ended. It was suggested that all of us should return with a few tree branches to symbolize the riches, as riches and timber have the same pronunciation in Chinese.

In the above ritual, there appear to be two worlds: one is the intuitable world composed of those prescribed acts and objects and the other is the ideal world the actor and participants share through the performance of ritual as a symbolic process. The intuitable world hints at inherent, durative and latent meanings that are not naturally manifest to every participant. Those latent meanings may be looked upon as transcendent meanings, which may need to be explained to some people. Consequently, the intuitable world becomes the index that leads people to think about their own past and future, which can be interpreted as a case of ritual uniting the past with an uncertain future with symbolic language. In this case, the ritual symbols are both the mimesis of the past and the bearer of anticipation. Here, the present, visible objects and acts open up to the absent, invisible world. And thus, it is through the ritual symbols that presence and absence and past and future are united. Gauvin writes:

It is quite evident that a rite is composed of both the prescribed gesture and of its theological significance, which goes far beyond that. In Catholic liturgy the gesture has a deep symbolic and mystic value: it actualizes in the present time of the ceremony, a past or future event that is thus mysteriously recreated or anticipated. The Catholic rite par excellence is the Mass, which can be said to reconstitute systematically the mystery of the Redemption by the death and Resurrection of Christ. (Gauvin, 1977. pp. 128–140).

It is worth noting that Gauvin points out the relevance of symbolic meanings for mystic value in terms of ritual, although his discussion is confined to Catholicism. When a common belief in the transcendent meanings of ritual is established, its gestures and acts are generally bestowed with mystic value. In this way, a thing is not only itself, but also something more than itself. For example, a *Kasaya* is not just a piece of clothing. It uncovers a sacred and mystic world, just as the rice and beans are not just meant to be eaten in the burial ritual above.

According to Paul Ricoeur's explanation, a symbol is a sign, but all signs are not symbols. He states, "the symbol is a sign in that like all signs it goes beyond something and signifies something (Ricoeur, 1969, p. 285). Among the various signs, technical signs and symbolic signs occupy two opposite poles. The former is apparent and univocal in representing only what it signifies, whereas the latter is opaque and equivocal in what it refers to because the signified varies from culture to culture.

As seen in the burial ritual described above, some natural objects can become symbolic signs only when taken in the context of certain rituals. In some cases, a symbol can be a double sign, like a dream within a dream, which I call the sign of signs. For example, "Hitler" is both the name of a historical person and a symbol of evil. "Round Moon" is a sign referring to a celestial body and is also the symbol of perfection and reunion in Chinese culture. A hand gesture in the shape of a "V", which is often called Churchill's gesture, is a symbol for victory. It is obvious that in these cases there are two meanings: one that is the literal, patent, and primary meaning, and another that is the symbolic, latent and secondary meaning. The primary meaning is not parallel to the secondary meaning, which will be referred to a "parasitic" because "the symbolic meaning is constituted in and by the literal meaning, which operates the analogy in giving the analogue" (Ricoeur, 1969, p. 286).

The life of symbols consists in its continuous exercise and explanation. Ritual can provide us with extensive possibilities for the institutionalized exercise of symbols. Whether participants in a ritual can understand the meanings of the symbolic acts and objects depends upon whether they can realize the passage from the primary to the secondary meanings of the symbols. Therefore, this realization also depends upon whether one has assimilated to the symbolized.

Symbol is a kind of concretized abstraction. It is through the process of abstraction that symbolic acts and objects become not only themselves, but references to something beyond themselves too. In terms of semiotics, the symbol is both significant and signified. It is significant because it is a sign to be bestowed with certain meanings however, in some cases this sign takes on a double structure of intentionality, which connects the original human experience to current emotions and ideas. For instance, the King's cane usually symbolizes not only the genitals of a male, but the unity of country and the highest authority (陈荣富, 2004, p. 40). Therefore, the same symbolic object has different referents or signifiers and thus develops different intentional relations simultaneously.

Ritual calls for and depends upon repetition. Ritual's persistence is attributable to the repetitiousness of its symbolized gestures and objects, as well as its fixed procedures in the social community, which reminds us of the world of experience and the world of the transcendent, the familiar and unfamiliar. Familiarity means accessibility, while unfamiliarity results in mystique. In a strict sense, this kind of familiarity is requisite for ritual. The certainty and validity of a ritual is determined by the repletion of its symbolic acts, whereas the procedure and fixed pattern are the determinate aspect of ritual. For this reason, any great change or innovation to a ritual naturally causes controversy among many people, especially when such a change effects the symbolic social status and authority of participants in the ritual.

### 6.3 Ritual and Recognition

Performing a ritual is a process of recognition and, therefore, the history of ritual is also the history of recognition. The identical role that ritual plays in our social life has something to do with recognition (Anerkennung, in Hegel's sense). One might even say that ritual is an elementary form of social recognition and the collective identity of individuals with a value-community.

Ritual serves to demarcate between recognition and rejection. That is, when one is allowed or invited to participate in a ritual, it indicates that one has been accepted as a member or guest of the community. This is true at least in religious and cultural groups, military and political organizations, and certain professions, such as doctors and police officers. In a hierarchical society, ritual provide participants with the opportunity to demonstrate their social position or role within their community so that it may be recognized by more and more people. This enables participants to engender self-respect, self-confidence, and a sense of value for themselves. Due to these benefits, this is why honor is typically bestowed upon a member of the social community through the practice of ritual. In these types of ritual, the order of time and space is meaningful because the order of seats, speeches, and movements serve to recognize the social position of persons among the many other attendees. Additionally, age and seniority should be considered in those rituals related to the affairs of a family or clan in traditional Chinese society. A failure to take these details into account, may result in an individual being puzzled, unhappy, or angry.

In ancient times, rituals were the primary or even unique form of social recognition, which served as unwritten law. In ancient China, ritual was a necessary condition for the legal recognition of a couple as husband and wife, however, in modern times, a couple can be recognized as husband and wife before the law without carrying out the associated ritual. *The Book of Rites* states, "without temple presentation the woman is not a legal wife" (Cf. Ku Hungming, 1915, pp. 83–85). The "temple presentation" referenced here is one of six traditional rituals or marriage ceremonies in China. In traditional Chinese society, the six legal marriage ceremonies included: first,

the Formal Proposal for Marriage (问名, literally, asking for the name); second, Betrothal (纳彩, literally, receiving silk presents); third, Fixing the Day for Marriage (定期); fourth, Fetching the Bride (亲迎); fifth, Plighting Troth (奠雁), namely, pouring libations before the wild goose as a symbol of faithful love), sixth, Temple Presentation (庙见). Most of these ceremonies have been kept with the Chinese countryside areas, although some are simplified in order to save time, energy and money. These six ceremonies are a combination of the practices of secular and religious marriage, but the last two ceremonies remain the most important. According to Confucianism, marriage is not only about the couple, but the family as a whole. The act of marriage consists of the couple entering into a family in addition to a social relationship with others and, therefore, they must take responsibility for the family and gain formal recognition from others. At the same time, marriage also means practicing the anticipation of ancestors and thus requires the bride and groom to have a spiritual tie to their ancestors. The fifth ceremony involves the bride and groom vowing to love each other like faithful geese while going to their knees towards Heaven and Earth in hopes of their recognizing and bearing witness of them. The next step is for the bride and groom to go to their knees towards their parents and each other to recognize and promise mutual respect to each other in front of all those in attendance of the ceremony. The final ceremony, that of the temple presentation, involved the father or closest senior to get to one's knees before the ancestral memorial tablet in the hall or the ancestral temple and to announce to his ancestors the coming of a new member to the family in hopes of gaining recognition from them. In this sense, marriage and its recognition are bestowed with sacred meanings.

Some young people today seem to be bored by the trifling traditional ritualistic services. Due to the development of other forms of social recognition, they find it unnecessary to be recognized within a value-community through religious ritual. This phenomenon appears to originate from the secularization of rituals in modern times, reducing their sacredness, mystery, and control over people's minds. Similarly, in the past, the "rite of passage" of an individual required one to undergo a series of rituals related to birth, maturation, marriage, disease, and death, representing the different life stages. The individual was publicly recognized only through these rituals. Here, it is important to ask why some rituals have been omitted or simplified today. It appears that the simplification of these rituals is not only due to the secularization of rituals, but also with the change in forms of recognition. In order to give a rational explanation for this, it is necessary to analyze the different forms of recognition and its relationship to ritual.

In accordance with different orientations, there are two primary classes of recognition: individual recognition and mutual recognition. Individual recognition involves a person or group taking action to accept other individuals or groups. For example, a father recognizes his natural son and a country recognizes the independence of a new state. Mutual recognition involves a proper reciprocal recognition of the feelings, dignity, value, and status of other social

agents. For example, persons exchange gifts as a means of interpersonal communication, members of the armed forces salute each other, and countries exchange ambassadors.

A meaningful and helpful contribution to the analysis of the relationship between rituals and recognition is that of the distinction between three modes of recognition given by Axel Honneth, a German philosopher. According to Honneth, love, law, and solidarity are the three main modes of recognition, the opposites of which are rape, deprivation of rights, and shame. Honneth succeeded in finding the key to understand the secret of recognition when he developed the young Hegel's concept of *Anerkennung* and treated "love", broadly construed, as the primary form of recognition based on the positive studies of Donald W. Winnicott and Jessica Benjamin. In his book, *Kampf um Anerkennung (Struggle for Recognition)*, he describes the complex structure of recognition-relation, which has three dimensions, including "support in feeling", "respect in knowledge" and "high valuation in social communication". Without even discussing the relation between ritual and recognition, his description of the structure of recognition is also true of the characteristics of ritual. In other words, ritual not only shows the support of one person given to another through feeling, but also demonstrates one's respect for others and one's appreciation of the social value of others. Mutual recognition expresses the symmetrical valuation between independent subjects, while mutual and symmetrical valuation encompasses the reciprocal observation and appreciation of independent subjects in light of value, enabling the abilities and nature of the other to be meaningful for common practice (Honneth, 2003, pp. 209–210).

Whether it is unilateral or bilateral, ritual is closely related to action, feeling, value, status, and the moral ideas of a person or group. From this, it can be concluded that there is a deep connection between ritual and recognition. For instance, a rite of passage reflects the change of a social role for one person through one's different life stages and requires the recognition of each social role by one's community members. Alternatively, the ritual of marriage is the public recognition of the different social roles of one person, such as a husband or a wife, a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law, etc. This is why a marriage held without ritual has had difficulty in being recognized by the social community, especially in China ("不庙见, 不成妇", means "unable to become a wife without the ritual of Temple Presentation"). Due to the power of law in modern society, the wedding ritual as a mode of recognition has lost its original effect. However, like love, solidarity, handshakes, and the exchange of gifts, it includes the logic of mutual recognition, indicating social identity and respect (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 294).

Generally speaking, all individuals strive for the recognition of others because it is an affirmation of one's social role, abilities, status, value, and dignity as a person. In a hierarchical society, ritual expresses respect for authority and reflects the demand for unequal status through its ordering of space and time. On the contrary, in a free society, ritual embodies the demand for equality. Sometimes ritual can serve as a symbol of acceptance and



elimination. For example, an individual who is excluded from an organization or institution will not be allowed to participate in those rituals unique to the institution or organization. The Buddhist ritual of head-shaving acknowledges that a person has been admitted into the rank of monks, just as the Christian ritual of bathing recognizes one's place in the church.

As a face-to-face action, the marriage ritual implies that the couple formally receives public respect, appreciation and recognition by one another. Meanwhile, the performance of the ritual provides the couple with the opportunity to be witnessed by others to strengthen the publicity, openness, and community of recognition and thus demonstrates that the couple accepts an immaterial and invisible bond from the ritual. Despite its non-coercive character, this ritualized public action can be internalized as an effective experience for the person, which will influence one's intentions and decisions and will embody a meaning similar to a promise or tacit convention. It is in this sense that ritual provides us with so-called "tacit knowledge" in terms of Polanyi. There is good reason to believe that the exchange of keepsakes between the bride and bridegroom, in addition to their performance of the ritual of kowtowing towards each other, plays the role of mutual recognition for the new couple in the Chinese marriage ceremony. In fact, Marcel Henaff regards the exchange of all gifts as a symbol of the mutual recognition of people. Similarly, handshakes, greetings, and farewells in ordinary life are the primary signs of mutual recognition from which one can recognize the sprouts of recognition at the moral, legislative, and political levels.

**Acknowledgements** This chapter is the product of two conferences on ritual, which were held respectively at Hong Kong Baptist University (2005) and the University of Notre Dame (2007). I would like to thank the conference organizers, Professor Ping Cheung Lo, Professor David Solomon, and Professor Ruiping Fan, in addition to the sponsor of the Ritual Book Project, Professor H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., for creating a wonderful and unified spiritual space for participants from different cultural backgrounds. In addition, I would especially like to thank Mrs. Corinna Delkeskamp-Hayes, Professor Ivanhoe, and other conference participants for their critical and constructive comments on this chapter.

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