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The work of appropriation, domestication, and substitution: theories of sacrifice in the *Liji*

Michael Puett

- 1 The Classical Chinese civilisation has come to be known to a significant degree in the literature of anthropology and religious studies through the practice of sacrifice, and particularly through ancestral sacrifice. Despite its prominence as a topic of discussion, however, surprisingly little work has been done in exploring the indigenous theories concerning sacrifice that have emerged in the Chinese tradition. This paper will attempt a small piece of this larger project by discussing theories of sacrifice in the *Liji*. I will begin by turning to dominant approaches concerning sacrifice in contemporary theory, and will then turn to those found in the *Liji* itself.

Sacrifice as killing and consumption

- 2 Most theories of sacrifice that have become common in the humanities and social sciences over the past two centuries have focused on the killing of animals and the consequent consumption of meat in the sacrificial act. The study of Greek sacrifice has been the origin of many of these discussions, with various theories focusing on either killing or consumption.
- 3 In terms of killing, by far the most influential figure has been Walter Burkert. Burkert saw Greek sacrifice as a survival (based ultimately in man's genetic make-up) of rituals dating from the early hunting societies of human civilisation. His emphasis was on the notion of sacrifice as expiation, a gift to nature in order to atone for the murder which man had to make in order to eat.¹ Burkert's arguments have been widely rejected for their biological reductionism and for their reliance on a claimed Palaeolithic sense of guilt, not to mention the questionable usage of archaeological material to reconstruct Palaeolithic ritual practices.

- 4 Perhaps in part out of opposition to these concerns about Burkert's approach, subsequent scholars have tended to de-emphasise the significance of killing in Greek sacrifice. But it is important to remember that, in early Greek sacrifice, there was indeed a great deal of ritual focus on the act of killing and the necessary expiation for doing so. For example, the ritual sacrifice of an ox for Zeus –offered by most of the city-states at least once a year– included a ritual expulsion of the figure who killed the bull, as well as a ritual expulsion of the knife used to do the killing.²
- 5 By far the most influential rereading of Greek sacrificial practice since Burkert has been the one undertaken by Vernant and Detienne, who have focused instead on the patterns of consumption in sacrifice. As Vernant and Detienne note, after the bull was slain, the bones and fat of the animal were offered to the gods by burning, and the meat was then eaten by the humans. Vernant and Detienne go on to highlight the symbolic significance of the division, rooting it in stories related to Prometheus.³
- 6 In turning to a symbolic analysis of the Greek sacrifice, Vernant and Detienne were part of a much larger movement in anthropology and religious studies in general. From a larger comparative perspective, both killing and consuming are commonly emphasised in sacrificial practice throughout the world, and both are crucial parts of what has become by far the dominant paradigm in anthropology for the understanding of sacrifice from a symbolic perspective. In this formulation, the offering represents the disordered state of the one giving the sacrifice. One is thus killing that disordered state and offering it up to the divine powers. The offering is thus divinised, and, when humans consume the rest, they too partake of that divine power.
- 7 As one example among many of this reading, Valerio Valeri reads Polynesian sacrifice in this way:
- In a sacrifice, the offering –which is a substitute of the sacrificer– is eaten by the god and thus feeds him. But it also becomes part of him and thus participates in his powers. Insofar as part of the offering so transformed returns to the sacrificer to feed him, he acquires part of the divine powers. The sacrificer may be viewed as undergoing, through his substitute, symbolic cannibalisation and resuscitation: he is transformed by being eaten, incorporated by the god.⁴
- 8 The key, then, is substitution: the offering is a substitute for the one giving the sacrifice.
- 9 Another example is Maurice Bloch, who builds a general theory of sacrifice out of a variant of this notion. The sacrificer first identifies with the victim –representing, for Bloch, the purely vital element of the sacrificer. The death of the victim then represents the death of that vitality, with the sacrificer becoming identified with the transcendental powers. In the resulting feast, the sacrificer returns to the world of humanity, but now, empowered by the transcendental, as a full consumer of the world of vitality.⁵
- 10 Indeed, Bloch argues that the same theory can explain Greek sacrifices as well. In his reading, Vernant and Detienne focus on only one element of the larger process that fully includes the themes of substitution and identification: “I cannot, however, entirely follow Detienne and Vernant when they use their point about cooking as though it negated the significance of the identification of sacrificer and victim and the significance of the self-sacrifice and substitution elements...”⁶ From this perspective, the killing and consumption (as emphasised by Burkert and Vernant/Detienne respectively) that we see in early Greek sacrifice would be key components of a larger

process of transformations based in the interplay of vitality and transcendence. And the play of substitution would be the key that makes this killing and consumption in sacrifice meaningful.

- 11 Many of the studies in the anthropological literature involve working out the various permutations of this model. For example, does a given culture more strongly emphasise the issues of the sacralisation of the human sacrificer (as Valeri emphasises for Hawaiian kingship sacrifices) or a subordination of a sacrificer to divine commandments? But pervasive is the view that the offering is a substitute for the one giving the sacrifice.

Sacrificial theory in the *Liji*

- 12 But then we turn to the *Liji*: the theories of sacrifice articulated in the *Liji* sit rather uneasily with these formulations.
- 13 To begin with, sacrificial theory in the *Liji* says little about the act of killing itself. The fact that animals must be killed for the sacrifices is hardly a topic of concern, and is never presented as something for which expiation needs to be made. Moreover, although the issue of substitution is crucial in the sacrifice chapters of the *Liji*, the substitutions of interest in these chapters are not between the giver of the offering and the offering itself.
- 14 To return to Valeri, he gives the following phrases as a minimal definition of sacrifice:
- I suggest, then, that the central phenomena of sacrifice are elaborations of a basic art: the ritualised taking of some life (or the destruction/removal from the sphere of a purely human use of precious objects that stand as signs of life) to bring about some benefit.⁷
- 15 It is difficult to say that even such a minimal definition really works for theories in the *Liji* without a bit of tinkering. Chinese sacrifice, as theorised in the *Liji*, is deeply concerned with the relations between humans with the natural and divine worlds. But the focus is not on killing, destruction, or removal (even though all of these, of course, occur). Similarly, although consumption certainly occurs, it is not the focus of the theorisation –at least not in the sense of removing something from one realm and having it incorporated into another (the divine powers consuming an animal seen as representing the sacrificer, for example). The emphasis is rather on the hosting –who hosts whom and with what– and the play of identifications and substitutions that occur at this level as well –not with the offering representing the sacrificer but with an interplay of different positions of who is the host and who is being hosted. Finally, and continuing directly from the last point, sacrificial theory in the *Liji* is not based in a symbolic analysis. It therefore opens up some interesting questions when placed alongside contemporary theories.

Domestication

- 16 The most careful and extensive discussion of Chinese sacrifice has been undertaken by Gilles Boileau.⁸ He beautifully explores the degree to which Chinese sacrifice involves an interplay of uncooked and cooked foodstuffs, and how this interplay is built upon a myth concerning the origins of Chinese civilisation. My hope will elaborate upon Boileau's analysis by exploring in more detail the way in which these issues are theorised in the *Liji*.

- 17 The *Liji* is an extraordinarily heterogeneous text, including various works of ritual theory written from the fourth to the second centuries BC. But there are a set of chapters that contain a fairly consistent view of the meaning of sacrifice. The chapters, which I have simply termed the “sacrifice chapters,” include the “Tan Gong” 檀弓 (Archery-in-Santal), “Liyun” 禮運 (Ceremonial usages), “Jifa” 祭法 (Law of sacrifices), “Jiyi” 祭義 (Meaning of sacrifices), and “Jitong” 祭統 (Summary account of sacrifices). I have argued elsewhere for a general understanding of what the chapters might be arguing.⁹ Here, I will focus in particular on sacrificial theory in these chapters.
- 18 The chapters in question contain several different narratives regarding the origins of sacrifice. One of the most complex appears in the “Liyun” chapter.¹⁰ The chapter consists of a dialogue between Confucius and his disciple Yan Yan. It opens with a discussion between the two following the performance of a sacrifice. Confucius, saddened, explains to his disciple his sense of loss from the great ages of the past. His explanation involves the first of two narratives that he will give in the chapter concerning the past.
- 19 In distant antiquity, Confucius explains, the Great Way held prominence:
 大道之行也，天下為公。選賢與能，講信脩睦，故人不獨親其親，不獨子其子。
 In the practice of the Great Way, all under Heaven was public. They selected the talented and capable. They spoke sincerely and cultivated peace. Therefore, people did not only treat their own kin as kin, and did not only treat their own sons as sons.¹¹
- 20 The loss of the Great Way was marked by the division of the world into separate lineages. Kinship accordingly came to be seen as only existing within each lineage:
 今大道既隱，天下為家，各親其親，各子其子。
 Now, the Great Way has become obscure. All under Heaven is [divided into] lineages. Each treats only its own kin as kin, only their own sons as sons.¹²
- 21 The use of ritual, it turns out, was one of the causes of this breakdown. Once rituals were created, they bound people together through ritual obligations. But this binding also created the divisions that led to the loss of the Great Way:
 禮義以為紀；以正君臣，以篤父子，以睦兄弟，以和夫婦，以設制度，以立田里，以賢勇知，以功為己。故謀用是作，而兵由此起。
 Ritual and propriety are used as the binding. They are used to regulate the ruler and subject, used to build respect between the father and son, used to pacify elder and younger brothers, used to harmonise husband and wife, used to set up regulations and standards, used to establish fields and villages, used to honour the courageous and knowledgeable, taking merit as personal. Therefore, schemes manipulating this arose, and because of this, arms were taken up.
- 22 As a consequence of rituals, human society became organised into a series of lineages. As such, positions of power came under the control of lineages, instead of being given to the worthiest.
- 23 Rituals, therefore, are part of the problem. Ritual creates continuity along lineage lines, but it also breaks the larger public nature of human society, separating the social world into distinct lineage organisations.

- 24 Returning to the frame attributed to Confucius: only six figures, since this emergence, have succeeded in using the rituals effectively: Yu, Tang, Wen, Wu, Cheng, and the Duke of Zhou. What these figures accomplished is what Confucius terms the “Lesser Peace”:

禹、湯、文、武、成王、周公，由此其選也。此六君子者，未有不謹於禮者也。以著其義，以考其信，著有過，刑仁講讓，示民有常。如有不由此者，在執者去，眾以為殃，是謂小康。

Yu, Tang, Wen, Wu, Cheng, and the Duke of Zhou were selected because of this. These six rulers were always attentive to ritual, thereby making manifest their propriety, thereby examining their trustworthiness, making manifest when there were transgressions, making the punishments humane and the expositions yielding, showing constancy to the populace. If there were some who were not following this, they would be removed from their position and the populace would take them as dangerous. This was the Lesser Peace.¹³

- 25 From the way the narrative has been set up, one might assume that the argument of the chapter would be that one should return to the Great Way, and that this would also entail a rejection of ritual. In fact, however, it becomes clear that Confucius is on the contrary calling for the re-creation of the Lesser Peace. And the practice of ritual –the proper practice of ritual– is key to this. When Confucius’ disciple –understandably, given the narrative thus far– asks why then rituals are so important, Confucius explains that, when practised properly, they are crucial for upholding the way of Heaven and for regulating the dispositions of humanity:

言偃復問曰：「如此乎禮之急也？」孔子曰：「夫禮，先王以承天之道，以治人之情。」

Yan Yan asked again, “Are the rituals of such urgency?” Confucius said: “Rituals are what the former kings used to uphold the way of Heaven and regulate the dispositions (*qing*) of humans.”¹⁴

- 26 The remainder of the chapter is devoted to Confucius explaining why rituals –despite the dangers already seen– are crucial, how they could –as with the Lesser Peace– be used effectively, why the Lesser Peace is in fact preferable to the Great Way, and how they work vis-à-vis the divine and human dispositions. To do so, Confucius provides a second narrative. It too begins in distant antiquity when the Great Way was practised. But here Confucius focuses on the emergence of rituals, with a particular focus on sacrifice:

夫禮之初，始諸飲食，其燔黍捭豚，汙尊而抔飲，蕡桴而土鼓，猶若可以致其敬於鬼神。及其死也，升屋而號，告曰：『皋！某復。』然後飯腥而苴孰。故天望而地藏也，體魄則降，知氣在上，故死者北首，生者南鄉，皆從其初。

Now, when rituals were first started, they began with drinking and eating. They roasted millet and slices of pork.¹⁵ They hollowed out the ground to hold liquids and drank with their hands; they used straw drumsticks and earthen drums. Even so, they were able to direct their reverence to the ghosts and spirits. When someone died, the living would climb to the top of their abode and call out saying “Come back!” Only then would they give uncooked rice and pieces of raw meat. Thus they would look up to Heaven while burying in the earth. The body and the earthly souls descend, while the intelligent *qi* rises. Therefore the deceased have their head to the north, while the living face south. All of this is from the beginning.¹⁶

27 Rituals began with sacrificial offerings. More specifically, with drinking and eating aimed at directing reverence to the ghosts and spirits. This was done without the use of any utensils or human technologies.

28 Confucius then explains why this is the case: humans in the distant past had no technologies at all. They had no shelter, no ability to create fire, and no clothing:

昔者先王，未有宮室，冬則居營窟，夏則居橧巢。未有火化，食草木之實，鳥獸之肉，飲其血，茹其毛。未有麻絲，衣其羽皮。

In ancient times, the former kings did not yet have houses. In the winter they lived in caves, in the summer in nests. They did not yet know the transformations of fire. They ate the fruits of plants and trees, and the raw meat of birds and animals. They drank their blood and ate their feathers. They did not yet have hemp and silk, and they clothed themselves in feathers and skins.¹⁷

29 This is what life was like in the Great Way. Humans saw all humans as linked by common kinship, and they deeply revered the ghosts and spirits. But they also lived in caves and nests, relied for their food on hunting and gathering, and ate raw the flesh of any animals they caught.

30 Recognising the fact that humans could not flourish in such a situation, the sages – correctly, according to the narrative– began making a series of innovations that led to the domestication of the world. They taught humans how to work with metals, how to make shelters, and how to work with fire:

後聖有作，然後脩火之利，范金，合土，以為臺榭、宮室、牖戶，以炮以燔，以亨以炙，以為醴酪，治其麻絲，以為布帛，以養生送死，以事鬼神上帝，皆從其朔。

The later sages arose. Only then were they able to utilise the advantages of fire, the working of metals, and the pulling of clay. They thereby made towers and houses with windows and doors; they thereby baked, roasted, boiled, and broiled, and they thereby made sweet wine and gruel. They worked with hemp and silk, and they thereby made clothing. They thus nourished the living and sent off the dead, and they thus served the ghosts, spirits, and high god. All of this followed from before.¹⁸

31 With these new technologies, humans were able to flourish. And the serving of the ghosts, spirits, and high god followed as before.

32 Except, of course, that it did not. Or, rather, the serving might have been the same, but the social effects were certainly not. As it was made clear in the first narrative of the chapter, the result of these innovations was also that the world increasingly became broken up into separate lineages. And rituals played a key part in this. Increasingly, sacrifices to the deceased –the ghosts– involved only those related to the living, and this in turn helped to define people’s dispositions only to their own lineages. The same rituals that had earlier worked to connect all humans to each other and to both the deceased and the spirits helped to create a world in which humanity and the ancestral dead were connected only within lineages.

33 But going back to distant antiquity is not an option, as it would also be a world without shelter, clothing, and the use of fire. The implication of the two juxtaposed narratives is thus that the goal is to achieve what was accomplished in the Lesser Peace –where

somehow the proper use of rituals created something like, albeit lesser than the Great Way of distant antiquity– but with the innovations of the later sages still maintained.

34 The first hint of how this is to be accomplished appears immediately with a description of sacrifice as it occurred in the Lesser Peace. The sacrifice would begin by laying out raw foodstuffs: blood, feathers, and raw flesh –precisely the foods that humanity consumed before the sages invented cooking. Roasted meat would be offered next. The meat would then be cooked yet more, and the meat then dismembered and served. The ruler and his consort would give each of these offerings in turn. The sequence of the sacrifice thus recapitulates the narrative of domestication, with raw foods being brought out first, followed by progressively cooked foods. The people who made the offerings were the king and his consort, who had become the centre of the sacrificial offerings.¹⁹

35 The chapter then turns to an explication of the logic underlying the sacrifices. The rise of human civilisation was a process of domestication, guided by sages who accordingly became the centre of the web of relationships that came to define the cosmos. As the chapter states succinctly:

故聖人參於天地，並於鬼神，以治政也。

Thus, the sage forms a triad with Heaven and Earth and connects with the ghosts and spirits so as to control his rule.²⁰

36 Unlike the Great Way, the sage has now become the centre of everything, forming a triad with Heaven and Earth and connecting with the ghosts and spirits in order to rule effectively.

37 The evolution of sacrifice is thus directly connected to the larger domestication of the world. Just as agriculture involved domesticating the vital elements of the world into an organized system with humans at the centre, so does sacrifice with the dispositions of humans. Human dispositions are the field that rituals domesticate:

故聖王修義之柄、禮之序，以治人情。故人情者，聖王之田也。修禮以耕之，陳義以種之，講學以耨之，本仁以聚之，播樂以安之。故禮也者，義之實也。

Therefore, the sage kings cultivated the handles of propriety and the arrangements of the rites in order to regulate human dispositions. Thus, human dispositions are the field of the sage kings. They cultivated the rites in order to plough it, arrayed propriety in order to plant it, expounded teachings in order to hoe it; took humaneness as the basis in order to gather it; and sowed music in order to pacify it. Therefore, rites are the fruit of propriety.²¹

38 The sages used rituals to order human dispositions as they used agriculture to order the natural world.

39 Humans, then, are of the same raw stuff as the rest of the cosmos. Rituals involve domesticating this raw stuff and re-weaving it:

故人者，其天地之德，陰陽之交，鬼神之會，五行之秀氣也。

故聖人作則，必以天地為本，以陰陽為端，以四時為柄，以日星為紀，月以為量，鬼神以為徒，五行以為質，禮義以為器，人情以為田，四靈以為畜。

Humans are [a product of] the powers of Heaven and Earth, the interaction of *yin* and *yang*, the joining of the ghosts and spirits, and the subtle energies of the five phases... Thus, when the sage humans created rules, they necessarily took Heaven and Earth as the basis, took *yin* and *yang* as the level,

took the four seasons as the handle, and took the sun and stars as the marker [of time]; the moon was taken as the measure, the ghosts and spirits as the assistants, the five phases as the substance, the rites and propriety as the instruments, the dispositions of humans as the field, and the four efficacious creatures as the domesticates.²²

40 The chapter elaborates its point about the four efficacious creatures:

何謂四靈？麟鳳龜龍，謂之四靈。故龍以為畜，故魚鱗不滄；鳳以為畜，故鳥不矯；麟以為畜，故獸不狘；龜以為畜，故人情不失。

This is the reason that there was sufficient food and drink for humans. What are the four efficacious creatures? The unicorn, the phoenix, the tortoise, and the dragon –these are the four efficacious creatures. Therefore the dragon was made into a domesticate, and thus the fish did not swim away. The phoenix was made into a domesticate, and thus the birds did not fly away. The unicorn was made into a domesticate, and thus the beasts did not jump away. The tortoise was made into a domesticate, and thus the people's dispositions were not neglected.

41 The domestication of the efficacious creatures resulted in sufficient food and drink for humanity, as well as sufficient control over human dispositions.

42 The result of this domestication of human dispositions is that the sage was able to connect all of humanity into one lineage –as humanity had been during the Great Way, only now domesticated, and thus with the sage at the centre:

故聖人耐以天下為一家，以中國為一人者，非意之也，必知其情，辟於其義，明於其利，達於其患，然後能為之。

Therefore, as for the sage bearing to take all under Heaven as one lineage and take the central states as one person, it is not something done overtly. He necessarily knows their dispositions, opens up their sense of propriety, clarifies what they feel to be advantageous, and apprehends what they feel to be calamitous. Only then is he capable of enacting it.²³

43 If rituals, along with the innovations of the later sages, helped to break the unity of the Great Way and created a world divided by lineages, the six figures who used ritual properly did so to domesticate the dispositions of the populace so that all humans came to regard themselves as part of a single family –united, of course, by the ruler. All of the distinct lineages thus came to see the ruler as the centre of this single lineage.

44 The sacrificial system was organised accordingly:

故先王患禮之不達於下也，故祭帝於郊，所以定天位也；祀社於國，所以列地利也；祖廟所以本仁也，山川所以償鬼神也，五祀所以本事也。故宗祝在廟，三公在朝，三老在學。王，前巫而後史，卜筮瞽侑皆在左右，王中。

The former kings were worried that the rites would not reach those below. They therefore sacrificed to Di in the suburban sacrifice as a means by which to determine the place of Heaven. They made offerings to the Earth altar in the kingdoms as a means by which to array the benefits of the earth. They offered ancestral sacrifices at the shrines as a means to provide a basis for humaneness. They offered at the mountains and the streams as a means by which to host the ghosts and spirits. They gave the five offerings as a means by which to provide a basis for activities. Therefore, there were ancestral invocators at the shrines, the three dukes at the court, and the three elders at the schools. In front of the king were the ritual specialists and behind were the astronomers; the diviners by crack making, the diviners by stalks,

drummers, and assistants all stood to the right and left. The king was at the centre.²⁴

- 45 The ruler would thus reorganise the world, weaving it back together with himself as the fulcrum:

心無為也，以守至正。故禮行於郊，而百神受職焉，禮行於社，而百貨可極焉，禮行於祖廟而孝慈服焉，禮行於五祀而正法則焉。故自郊社、祖廟、山川、五祀，義之修而禮之藏也。是故夫禮，必本於大一，分而為天地，轉而為陰陽，變而為四時，列而為鬼神。

His mind was without activity, so as to hold fast to the utmost correctness. Thus, the rites were practised in the suburbs, and the myriad spirits received offices through them. The rites were practised at the earth god's altar, and the hundred goods could be fully appropriated through them. The rites were practised in the ancestral shrines, and filiality and kindness were submitted through them. The rites were practised with the five sacrifices, and the correct standards were taken as models through them. Therefore, from the suburban sacrifice, earth god altar, ancestral shrine, mountains and rivers, five sacrifices, propriety was cultivated and the rites were embodied. It is for this reason that the rites are necessarily based in the Great One, which separated and became Heaven and Earth, revolved and became yin and yang, alternated and became the four seasons, were arrayed and became the ghosts and spirits.²⁵

- 46 The world is again linked, but with the ruler at the centre.
- 47 In short, from a continuity of equality, the world fell into discontinuity –a fall brought about in part through rituals that bound humans into distinct lineages. Those few sages whom Confucius reveres, however, were able to use ritual to re-create continuity –but now a graded, hierarchical continuity in which the cosmos is fully linked, but linked in a way that places the ruler in a position of hierarchical centrality.
- 48 The practice of sacrifice, done properly, enacts this vision. It begins with the raw foods eaten by humanity in distant antiquity, and then moves to cooked foods. The ruler is the one hosting all of the spirits and ghosts, and doing so on behalf of all of humanity – and thus fully linking the divine and human realms. Something reminiscent of the Great Way is achieved, but now in a domesticated world with the ruler at the centre.

Substitutions

- 49 The “Liyun” is offering a vision of sacrifice based upon the workings of human dispositions. But what, then, are the mechanisms for such dispositions of familial unity to be developed? This is explored in several of the sacrifice chapters of the *Liji*, but here I would like to focus on the “Jitong.” As we might have expected from much of the recent theoretical literature on sacrifice, there is a great deal of concern with substitutions in the “Jitong.” At no point, however, is the offering presented as a substitution for the sacrificer. On the contrary, the concern in the play of substitutions is entirely with the participants –including the divine powers.
- 50 To begin with, royal sacrifices involved a series of role reversals within the patriline. The grandson would serve as the impersonator –literally “corpse” (*shi* 尸)– of his deceased grandfather. The father would then play the role of the son to his own son, giving offerings to his deceased father as played by his son:

夫祭之道，孫為王父尸。所使為尸者，於祭者子行也；父北面而事之，所以明子事父之道也。此父子之倫也。

Now, according to the way of sacrificing, the grandson acted as the impersonator of the king's father. He who was made to act as the impersonator was the son of he who made the sacrifice. The father faced north and served him. By means of this, he made clear the way of a son serving his father. This is the relation of father and son.²⁶

- 51 The roles of ruler and subject, father and son, are absolute. But the occupiers of each of these positions are defined entirely by the ritual space. Outside the temple, the impersonator was the son of his father, the grandson of the deceased, and the subject to his ruler. Inside, he was the father and he was the ruler. Outside the temple, the father was the ruler; inside, he was the son and the subject.

君迎牲而不迎尸，別嫌也。尸在廟門外，則疑於臣，在廟中則全於君；君在廟門外則疑於君，入廟門則全於臣、全於子。是故，不出者，明君臣之義也。

The ruler met the victim but did not meet the impersonator. This avoided impropriety. When the impersonator was outside the gates of the temple, then he was seen as a subject; when he was inside the temple, then he was fully the ruler. When the ruler was outside the gates of the temple, he was seen as the ruler; when he entered the gates of the temple, he was fully the son. Therefore by not going outside, he made clear the propriety of ruler and subject.²⁷

- 52 The deceased grandfather, as performed by the grandson, would thus be hosted by the ruler, who in the ritual is the son and the subject of his own son.
- 53 After the impersonator ate the offerings given to him by his son within the ritual, the impersonator would stand. The ruler, together with his ministers, would then eat the leftovers. They too would stand, and the next ranks of aristocrats would eat the leftovers. The same process would continue down the entire normative hierarchy:

是故尸饗，君與卿四人饗。君起，大夫六人饗；臣饗君之餘也。大夫起，士八人饗；賤饗貴之餘也。士起，各執其具以出，陳于堂下，百官進，徹之，下饗上之餘也。凡饗之道，每變以眾，所以別貴賤之等，而興施惠之象也。是故以四簋黍見其修於廟中也。廟中者竟內之象也。祭者澤之大者也。

Therefore, when the impersonator rises, the ruler together with the four ministers eat the leftovers. The ruler rises, and the six great nobles eat; the ministers eat the leftovers of the ruler. The great nobles rise, and the eight officers eat. The officers eat the leftovers of the nobles. The officers rise, and each takes his portion and goes out; the [leftovers] are arrayed below the hall. The hundred officials enter and remove it. The inferiors eat the leftovers of the superiors. In general, the way of disposing [of the leftovers] is that with each shift there are more people; one thereby distinguishes the ranks of noble and mean. Thus arises the image of bestowing and graciousness. Therefore, using these four millet vessels, one sees cultivation within the temple. Within the temple is an image of the entire realm. Sacrifice is the greatest of grace.²⁸

- 54 Within the temple, therefore, the deceased (played by the grandson) is served by the father. The remainders are eaten in a descending order of perfect hierarchy. The king thus hosts his deceased father, and the rest of society eats the leftovers of that offering.
- 55 Since they are eating the leftovers of the filial offerings of the son to the deceased father, the hierarchies of the populace accordingly develop the filial dispositions

toward the ruler that he is embodying through his hosting of the father (as played by the son). The hierarchies below him consequently become like the sons and grandsons for the ruler, and the ruler becomes like the father and mother of the people:

是故其德盛者，其志厚；其志厚者，其義章。其義章者，其祭也敬。祭敬則竟內之子孫莫敢不敬矣。其德薄者，其志輕，疑於其義，而求祭；使之必敬也，弗可得已。祭而不敬，何以為民父母矣？

Therefore, if his power is flourishing, his intent will be deep. If his intent is deep, his propriety will be displayed. If his propriety is displayed, his sacrifices will be reverent. If his sacrifices are reverent, then none of the sons and grandsons within the borders will dare be irreverent... If his power is slight, his intent light, and he has doubts about his propriety, then, when seeking to sacrifice, he will not be able to be reverent when it is necessary to be so. If he is not reverent when sacrificing, how can he be taken as the father and mother of the people?²⁹

- 56 Within the temple, therefore, the entire world is arrayed in a single patriline, with the entire populace defined as sons and grandsons of the ruler, who is himself the father and mother of the people.
- 57 This same logic works with the ruler's sacrifices to the High God. Just as the filial son (the ruler) sacrifices to the impersonator with full filiality, so does he sacrifice to the High God:

唯聖人為能饗帝，孝子為能饗親。饗者，鄉也。鄉之，然後能饗焉。是故孝子臨尸而不忤。

Only the sage is able to sacrifice to the High God, and only the filial son is able to sacrifice to his parents. "Sacrifice" (*xiang* 饗) is to face toward (*xiang* 鄉). One faces toward it, and only then can one sacrifice to it. Therefore, the filial son approaches the impersonator and does not blush.³⁰

- 58 As such, the ruler becomes the "Son of Heaven":

故天子祭天地，諸侯祭社稷。

Therefore the Son of Heaven sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, the lords of the states sacrifice to the altars of the land and grain.³¹

- 59 All of the lineages of the realm are united under the ruler, who is thus also the father and mother of the people. And the ruler is also the Son of Heaven. As a result, the ruler is located at the centre, linking all of the different lineages together through his own role as father and mother of the people, and also linking them to the larger cosmos through his role as Son of Heaven. The entire cosmos becomes as such a perfect patriline, with the ruler as the fulcrum.
- 60 We now arrive at the world envisioned in the "Liyun." The entire cosmos has become, through the dispositions instilled in sacrifice, a single family, connected through the ruler. In this world of constructed patterns, sons have only filial dispositions toward their parents, the parents have only filial dispositions toward their ruler, and the living have only filial feelings to the dead.
- 61 The vision of sacrifice that underlies the practice is based upon the endless interplay of substitutions: the son becomes the grandfather, Heaven becomes the father, the ruler becomes the son of Heaven and the father and mother of the people, etc. The father-son patriarchal relationship becomes the basis on which, through the series of role reversals and altered relationships, the entire realm is made into one single, patrilineal

family. The grandson acts as the corpse of the deceased father, but then in the ritual role of the deceased as an ancestor. The ruler plays the role of the filial son to his own son, as well as the filial son to Heaven. The ranked orders of the court play the role of filial sons and grandsons to the ruler, who also plays the role of father and mother of the people. The play of substitutions is crucial here, but the concern is not to have the victim substitute for the disordered state of the sacrificer. The play of substitutions is rather with different members involved in the sacrifice playing different roles in the processes of hosting and being hosted.

- 62 As in most forms of sacrifice, the sacrificer is the one empowered by the sacrificial act. But there is no claim here that he is offering himself in his disordered state. The substitutions are instead about constructing a new set of the relationships surrounding the ruler, with himself as the hosting figure connecting the ghosts, spirits, and living populace.

A Constructed World

- 63 To work through the implications of this view, let us return to the “Liyun.” Just as the Lesser Peace builds upon the vitality of the Great Way and reorganises it, the same is true of the sacrificial order building upon the world of reproduction. It is not reproductive in itself: the ruler is not really born of Heaven, the ruler is not really the father and mother of the people, and he certainly did not really give birth to them. The sacrifices involve constructing an order that not only cannot reproduce the Great Way but in fact cannot reproduce at all.
- 64 To go back to the efficacious creatures mentioned in the “Liyun.” The domestication assumes the efficacy that exists in the larger cosmos. The domestication itself is not efficacious: the domestication simply appropriates that efficacy for humanity. And sacrifice operates the same way. Sacrifice, when utilised properly, creates a perfect patrilineal system in which the entire cosmos operates along a lineage in which females are either excluded or, as in the case of the ruler, appropriated into the ruler’s position of being both father and mother of the people. The resulting patriarchal order assumes an efficacy and vitality that exist outside the ritual, an efficacy and vitality that it appropriates and domesticates but that it cannot replicate.
- 65 The cosmos, thus, does become a single lineage, with the ruler at the centre. But this is not a lineage in a procreative sense. On the contrary, the lineage of sacrifice exists in an uneasy tension with the world of vitality, fertility, and reproduction.
- 66 One of Maurice Bloch’s arguments was that sacrifice operates in a tension between vitality and transcendence. The point certainly holds for the theories in the *Liji* as well, but in the *Liji* the tension is played out not via the identification of the victim with the vitality of the sacrificer but rather in terms of the construct of sacrifice itself.

Symbols and the subjunctive

- 67 As mentioned above, perhaps the dominant paradigm in anthropology for the understanding of sacrifice is to read the victim as being a substitute for the sacrificer in his disordered state. The victim, therefore, is a symbol. But what about rituals that do not work according to symbols, and that therefore are being misread when interpreted through a schema of symbolism? This point has been made in terms of theories that

focus on the performative aspects of ritual. But we see in the *Liji* something different. The sacrificial world is a construct that is certainly meaningful, but it is one self-consciously created as a domestication of, and in tension with, a world that operates radically differently. Within the world of sacrifice, the cosmos is a continuous and harmonious patriarchal system in which the ruler, as Son of Heaven, connects all people and the entire cosmos. That construct operates in tension with, and yet fully requires, the world of vitality that the sacrificial construct denies.

68 This is a vision that opens up some interesting questions *vis-à-vis* existing theories of sacrifice. When, for example, Geertz undertakes a beautiful interpretation of a sacrificial ritual to explore the complex beliefs of the participants concerning cyclical time, the model assumes that the ritual is socialising the participants into a certain way of thinking.³² Accordingly, a statement in a ritual that the world is cyclical is taken to be an assumed belief among the participants. But what if it is not a belief? What if, following the theories of the *Liji*, the work of the sacrifice is operating in tension with the world outside? What if a Balinese ritual involving cyclical time was thought of not as a system of belief but instead as a ritual construct? Instead of reading a given sacrificial ritual as indicative of a worldview, the theories in the *Liji* would have us ask about the work the subjunctive space is doing with the world outside of the ritual.

69 The concern, in other words, is not that symbols do not play a role in ritual –they clearly can and often do. It is that the attempt to read a ritual as providing a symbolic world that the participants are being socialised into believing is what should be questioned. This certainly can occur. But, as we see being theorised in the *Liji*, the concern in ritual can also be to develop particular dispositions by transforming the relationships among the participants.

70 Reading the symbolism of a ritual space as indicative of a larger worldview has been critiqued by a number of scholars as well. Maurice Bloch has explicitly criticised Geertz's attempt to read claims concerning cyclical time in Balinese rituals as being examples of a larger set of cultural assumptions.³³ Such a critique is indeed part of Maurice Bloch's larger argument concerning sacrifice. Bloch's claim is that ritual serves to take a contingent social order and make it appear natural, enduring, and backed by transcendental sanctions.³⁴ As we have seen above, sacrifice for Bloch is the process by which this happens.

71 Nancy Jay has argued along similar lines:

Sacrifice is an extraordinarily efficient method for control of the production of religious meaning, especially effective in centralising and making exclusive the means of communication with the transcendent powers that legitimate the social order.³⁵

72 More particularly, Jay argues that sacrifice works to legitimate a patriarchal social order. For example, Jay critiques Valeri's reading of Hawaiian sacrifice, arguing that Valeri accepts too much of the order presented in sacrifice as a given. In contrast, she argues that sacrifice in Hawaii should be seen as legitimating male domination:

Hawaiian royal sacrifice can be seen as a historically contingent practice for production of a political ideology in which the perspective of male nobles is elaborated as transcendent divine truth, legitimating one particular historical form of male domination by making it appear universal and eternal.³⁶

73 Bloch and Jay are assuming much the same framework. Both assume a stable divine and natural order that humanity is either taking from (in the case of the natural order) or

gaining legitimacy or support through (in the case of the divine order). In terms of the latter: the divine order is seen as transcendent, and contingent hierarchies in the human realm are legitimated by making them appear transcendent and divinely based. For the two of them, sacrifice is the mechanism for making this occur. And in continuity with a long tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both consider that the social scientist is able to uncover and unmask this mechanism by which religion legitimates and gives transcendental sanctions to what would otherwise be a contingent social order.

- 74 In other words, despite their critiques, Bloch and Jay share a great deal with figures like Geertz and Valeri. All of them see ritual as instilling a belief structure. And one could expand the point. In the dialectic in Western theory over the past century, concerning whether to see the ritual space as indicative of a larger worldview or as a legitimation of an otherwise contingent social formation, both sides still focus on belief –on ritual as socialising participants to believe in the vision provided in the ritual context.
- 75 But in the *Liji* we see a theory predicated on the idea that the work of sacrifice, like the work of ritual more broadly, is an act of domestication, in which the natural and divine orders are being transformed. And the sacrificial space in which this occurs is explicitly being presented as a construct, in a self-conscious disjunction both to the world outside and to the world that putatively existed before the domestication process began. There is no belief being instilled that the ancestors really are benevolent, that the world is harmonious, that the ruler is a Son of Heaven, etc. And there is certainly nothing to unmask.³⁷ The ritual is rather explicitly presented as a temporary ordering of a world that is otherwise prone to discontinuity. As the *Liji* puts it beautifully:

子曰：「牲醴禮樂齊盛，是以無害乎鬼神，無怨乎百姓。」

The Master said, “As for the sacrificial victims, ritual, and music being properly arranged and flourishing, this is the means by which there is no harm from the ghosts and spirits and no resentment from the hundred families.”³⁸

- 76 For brief periods (during the ritual and occasionally –six times, according to the “Liyun”– for entire reigns) it works, and the ghosts and spirits above and the people below are connected and supportive. But, of course, it never works for very long and it never works fully.
- 77 Some colleagues and I, building upon these theories of ritual from classical China, have argued that they portray a subjunctive understanding of ritual: the creation of a ritual construct that operates in self-conscious tension with the non-ritual world:

These arguments imply that ritual always operates in a world that is fragmented and fractured. Moreover, the subjunctive world created by ritual is always doomed ultimately to fail –the ordered world of flawless repetition can never fully replace the broken world of experience. This is why the tension between the two is inherent and, ultimately, unbridgeable. Indeed, this tension is the driving force behind the performance of ritual: the endless work of ritual is necessary precisely because the ordered world of ritual is inevitably only temporary.... If the world is always fractured, and if ritual always operates in tension with such a world, then we need to think of ritual in terms of such an endlessly doomed dynamic. Ritual should be seen as operating in, to again quote Robert Orsi, “the register of the tragic.” Although the claims of ritual may be of an ordered, flawless system, the workings of ritual are always in the realm of the limited and the ultimately doomed.

39

- 78 The *Liji* portrays sacrifice in precisely this way.
- 79 Let us return to ancient Greece. If we were to apply the approach of the *Liji* to early Greek sacrifice, it would lead us to ask what are the perceived tensions in dealing with the natural and divine worlds, and what is the work that sacrificial ritual does with these tensions. Interesting comparative questions would then emerge from there. For example, why is killing such a concern in Greek sacrificial ritual, unlike in Chinese sacrificial ritual? What relations with the animal world and the divine world are being played upon in sacrifice? This is where Burkert's reliance on a reconstruction of Palaeolithic practices as a template to explicate Greek sacrifice is most dangerous – Greek sacrifice, as Vernant and Detienne emphasise, was exclusively concerned with domestic animals.
- 80 In other words, instead of taking for granted that sacrifice involves a focus on killing or consumption, on a symbolic killing of the sacrificer, or even on the instilling of a particular worldview at all, such emphases rather become interesting permutations that themselves need to be understood and explicated. In short, taking the sacrificial theories from the *Liji* seriously as theory opens up a host of possibilities –not just for the Chinese sacrifice but for our understanding of sacrifice in general.

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NOTES

1. Burkert 1983.
2. Durand 1986.
3. Detienne & Vernant 1989.
4. Valeri 1989, 224. The "sacrifier" refers to the person on whose behalf the sacrifice is being made, while "sacrificer" refers to the person who actually performs the sacrifice.
5. Bloch 1992.
6. Bloch 1992, 30.
7. Valeri 1994, 104.
8. Boileau 1998–1999. See also Boileau's contribution to the present volume.
9. Puett 2005; Puett 2008; and Puett 2009.
10. Puett 2005 and Puett 2010c, 132–135.
11. Liji, "Liyun," Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies, Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (hereafter cited as ICS), 59/9.1:24.
12. *Ibid.*, 59/9.1:27–28.
13. *Ibid.*, 59/9.1:28–32.
14. *Ibid.*, 60/9.2:1.
15. Presumably from natural fires, since, as we will see shortly, the domesticated use of fire had yet to be invented.
16. Liji, "Liyun," ICS, 60/9.4:10–13.
17. *Ibid.*, 60/9.5:14–15.
18. *Ibid.*, 60/9.6:16–17.
19. *Ibid.*, 60/9.7:20–22.

20. *Ibid.*, 61/9.18:26.
 21. *Ibid.*, 63/9.35:25–26.
 22. *Ibid.*, 62/9.26:15, 22–24.
 23. *Ibid.*, 62/9.22:5–6.
 24. *Ibid.*, 63/9.28–9.29:4–8.
 25. *Ibid.*, 63/9.31:8–14.
 26. *Liji*, “Jitong,” ICS, 131/26.14:29–30.
 27. *Ibid.*, 131/26.13:26–27.
 28. *Liji*, “Jitong,” ICS, 131/26.9:7–10.
 29. *Ibid.*, 133/26.22:2–6.
 30. *Liji*, “Jiyi,” ICS, 126/25.6:7.
 31. *Liji*, “Liyun,” ICS, 61/9.10:2–3.
 32. Geertz 1977, 360–411.
 33. Bloch 1989, 1–18.
 34. Bloch 1989, 44–45.
 35. Jay 1994, 149.
 36. Jay 1994, 146.
 37. Puett 2013.
 38. *Liji*, “Biaoji,” ICS, 151/33.27:28–29.
 39. Seligman *et al.* 2008, 30.
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