Ritual and Sincerity in Early Chinese Mourning Rituals

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Abstract

This thesis examines the emphasis Eastern Han (24 – 220 CE) men placed on mourning their mothers and peers within the context of ritual theory and practice. The ritual texts, used as the basis for an imperial ritual reform in 31 BCE, provided instructions on how to properly perform the mourning rites, as well as whom to mourn. Full mourning was to be worn for fathers and superiors, yet in the Eastern Han, many did not heed these prescriptions, choosing in addition to mourn their mothers, equals, or inferiors, thereby subverting the traditional patriarchal model. By examining theories of ritual current in the Han, the mourning prescriptions themselves, and introducing the concept of sincerity in ritual, I argue that the changes in mourning patterns during the Eastern Han are indicative of the beginnings of a fundamental change in beliefs towards ritual and the ancestors.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine l'importance que les hommes des Han orientaux (24 – 220 EC) accordaient au deuil envers leurs mères et leurs semblables dans le cadre de la théorie et de la pratique du rituel. Les textes rituels, sur lesquels fut établie une réforme impériale du rituel en 31 AEC, fournissaient les instructions nécessaires pour déterminer comment performer correctement les rituels de deuil, de même que ceux et celles à qui ces rituels pouvaient être adressés. Le deuil complet devait être observé pour les pères et les supérieurs, mais chez les Han orientaux, plusieurs n'observèrent pas ces directives et choisirent plutôt de porter le deuil de leurs mères, de leurs égaux, voire de leurs subordonnés, renversant ainsi le modèle patriarcal traditionnel. Grâce à une analyse des théories du rituel pratiqué chez les Han, des directives relatives au deuil elles-mêmes, et en introduisant le concept de la sincérité dans le rituel, j'avance que les changements dans les structures du deuil au cours de la période des Han orientaux révèlent les premier changement fondamentaux dans les croyances envers le rituel et les ancêtres.

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Introduction

> In serving his parents, a son should conceal (their faults) and remonstrate with them. In every way he should look after them without definite rules, should serve them to the utmost until their death, and then wear the three-years mourning for them to the fullest. In serving a lord, a man should remonstrate with him about his faults and not conceal them. In every way he should look after him according to the rules, should serve him to the utmost until his death, and then wear the three-years mourning, according to the rules. In serving a teacher, a man must neither remonstrate with him nor conceal (his faults). In every way he should look after him without definite rules, should serve him to the utmost until his death, and then should mourn him in his heart for three years.
> 事親有隱而無犯，左右就養無方，服勤至死，致喪三年。事君有犯而無隱，左右就養有方，服勤至死，方喪三年。事師無犯無隱，左右就養無方，服勤至死，心喪三年。[1]

These instructions, recorded in the "Tangong shang" 檀弓上 chapter of the *Li ji* (Ritual Records 禮記), give very specific directions for how subordinates should serve their superiors throughout their lives and after their deaths. Common to all three is the observance of three-years of mourning, though it was performed in different ways, depending on the type of relationship. For a parent, it was to be observed to the fullest; for a lord, according to the rules; and for a teacher, it was to be observed only within oneself and should have no outward manifestation (i.e., there was no donning of mourning dress). Mourning rites became increasingly prevalent during the Han dynasty (漢朝 206 BCE – 220

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[1] *Li ji* "Tangong shang," *Li ji zhangju* 禮記章句 *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Shanghai, 2002), vol. 98, 3.48. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. My translations for the *Li ji* have been greatly aided by James Legge's, *Li Chi: Book of Rites* (New York, NY, 1976).

CE), but the instructions of the ritual texts were not always followed. This thesis will explore mourning rites during the Han: their foundations, the ideology behind them, and the significance behind the deviations from the ritual principles that were given in the ritual texts.

Any discussion of ritual and the performance of rites must necessarily begin with a definition of ritual. I take for my definition that of Roy Rappaport: "*the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers*,"[2] and add that the performance of these acts are intended to bring about a predictable result. In the case of the mourning rituals, the rites also involved interaction with the spirits, making them what could be termed religious rituals, although, as we shall see below, the rites were not exclusively performed for the spirits.

The mourning system and mourning rites were a complex way through which kinship and social groups were organized and the rites were instrumental in reorganizing the group after a death, as well as providing for the deceased. Death caused a disruption in the kinship group and society, and it was necessary to perform certain rituals in order to restore order, and to re-centre the kinship group, or the state, following the death of the emperor.[3] The mourning system defined kinship relations according to the level of mourning they would wear for

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[2] Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge, 1999), 24.

[3] See Michael Puett, "Combining the Ghosts and Spirits, Centering the Realm: Mortuary Ritual and Political Organization in the Ritual Compendia of Early China," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC – 220 AD)*, vol. 2, 695-720 (Leiden, 2009), for the idea of centering the realm after the death of an emperor.

the deceased, with the closer relatives having a heavier obligation than the more distant relatives. This system could also be applied to other hierarchical relations: men were also supposed to don mourning dress following the death of their lord. The mourning rites themselves, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, involved wearing a specific type of mourning dress for an allotted amount of time, determined by the degree of kinship, as well as restrictions on food, comportment, and spatial separation of the living from those who had been close to the deceased. The heaviest mourning obligation fell on the primary mourner (*zhu ren* 主人) who was the eldest son of the dead man's primary wife,[4] as well as his wife. The mourners were expected to perform sacrifices to the deceased, and were under restrictions on how they were to act, and what services they were able to perform.[5] The longest mourning period lasted "into the third year," which was in reality either twenty-five or twenty-seven months.[6] At the end of the mourning period, the deceased would be established as an ancestor,[7] while the primary mourner would be integrated into his new role as head of the

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[4] Qian Xuan 錢玄, *Sanli tonglun* 三禮通論 (Nanjing, 1996), 599.

[5] As the mourners were restricted in their actions, they were not to participate in social activities, including imperial service.

[6] The mourning for a father was double the one-year mourning (24 months) with the addition of an extra month to make it an odd number, for odd numbers were required in death rites. There was some confusion even during the Han as to whether or not it was twenty-five or twenty-seven months, and in later periods it seems that twenty-seven became the accepted length. In the ritual texts it is described as the three-year *san nian* 三年 mourning. See Lai Guolong, "The Diagram of the Mourning System from Mawangdui," *Early China* 28 (2003): 85 and 89-91.

[7] Failure to mourn could result in the spirit of the deceased haunting the living and his descendants as an angry ghost.

household. The mourning period was a transitional stage for both the living and the dead, and, because it was so necessary to properly establish the ancestors, the ritual prescriptions are very detailed and specific. The extant prescriptions of the rites are contained in the *Yi li* (*Ritual Principles* 儀禮), a text that gives instructions on ritual performance for the *shi* 士,[8] and may have been one text in a series of many in ritual instruction.[9] This text was promoted by the Classicists[10] during the Han as one of the foundations of their ritual system. While the mourning rites had their origins in the pre-Han period, the Han was an important point in the evolution of Chinese ritual, for it was during this time that the imperial ritual system was organized, its foundational texts reached their final forms - the texts from this period influenced later writings on Chinese ritual, most significantly, the Song dynasty (宋朝 960-1279) ritual manual *Family Rituals* 家禮 by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), and it finally became accepted as the imperial-sponsored ritual system. While it may not have been as universally accepted during the Han, it was this system on which subsequent dynasties based their own ritual systems, albeit with some modifications, and these ritual principles existed until the end of the imperial period.

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[8] According to Michael Loewe, the *shi* were "persons of education and ability with some powers of leadership." Loewe, *The Government of the Qin and Han Empires 221 BCE – 220 CE* (Indianapolis, IN, 2006), 71.

[9] The compilation and dating of this text will be discussed in Chapter 2.

[10] The term Classicists is employed for the *Ru* 儒, in order to avoid confusion with the term "Confucian."

The ritual and spiritual landscape of early China was by no means unified, and it is not the intention of this thesis to suggest that it was. Many varied beliefs existed regarding the ancestors, life after death, and the cosmos; however, central to all of them was the idea that the ancestors were important to the living, and that it was necessary to interact with them. According to Marianne Bujard, by the middle of the first century BCE, there were two competing models for imperial ritual systems: one promoted by the Classicists and ritual specialists who sought the centralization of ritual, the elimination of 'useless' deities, and the promotion of the worship of Heaven (*tian* 天) and the patriarchal system. The second system was supported by the *fang shi* (masters of methods 方士)[11] and "promoted ancient cults whose ultimate aim was immortality."[12] The cults of immortality, while remaining popular, were eventually pushed into the private sphere by the Classicists, while the ritual system and worship of Heaven were made public affairs.[13] The Classicists promoting this public ritual system

[11] Martin Kern describes the *fang shi* as "magicians" from what was formerly the state of Qi. These masters of methods claimed to hold secret knowledge that had been passed down from the Yellow Emperor. See Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of "Wen" in Early China," *T'oung Pao* 87 (2001): 66-67.
[12] Marianne Bujard, "State and Local Cults in Han Religion," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC – 220 AD)*, vol. 2 (Leiden, 2009), 777.
[13] Ibid., 792.

believed that the centralization and standardization of the ritual system would ultimately bring about increasing centralization of political power.[14]

In their attempt to attain dominance over the immortality cults, they moved and renamed a number of the important sacrifices from earlier times. Most notably, this meant that the emperor no longer needed to travel across the empire to perform all of the sacrifices: they could all be performed in the capital region.[15] The Classicists attempted to suppress hundreds of local cults, with varying degrees of success, and, during the Western Han, the state oscillated between the Classics-based ritual system and the rites of the various cults, but the Classicists persisted, attempting to make all of the rites and the worship of deities conform to what they thought was contained in the Classics, a project that also saw the development of the corpus itself. Ultimately, they were successful:

> From the Eastern Han on, the principal celebrations of the imperial religion were in place. The literati had finally succeeded in implementing the knowledge of the religious institutions that they had extracted from the Classics.[16]

This system was fully integrated into government by the late Eastern Han, but unfortunately, we lack evidence about the extent to which it was enforced. Concerning the funerary rites, we have some statutes concerned with sumptuary

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[14] Ibid., 778. As the architects of this system, the Classicists would have some control over it, being the only people able to answer questions and adapt the rites.
[15] Ibid., 779-81.
[16] Ibid., 801-2. While the immortality cults were never completely eliminated, they lost prominence in government.

regulations in burial,[17] but none have yet been discovered concerning the mourning rites. However, as we will see below, mourning was an important public performance that could enhance or destroy one's reputation.

This thesis will concern itself with the motivations of those behind the standardization of the mourning rites, specifically the emphasis on filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and social structure, rather than engage in a discussion on whether or not the rites were ever practiced in their stipulated forms, or to what extent the government attempted to enforce them. The ideological concerns of the Classicists, as expressed in the mourning rites, provide us an interesting insight into early imperial Chinese social structure, for they attempt to regulate and harmonize society by making the performance of these rites a public affair. The prescriptions were very detailed and, while convoluted, provided the mourners with strict guidelines to follow, making it easy to note any deviations on the part of the practitioners. They reinforced the patriarchal hierarchy, reorganizing society after the death of one of its members, specifically males. At the same time, they fulfilled the important role of establishing the deceased as an ancestor and providing it with the nourishment it required.[18] These ideological concerns will be juxtaposed against the deviations from the mourning rites that began to emerge in the late Eastern Han, revealing a change in the way people thought

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[17] See Peng Hao 彭浩, "Du Yunmeng Shuihudi M77 Hanjian 'Zanglu'" 讀雲夢睡虎地 M77 漢簡《葬律》(Reading the Han Bamboo-slip 'Zanglu' Excavated from M77 at Yunmeng Shuihudi Site) *Jiang-Han kaogu* 江漢考古, 2009: 130-134.

[18] The soul required nourishment so that it could properly become an ancestor, and not need seek its own food.

about their interactions with their ancestors, and the role of ritual in those interactions. It is necessary to theorize beyond the texts and the statements of the men who performed these rites, for, while the participants may have understood part of the cultural event, it existed within a larger structure of cultural meaning.[19]

The ideological motivations, as well as the mourning rites themselves, will be taken from the texts that formed the basis of the ritual system, the *Yi li* and *Li ji,* as well as one of the most influential texts on ritual from the Warring States (Zhan Guo 戰國 475 – 221 BCE) period, "A Discussion of Rites" ("Li lun" 禮論) from the *Xunzi* 荀子. These theories of ritual will be placed in the "Ritual and Sincerity" framework, as presented by Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon in their recent monograph, *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*. The authors argue that ritual seeks to maintain order and harmony in society (a position very similar to that of the early Chinese theorists), but that within overly inflexible ritual systems, sincere movements are likely to emerge, promoting the individual and his belief over the well being of the larger social group.[20] I will argue that the deviations in mourning rites during the Eastern Han are an example of a sincere movement emerging within the ritual system and that this is indicative of changing beliefs towards the ancestors and afterlife.

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[19] Evelyn Rawski, "A Historian's Approach to Chinese Death Ritual," in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), 22.

[20] Sincere movements, discussed further below, emphasize individual belief and experience and tend to reject existing ritual forms.

Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the historical conditions of the promotion of the Classics-based ritual system, details regarding the ritual texts themselves, as well as a brief discussion of the other funerary rites that were performed by the family. Chapter 3 examines the theories of ritual that were current during the Han, specifically drawing on the work of Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 312 - 230 BCE), a Warring States era persuader whose eponymous text influenced the texts that became part of the Han ritual corpus, and in whose text the theory of ritual is presented most clearly. The theory of ritual and sincerity will be explored in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 discusses the prescriptions for mourning rituals, as presented in the *Yi li* as well as some of the reasons given for the performance of the rites, as seen in the *Li ji*. In this chapter, we will also explore some of the origins of these rites, as they were not merely invented by the Classicists. Chapter 6 will discuss the deviations from the mourning prescriptions, and will draw heavily on the work of Miranda Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China*. Brown discusses the mourning deviations and provides an explanation for them based on the political circumstances of the time, but neglects the religious implications of this shift. While the political implications are important, changes in the rites that are so concerned with the ancestors and afterlife must be discussed within a ritual context. Finally, I will conclude by briefly looking at some of the ways in which this ritual system influenced the practices of later dynasties, and the legacy of the Han period Classicists.

Chapter 1: Rituals, Texts, and Filial Piety in the Han

While rituals have been a part of Chinese life and politics from earliest times, their role in government, and the very definition of *li* 禮, varied over time. With the founding of the Han dynasty by Liu Bang 劉邦 in 206 BCE, ritual occupied a central role in government rhetoric, a position that it would occupy through many later dynasties, and indeed, some scholars have remarked that the structure of funerary rituals, although modified somewhat over time, remained a constant part of Chinese civilization from the Western Zhou (西周 1046-771 BCE) to the modern period.[21] The promotion of ritual in the early Han came about for several reasons. First, after having overthrown the "tyrannical" Qin, Liu Bang needed to legitimize his takeover, and one way of doing this was to portray himself as a benevolent ruler, who would bring about another golden age by returning to the ways of the ancients.[22] Classicists, trained in the ancient texts, were brought to the court and encouraged to revive forgotten rituals, they also began to occupy official positions and have a good deal of influence in government. Second, the Han, wanting to distance themselves from their

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[21] Qian, 597. While the structure of the rites themselves remained fairly constant, the rhetoric surrounding ritual varied greatly during the early imperial period.

[22] It must be noted that the Han maintained most of the bureaucratic and legal institutions of the Qin, and that the Qin themselves had performed many of the rituals the Han Classicists "revived." The demonization of the Qin was a large part of Han rhetoric as they sought to legitimize their takeover. The golden age that they harkened to was also likely fictional, and these rituals that were "revived" were, in fact, largely re-invented.

predecessor, argued that while an empire might be won through warfare, it could only be maintained through ritual.[23] The Classicists hoped to lend legitimacy to the government by promoting ritual over warfare for the benefit of the people and the state. Over time, the Classicists, who were educated in the classical texts and claimed to be incorruptible, were able to gain influence at court, over the primarily military followers of Liu Bang who had helped establish the empire.[24]

This revival of ritual by no means implies a unified system. The rituals performed and the rhetoric surrounding them changed drastically throughout the Han, and the ritual texts themselves were in "total disarray at the start of the early Western Han."[25] Despite this, the *Rites* were given much importance during the Han, and were eventually compiled into volumes that would endure through later dynasties. A ritual reform movement of 31 BCE brought the *Li ji* and other ritual texts into prominence. The then capital, Chang'an 長安, was in a state of disorder; being the seat of the emperor it should have been a peaceful, lawful place, but instead it was riddled with corruption and crime.[26] The reformers, led by the Chancellor Kuang Heng 匡衡 (Chancellor 36-30 BCE) urged Emperor Cheng 成帝 (51 – 7 BCE) to consider the value of classical

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[23] This sentiment was first expressed in Jia Yi's "Guo Qin lun" (過秦論), quoted in Michael Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics* (New Haven, CT, 2001), 176.
[24] Ibid., 176-77.
[25] Ibid., 175. Both the *Shi ji* and the *Han shu* agree on this point, though this may have been a rhetorical claim.
[26] Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 BC to AD 9* (London, 1974), 159.

learning and behaviour in a memorial submitted to the throne in 33 BCE.[27] In 31 BCE, Kuang Heng instituted a major reform of the ritual system of the Han, focusing imperial ritual on the cults of Heaven and Earth, and discouraging the worship of other cults that had been instituted by the Qin rulers, whose worship had been continued by the early Han emperors. During the reign of Emperor Ai 哀帝 (r. 7 – 1 BCE), "Government was restructured to fit Classicist precedents more precisely, [and] the three-year mourning period was reinstated."[28] This ritual system appealed to the authority of the past, and while imperial policy towards ritual went through a number of reversals in the short period before the fall of the Western Han, the rituals of the Eastern Han were based on the reforms of 31 BCE.[29] The texts that formed the foundations of this system remained central to the practice of ritual in later imperial China, indeed the texts were of such importance that Bujard asserts "throughout the two Han dynasties, ritual specialists and literati applied themselves to reforming the state cults so that official recognition of the deities, the performance of ceremonies, offerings and liturgies would conform in every respect to the Classics."[30]

The Ritual Texts

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[27] Ibid., 160.
[28] Kenneth E. Brashier, *Ancestral Memory in Early China* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 137.
[29] Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict*, 164-49. For a more detailed discussion of these debates, see ibid., 154-92.
[30] Bujard, 801. It must be noted that the imperial ritual system proposed by the Classicists never fully eradicated the cults and other deities that they argued against.

The mourning rituals of ancient China have been passed down to us primarily in two ritual texts, the *Yi li* and *Li ji*. These two texts went through various stages of compilation and editing before they reached their final forms that we have received today, but some of the individual chapters that were used in the formation of both texts existed in some form prior to the Han dynasty.[31] These texts (discussed individually below) are very different in form and content, but they were both an important part of the discussions on ritual, and in 31 BCE, the *Li ji* was made one of the core texts of a reformed imperial ritual system, with the hopes that a return to the rituals of the ancients, society would once again become harmonious.[32]

The *Yi li*

The *Yi li* was known by various names during the Han dynasty, including the *Shi li* 士禮, *Qu li* 曲禮, *Ligu jing* 禮古經, and *Li (jing)* 禮(經). The earliest

[31] These two texts were likely compiled from existing chapters that circulated independently to form the texts, and could be edited or removed by various authors. There is no single author or compiler for either one, and they are very difficult to date. Newly discovered manuscripts from tombs have revealed large differences between different versions of texts, especially between those buried in the early period with the received version we have today. For an example of the editing process that many of the Han period texts underwent, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany, 2006), which discusses this process, especially Chapter 2: a comparison of the excavated and received versions of the "Zi yi" chapter of the *Li ji*.

[32] Puett, 715. See also Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*. This system was also based on the *Shu jing* 書經.

reference to the text by the name of *Yi li* is in the *Lun heng* 論衡,[33] a text which dates to ca. 80 CE, and it is this text (or a slightly later version of it) that is extant today.[34] A version of the *Yi li* was discovered at Wuwei 武威, in the 1960s, and this version bears close resemblance to the received version.[35] It has been dated to the reign of Emperor Xuan 宣帝 (r. 74 – 49 BCE) of the Western Han.[36] The *Yi li* consists primarily of detailed instructions for *shi* on how to perform various rituals. It contains very few details concerning court rituals, and was therefore not as prominent in the ritual reforms of 31 BCE, although it was often referred to in discourse on ritual.[37] The text contains instructions for life-cycle rituals, specifically for males, such as capping (coming of age), marriage, and funerals, as well as ritual celebrations (banquets and archery), and proper etiquette when meeting or entertaining higher status individuals. Because the text only discusses the rituals for the *shi*, and, on the basis of references to other ritual texts that are now lost, William Boltz finds it:

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[33] *Balanced Discourses*, composed by Wang Chong 王充.

[34] William G. Boltz, "*I li*," in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley, CA, 1993), 234. While there are references to the text from the Han period, we should not assume that the text remained "stable" from its time of composition/compilation to the Han period, or from the Han to today.

[35] It must be noted that although many of these texts reached canonical status during the Han, later editors were still able to change and manipulate the texts, and so the received editions of texts are not always representative of the versions available to readers in the Han. Qian Xuan, and others, however, accept the ritual prescriptions as largely representative of early Chinese funerary rites. See Qian, 597-616.

[36] Xu Fuchang 徐富昌, *Wuwei Hanjian wenzi bian* 武威漢簡文字編 (Taipei, 2006), 3-4.

[37] Puett, 716.

> Reasonable to accept as likely the supposition that the extant *Yi li* is in origin a part of a larger corpus of similar ceremonial and ritual texts dating from pre-Han times, perhaps as early as the time of Confucius; that much of this was lost by Han; and that some may have come to be preserved in the text known today as the *Li ji*.[38]

Because these other texts were lost (if they indeed existed), the *Yi li* became one of the three most important texts (along with the *Li ji* and *Zhou li* 周禮)[39] on ritual in later Chinese history, and therefore merits examination.

While the *Yi li* does not describe any state or court rituals, it was nonetheless still an important part of the imperial ritual system. The relationships established by ritual in the family were intended to parallel the relationship between the ruler and his subjects, thus reinforcing loyalty to the state within the family patriarchal system. As Michael Nylan has observed:

> The conduct of the state seems largely to be family affairs writ large, for the head of the state's relation to his subjects, at least to those belonging to the *shi* estate, appears to be closely modelled on the patriarch's to his family members.[40]

The *Yi li* was concerned by implication, therefore, with prescribing the correct relationships in society, and only by following these ritual patterns could men hope to become more ethical, and advance their position in society. According to Nylan, the sumptuary regulations were in place to inspire those of lower status

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[38] Boltz, 237.

[39] The *Zhou li*, although not directly concerned with rituals themselves, does outline the roles and offices of ritual specialists at court, and was included in the ritual reform of 31 BCE as one of the central texts. See Puett, 700-2 and 713-14. Martin Kern argues that it was likely compiled in the late Warring States period, but includes knowledge of the Western Zhou administrative system: "Offices of Writing and Reading in the *Rituals of Zhou*," in *Statecraft and Classical Learning: The* Rituals of Zhou *in East Asian History* (Leiden, 2010), 67-68.

[40] Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 181.

to pursue a path towards being more publicly-minded, so that they too could enjoy the benefits of the highest ranks.[41]

The chapters on mortuary rituals offer detailed instructions on how to perform the various rites, describing everything from the type of utensils used, to the orientation of the participants in the chamber, and the types of clothes to be worn by the living and the deceased.[42] Many of these prescriptions are reflected in the archaeological record, or in other texts extant from the period, and while mortuary rituals varied by region and rank, the rituals in the *Yi li* can be seen as exemplifying the standard[43] performance of these rituals. The chapter on mourning rituals ("Sang fu" 喪服) is very detailed in the types of mourning men should wear for their various relations, as well as how they should act during the mourning period. The mourning system was essentially a reflection of the kinship system, but the rules for mourning presented in the *Yi li* also extend to non-kin, to acknowledge the desire (or ritual need) to mourn outside the kinship group.[44] The mourning system also included maternal kin, admitting the bonds that might remain between a wife and her natal family, even though she was no

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[41] Ibid., 194-95. Nylan argues that ritual transformation brought both material benefits and a moral self-transformation, which would ultimately create happier and more publicly-minded individuals.

[42] These prescriptions will be discussed further below.

[43] "Standard," according to the authors of the text. These rituals were rarely enforced by law, so these ritual prescriptions must be seen as an idealized version of the rituals of the past: a romanticized time where society was harmonious and governed by ritual.

[44] For example, in some circumstances one would mourn a wet nurse, to acknowledge the close bond that developed between them. A child would also be obliged to mourn his father's legal wife, even if she were not his birth mother, revealing that the system was not based exclusively on blood relations. These relationships will be discussed further below.

longer ritually a part of her natal family's patriline.[45] The *Yi li*, however, is only an instruction manual, listing what actions one should perform and when, and, as such, it does not offer any explanation as to why the rituals should be performed in these precise ways; some early theories are given in the *Li ji*.

The *Li ji*

The dating of the *Li ji* is problematic, as it seems to have existed in various forms before being compiled into a work of that title with 49 chapters before 102 CE, which may be the compilation that is extant today.[46] However, some version of a text by that name did exist in some form prior to this late compilation date, as it was quoted in the *Shiquge* 石渠閣 debates of 51 BCE,[47] and, as mentioned above, was used as the basis of an imperial ritual system instituted in 31 BCE. There is no real structure to the *Li ji*; it is an anthology of texts on ritual, and some chapters, specifically those describing mourning rites, are very similar to their counterparts in the *Yi li*, although the *Li ji* does not focus exclusively on the *shi*.

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[45] Women would be removed from their patrilines in the case of virilocal marriage, the ideal and most common form of marriage among the elite. In the case of uxorilocal marriage, a woman would remain in her family's patriline, however, because this was considered less ideal, the ritual texts do not discuss any modifications due to uxorilocal marriage. While uxorilocal marriage was not uncommon during the Han, the texts do not discuss it.

[46] Jeffrey K. Riegel, "Li Chi 禮記," in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, (Berkeley, CA, 1993), 294-95. Kenneth Brashier uses the analogy of a loose-leaf binder to describe the formation of texts such as the *Li ji*, binders "into which chapters and their commentarial notes were inserted, shuffled and removed" and that the chapters that were used to create this text were written from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, see Brashier, 48-49.

[47] Ibid., 294.

Much of the *Li ji* is comprised of exemplary tales, most often about Confucius and his followers.[48] Because it was compiled from many sources, it does contain a number of internal contradictions, but overall it seeks to provide an explanation for why the various rituals were performed, why they were invented, and why they must continue.[49] The *Li ji*'s position on ritual is based heavily on that presented in the *Xunzi* (discussed below), which is also seen in the chapter on ritual in the *Shi ji* 史記, the earliest history of China, written during the Western Han. According to Nylan, in the *Li ji*, "rites are the chief means to establish social hierarchy and make the distinctions upon which moral discrimination rests."[50] As we shall see, the rites were not egalitarian: society would be harmonious only when men knew and performed their role in accordance with their status; however, correctly following the rites enabled one to become a more moral man, which in turn could lead to social mobility through the system of recommendations, in which, as we will see below, a man could be recommended for office or promotion for displaying his virtue.[51]

While the ritual texts discussed above provide detailed descriptions of the rituals, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent these rituals were actually practiced in their stipulated forms, and by what groups of people. The rituals of the *Yi li* were intended to be followed by the *shi*, but we do not know how the rites differed for other groups, or if they indeed had their own manuals.

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[48] The primary exception to this being the "Yue ling" (月令) chapter.
[49] Puett, 697.
[50] Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 187-88.
[51] See ibid., 188.

However, some archaeological finds resemble the descriptions of burial presented in the *Yi li*,[52] and it is difficult to imagine that the texts, and rituals recorded in them, were the invention of the Classicists. According to Poo Mu-chou:

> Whether or not the rituals described or prescribed in the *Rites and Ceremonies* [the *Yi li*] were actually performed verbatim at any point, it can be assumed that they represent to a certain degree the commonly agreed social customs of the ruling elites. However, it is also clear that the *Rites and Ceremonies* is not a field report and that its content is the result of much editing and numerous transmissions and, above all, ideological embellishments.[53]

The ideological reasons behind the ritual prescriptions, as well as the origins of the rituals themselves, will be discussed further below.

Filial Piety and Statecraft

Before beginning our examination of ritual theories from ancient China and today, the concept of filial piety merits examination. Filial piety was a practice that had also existed long before the Han, but it was also during this period of ritual revival that it became more dominant in socio-political rhetoric. The way that family rituals were used to create loyalty to the government was through filial piety. Filial piety was also enforced by law, evidence for which can be found in excavated statutes from the Qin and Han.[54] One was to be loving and

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[52] The most famous example being the tombs at Mawangdui 馬王堆.

[53] Poo Mu-chou, "Ritual and Ritual Texts in Early China," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC – 220 AD)* (Leiden, 2009), 299.

[54] See Katrina C.D. McLeod and Robin D.S. Yates, "Forms of Ch'in Law: An Annotated Translation of the Feng-chen shih," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 1981: 111-163, for a translation of the *Fengzhen shi* 封診式 form-book

reverent towards their parents, just as a subject was supposed to be reverent towards his lord. The *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiao jing* 孝經), a text from the early Han, states that:

> What he undertakes in order to serve his father, he does to serve his mother; his love for them is the same. What he undertakes in order to serve his father, he does to serve his lord; his reverence for them is the same. Thus one's mother obtains one's love; one's lord obtains one's reverence; [both obligations] are combined in one's father. Thus if one serves one's lord with filial piety, one will have integrity; if one serves one's elders with reverence, one will be compliant.[55]
>
> 資於事父以事母而愛同．資於事父以事君而敬同．故母取其愛．而君取其敬．兼之者父也．故以孝事君則忠．以敬事長則順．

Filial piety was thus expressed towards both parents, although in different ways: the mother was to be loved, while the father was to be both loved and revered.[56] While the type of filial piety one was to show depended on gender, age was clearly the most important factor in determining one's relationship within the family, while rank was the most important in non-kin relationships. The reverence shown to a father was to be matched by that shown to a lord, and this reverence continued up the hierarchy, ending only at the emperor himself, the father of the people, and the Son of Heaven. Extending the analogy further, we

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found in tomb no. 11 of the *Shuihudi* 睡虎地 tomb complex. *Xiao* was also such an important attribute that all Han emperors had it as a sobriquet in their temple names.

[55] Paul Rakita Goldin, trans., "Filial Piety," in *Hawai'i Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture* (Honolulu, HI, 2005), 107. The *Classic of Filial Piety* was often used as a primer in teaching children to read, so it was likely known by most literate people of the Han.

[56] For the difference between the relationships between sons and mothers and sons and fathers, see Miranda Brown, "Sons and Mothers in Warring States and Han China, 453 BCE – 220 CE," *Nan Nü* 5.2, 2003: 137-69.

see that the family was a microcosm of the state, and that it was just as important to know one's position within the family as it was to know one's position within the state. These relationships were reinforced by the mourning system and rituals.

The mourning system clearly delineated one's position within the patriline, and the mourning rituals defined one's ritual responsibility to each member of the kinship group. The most extreme mourning obligation was to one's parents, followed by other, more distantly related kin. Direct superiors, however, were also to be mourned as a father, and, in theory, all men were to mourn the passing of the emperor. Because the correct performance of rituals proved that one was an ethical man, worthy of advancement in society, and that the mourning rituals demonstrated one's filial piety, the correct performance of mourning rituals could be grounds for recommendation to higher office, or commendation within the community.[57] Eventually, great financial sacrifices began to be perceived as filial actions and lavish funerals became the norm for those hoping to climb the social ladder.[58]

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[57] Miranda Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (Albany, NY, 2007), 28.
[58] Martin Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China* (New Haven, CT, 1991), 129-38.

Chapter 2: Early Chinese Conceptions of *Li* 禮

Scholars generally agree that ritual was immensely important in Chinese society, but as to how or why the rites were performed, there is less agreement. One of the difficulties in studying Chinese ritual is the translation of the word *li*. The character is typically translated as "ritual" or "the correct rites," although there is no equivalent word in English that encompasses the vast meanings contained in the term *li*. One of the earliest Western translators of the *Xunzi*, a text that influenced the development of the concept of *li* in early China, Homer H. Dubs, used no less than thirteen words to translate the term: religion, ceremony, deportment, decorum, propriety, formality, politeness, courtesy, etiquette, good form, good behaviour, good manners, and the rules of proper conduct.[59] Although convenient, the translation of *li* into "ritual" is problematic, as the English word does not fully encompass the various meanings of *li*, and carries with it Western ideas of ritual that have been formulated with a Western cultural bias. As such, it is necessary to examine what ritual meant to the early Chinese, as expressed in the written record.

The idea of ritual that was current in the Han was the product of centuries of debate and philosophizing on the term, as well as developments of the rituals and sumptuary regulations. Ritual, in pre-imperial times, was a "dividing line between Chinese and aliens, and often between elite and commoner,"[60] and, over

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[59] Homer H. Dubs, *The Works of Hsün Tze* (London, 1928), 113.

[60] Yuri Pines, "Disputers of the *Li*: Breakthroughs in the Concept of Ritual in Preimperial China," *Asia Major* 2000: 1. While the peoples of this time did not identify themselves as "Chinese," distinction was made between those of the

time, it became a means through which non-"Chinese," or non-elites, could change their status. By the sixth century BCE, ritual became a means of domestic control, and by the end of the Spring and Autumn period (春秋 771 – 475 BCE), it was an essential part of governing.[61] Ritual was also important to inter-state relationships, as can be seen by the *meng* 盟 covenants and the rituals governing warfare during the period. These military rituals were agreed upon by both parties, but dissolved in the transition between the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods.[62] According to the late Spring and Autumn period statesman of the state of Qi 齊, Yan Ying 晏嬰, ritual sought to preserve hereditary hierarchies, thereby preventing potential political contests.[63] His idea of ritual also linked the family and state, an idea that would become important in later times. Ritual, however, was only seen as a political tool at this point, important in inter-state negotiations, and in writings on ritual, discussions of morality are conspicuous only by their absence. It is during the Warring States period that supporters of ritual become more vocal about its moral and ethical advantages, and some de-emphasized the political elements.

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central states and the nomadic "barbarians." The peoples of the central states could negotiate with each other using their common rituals.

[61] Ibid., 11-15.

[62] For a discussion of both the *meng* covenant and military rituals, see Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany, NY, 1990) 15-52, for military rituals, see Robin D.S. Yates, "Texts and Practice: The Case of Military Ritual" (unpublished, 2002).

[63] Pines, "Disputers," 16. This speech was recorded in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳.

The moralistic view of ritual was most strongly expressed by Mengzi 孟子 (ca. 372 - 289 BCE, but his stance was influenced by his mentor, Confucius 孔子 (ca. 551 – 479 BCE). Confucius focused on the ethical properties of ritual, de-emphasizing the socio-political elements.[64] While hierarchies were still an important feature of ritual to Confucius, the ethical emphasis of Confucius' ritual may have derived "from the conscious effort to develop appropriate conduct for the rising stratum of *shi*."[65] In other words, through ritual, a member of the *shi* could ultimately become a "superior man" *(junzi* 君子). Despite the emphasis given to ritual by some of these influential figures, many Warring States thinkers also dismissed ritual completely: Zhuangzi 莊子 (ca. 369 - 286 BCE) argued that ritual was an inferior method, that it was what men used to guide their lives when they were unable to reach higher principles, such as virtue 德 or the Dao 道:

> When the Dao is lost, only then is virtue used (to govern). When virtue is lost, only then is benevolence used. When benevolence is lost, only then is propriety used. When propriety is lost, only then is ritual used.
> 失道而後德，失德而後仁，失仁而後義，失義而後禮。[66]

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[64] This view of Confucius is expounded by Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (Long Grove, IL, 1972).
[65] Pines, "Disputers," 19.
[66] *Zhuangzi*, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies, Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series, 60/22/12-13.

Mozi 墨子 (ca. 470 – 390 BCE) was also critical of ritual, as well as the hierarchies it perpetuated. For him, it was also an unnecessary indulgence that led to extravagant expenditures and wasted resources.[67] In particular, he argued that elaborate funerals and extended mourning were detrimental to the state, for they wasted both material resources and time, and did not bring any benefit to the people.[68] Two Warring States persuaders, who would become among the most prominent and influential in later times, however, gave ritual central importance in their writings. Mengzi, as mentioned above, followed Confucius most closely, focusing exclusively on morality, and downplaying its social role. For him, *li* was politeness, appropriate treatment of others, and personal conduct, and should be an internal virtue, believing in the inherent good nature of humans.[69] However, the theory of ritual that was most clearly expressed and was perhaps the most influential was that of another Warring States era persuader, Xunzi.

Very little is known about the life of Xunzi, save what was recorded in chapter 74 of the *Shi ji*, or, *Records of the Grand Historian*, the first work of history in China, written ca. 100 BCE. Xunzi was a native of the state of Zhao 趙國, born ca. 312 BCE,[70] during the Warring States period, and was drawn to

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[67] Henri Maspero, *La Chine antique* (Paris, 1965 (1927)), 246, and Poo Mu-chou, "Ideas Concerning Death and Burial in Pre-Han and Han China," *Asia Major* 1990: 32-33.
[68] Burton Watson, trans., *Mo Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York, NY, 1963), 66-69.
[69] Pines, "Disputers," 26-29.
[70] William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed., *The Grand Scribe's Records:* Volume VII, *The Memoirs of Pre-Han China by Ssu-ma Ch'ien* (Bloomington, 1994), 184.

the centre of intellectual thought, the Jixia Academy 稷下學官 in the state of Qi.[71] The text that bears his name, the *Xunzi*, is thought to have been primarily penned by Xunzi himself, although there are also sections that were recorded by his students.[72] The theory of ritual expounded in his eponymous text influenced the chapters on ritual in both the *Li ji* and the *Shi ji*. In fact, the similarities are so striking that one scholar, Noah Edward Fehl, has suggested that Xunzi himself wrote many of the chapters of the *Li ji*, as well as certain sections of the *Zuo zhuan*.[73] While there is not enough evidence to support this claim, given what we know of the authorship of the early ritual texts, it does go to show the comparability of the two works. Xunzi's theory of ritual is generally considered to be in part a syncretisation of previous conceptions of ritual, dating from the Spring and Autumn period up to the end of the Warring States, and it combines both the socio-political and moral elements described above.[74] Because of its influence on later texts, specifically the *Li ji* that was so important during the Han, the *Xunzi* will be discussed in detail in this chapter, while the pertinent sections of the *Li ji* will be analyzed in conjunction with the prescriptions of the *Yi li* in Chapter 5.

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[71] The existence and structure of the Jixia academy has been debated: Nathan Sivin has argued that as an academy, it was a myth, in "The Myths of the Naturalists," in *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China* (Aldershot, 1995), Chapter 4. Regardless of the existence of a formal academy, however, it seems likely that scholars gathered in the state of Qi to debate.

[72] John Knoblock, trans., *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford, CA, 1988) vol.1, 29-30.

[73] Noah Edward Fehl, 禮 *Li: Rites and Propriety in Ritual and Life, A Perspective for a Cultural History of Ancient China* (Hong Kong, 1971), 107.

[74] Ibid., 343.

Chapter 19 of the *Xunzi* is called "Li Lun," or, "Discourse on Ritual," and it is in this chapter that Xunzi presents his theory of ritual. As Robert Campany has observed, Xunzi's voice in "Discourse on Ritual" is that of an observer, rather than a participant. Although Xunzi himself would have actively participated in the rites, he chose to write about them from an extra-ritual perspective, and thus discusses ritual on non-ritual grounds.[75] Although ritual was not an uncommon subject in Warring States era texts, Xunzi was one of the few philosophers to devote an entire chapter to this topic. Few would deny that ritual was important in early China, but it is interesting that Xunzi felt the need to theorize ritual when many of his contemporaries who defended its practice asked fewer questions about the *how* and *why* of ritual. Xunzi's chapter opens with the question: "Whence did *li* arise?" 禮起於何也? to which he answers:

> Man is born with desires; if he has desires, but is unable to satisfy his desires, then he will be unable to not seek to satisfy them. If his seeking knows no limits and degrees, then he will be unable to not contend [with others]. Such contention leads to chaos, chaos leads to poverty. The Ancient Kings hated chaos, so they established *li* and moral principles in order to create distinctions, in order to foster man's desires, and to supply man with the means to seek [to satisfy them].
> 人生而有欲，欲而不得，則不能無求；求而無度量分界，則不能不爭；爭則亂，亂則窮。先王惡其亂也，故制禮義以分之，以養人之欲，給人之求。[76]

[75] Robert Campany, "Xunzi and Durkheim as Theorists of Ritual Practice," in *Discourse and Practice* (Albany, NY, 1992), 197-99.
[76] *Xunzi*, "Li lun," Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies, Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (hereafter ICS), 90/19/3-5. My translations have been aided greatly by John Knoblock's.

Ritual is thus presented as a means of controlling the majority of the people who have been unable to overcome their desires. The origin of ritual is placed in the remote past, with the ancient sage-kings, which contains a two-part argument: that people wiser than Xunzi and his contemporaries created ritual, so it must be valued, and, by locating the origin of ritual in the past, Xunzi is arguing for its continuation by appealing to tradition. It is easy to suppose from this passage alone that Xunzi believed that ritual was a form of socio-political control, but, as we will see below, the spirits were an important a part of ritual as well as of socio-political concern.

A little later in the chapter, Xunzi discusses the three roots of ritual: heaven and earth are the root of life, the ancestors are the root of the family, and lords and teachers are the root of order, and that ritual serves to regulate and balance the universe:

> Therefore ritual serves heaven above, and serves earth below. It honours the ancestors and esteems lords and teachers. These are the three roots of ritual.
> 故禮、上事天，下事地，尊先祖而隆君師，是禮之三本也。[77]

Xunzi makes distinctions between these three elements, but they are still intrinsically linked. Ritual does not just serve one facet of life, but unites them all so that:

> [By means of ritual] Heaven and earth are in harmony,
> The sun and moon illuminate,
> The four seasons proceed in order,
> The stars and constellations progress,
> The rivers flow, and the myriad things prosper.

[77] *Xunzi*, "Li lun," ICS, 90/19/21-22.

> 天地以合，日月以明，四時以序，星辰以行，江河以流，萬物以昌。[78]

Without ritual, the ways of the cosmos and earth would be disjointed, and chaos would ensue. By making distinctions and regulating society, the earth would be in order, by serving the ancestors and heaven, then order would be preserved in the cosmos, and all under heaven would be complete.

> When all under heaven observes the rites, it is well governed, if it does not observe the rites, there is chaos. When it observes them, there will be safety; when it does not, there will be danger. Observing the rites leads to survival; not observing the rites leads to destruction. The petty man is unable to fathom [this].
> 天下從之者治，不從者亂；從之者安，不從者危；從之者存，不從者亡。小人不能測也。[79]

Many scholars of Chinese ritual have understood Xunzi's theory of ritual as purely socio-political, without having any interaction with the cosmological realm. Yuri Pines has argued that by the end of the Warring States period, deities had merely become "part of ritual conventions rather than active partners in ritual communication." [80] The anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown has asserted that the social function of ancient Chinese rites were "independent of any beliefs that may be held as to the efficacy of the rites," suggesting that the rites were simply performed as a means of governing, without any religious

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[78] *Xunzi,* "Li lun," ICS, 92/19/4-5. Knoblock notes that this section is rhymed: it is therefore punctuated accordingly.
[79] *Xunzi*, "Li lun," ICS, 92/19/9-10
[80] Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722-452 B.C.E.* (Hawai'i, 2002), 75.

significance.[81] The above excerpts, however, show that the cosmos and deities were active members in ritual. While Xunzi did highlight the ancient elements of the rites, it is not sufficient to say that the rites were being performed simply because they had always been performed that way. There was a deeper link between the cosmos and society, and, as argued above, the rites served to regulate both society and the cosmos at the same time.

In early China, the socio-political order was not separated from the cosmological order: indeed they were interdependent.[82] As Xunzi said:

> The meaning of ritual is so profound, that those who examine it with the kind of perception that distinguishes hard and white, same and different, would be out of their depth.
> 禮之理誠深矣。「堅白」「同異」之察入焉而溺。[83]

Heaven and earth were two parts of a triad, just as the living and dead were both active members in society, albeit with different roles. As Marcel Granet has remarked: "le monde ne présente aucune apparence qui ne corresponde à une *totalité d'ordre cyclique constituée par la conjugaison de deux manifestations alternantes et complémentaires*,"[84] and, indeed, the role of the ruler was to maintain the balance between the complementary forces through ritual.

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[81] Quoted in James Laidlaw, "On Theatre and Theory: Reflections on Ritual in Imperial Chinese Politics," in *State and Court Ritual in China* (Cambridge, 1999), 412.

[82] This idea of separation between the two orders can be traced back to the influence of Émile Durkheim, in his *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: le système totémique en Australie* (Paris, 1968).

[83] *Xunzi*, "Li lun," ICS, 92/19/11. Here Xunzi is specifically attacking the specialists on names.

[84] Marcel Granet, *La pensée chinoise* (Paris, 1968), 127. While Granet is specifically talking about Yin-Yang dualism, the same can be said for other binary opposites, including the distinctions between the living and the dead: they were both two parts of a complementary whole, and each part needed the other to survive.

According to James Laidlaw, "Xunzi was aware that rites produced order, but the order for him was *natural, cosmic and supernatural* as well as social."[85] This "unitary" universal order[86] is important to bear in mind for the mourning rituals were essential for the maintenance of order amongst both the living and the dead, as well as to regulate the relationship.

Xunzi himself was also concerned with the correct performance of mortuary and mourning rites, and emphasized the link between them and social responsibility:

> One is only able to treat the dead in the proper way once, and is not able to do it again. This is the reason why the minister's treating of his ruler with the utmost respect, and the son's treating of his parents with the greatest reverence must be done to the fullest. Therefore to serve the living without the deepest devotion and without (following) respectful forms, this is called wildness. To send off the dead without the deepest devotion without (following) respectful forms, this is called stinginess. The gentleman despises wildness and is ashamed of stinginess.
> 故死之為道也，一而不可得再復也，臣之所以致重其君，子之所以致重其親，於是盡矣。故事生不忠厚、不敬文，謂之野；送死不忠厚、不敬文，謂之瘠。君子賤野而羞瘠。[87]

Following this, he details the various sumptuary regulations for burial, from the opulence accorded to the Son of Heaven, who is mourned by all, down to the frugal and shameful ceremony of a castrated criminal, who was not to be mourned, even by his family.

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[85] James Laidlaw, "On Theatre and Theory: Reflections on Ritual in Imperial Chinese Politics," in *State and Court Ritual in China* (Cambridge, 1999), 413, italics mine.
[86] Michael Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death: Faith, Myth and Reason in the Han Period (202 B.C. – A.D. 220)* (London, 1994), 6.
[87] *Xunzi*, "Li lun," ICS, 93/19/9-11.

For Xunzi, rituals were the key to proper governance, and it was therefore important that the ruler be familiar with the ritual principles, and that all men know their proper role in society:

> Regarding the state, there is also the "sharpening with the whetstone;" this is ritual decorum and the marking of time. Therefore, the fate of man lies with heaven, and the fate of the state lies with ritual. The lord of men who exalts rituals and honours worthy men will be a king; one who values laws and loves the people will be a tyrant. One who is fond of profit and often deceitful will be imperilled. One who schemes after power, plots revolution, and risks secrets will perish.
>
> 彼國者亦有砥厲，禮義節奏是也。故人之命在天，國之命在禮。人君者隆禮尊賢而王，重法愛民而霸，好利多詐而危，權謀、傾覆、幽險而亡。[88]

One's position in society was linked to his access to ancestral power. Regulations stipulated how many shrines each rank was permitted to maintain, and, because ancestral power could bring benefits to the living, the more powerful men had access to more generations:

> Thus the ruler of All Under Heaven serves seven generations (of ancestors); the ruler of a single state serves five generations; one who rules a five-chariot territory serves three generations; one who rules a three-chariot territory serves two generations. Those who nourish themselves by the work of their hands are not permitted to establish an ancestral temple.
> The reason for this is to differentiate between the accumulations of virtue. Those who have accumulated virtue, extensive benefits flow towards them; those who amass unimportant (qualities), scant benefits flow towards them.
>
> 故有天下者事七世，有一國者事五世，有五乘之地者事三世，有三乘之地者事二世，持手而食者不得立祭廟，所以別積厚，積厚者流澤廣，積薄者流澤狹也。[89]

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[88] *Xunzi*, "Qiang guo" 強國, ICS, 75/16/9-10.

[89] *Xunzi*, "Li lun," ICS, 91/19/3-5.

Many of the sumptuary regulations in the *Xunzi* are very similar to those given by the *Li ji*, and we see similar regulations in the funerary rituals. Indeed, the *Li ji*, one of the most important texts on ritual theory in the Han, presents a theory of ritual that strongly resembles that of the *Xunzi*:

> The rites of all under heaven bring about the return to the beginning, they bring about the (honouring of) ghosts and spirits, they bring about the harmonious use (of things), they bring about rightness, and they bring about deference. To bring about the return to the beginning is in order to strengthen the roots. To bring about (honouring) the ghosts and spirits is in order to revere origins. To bring about the (harmonious) use of all things is in order to establish the records of the people. To bring about rightness, is so that there will be no contention and perversion between upper and lower (ranks). To bring about deference is in order to get rid of strife. Combine these five in order to govern with the rites of all under heaven, and although there will be strangeness and evil, that which is not governed will be few.
> 天下之禮，致反始也，致鬼神也，致和用也，致義也，致讓也。致反始，以厚其本也；致鬼神，以尊上也；致物用，以立民紀也。致義，則上下不悖逆矣。致讓，以去爭也。合此五者，以治天下之禮也，雖有奇邪，而不治者則微矣。[90]

In the above passage, we see that the *Li ji* is also concerned with both the socio-political and cosmological realms, and that this text also argues for the maintenance of distinctions. Without the proper rites, there would be chaos.

These texts clearly advocate that ritual is important, and that there is only one correct way of performing these rituals. As we will see below, the *Yi li* directs the practitioner in the correct performance of these rituals, and provides few possibilities for variance. Why was it so important to standardize the rites? First, as we have seen above, the rites were concerned with maintaining

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[90] *Li ji,* "Ji yi" 祭義, 24.429.

hierarchic distinctions. The rites were a way to fix boundaries and roles in society, and to clearly demarcate social positions through the use of visible performances and insignia.[91] These visible benefits of social standing, such as increased access to ancestral power and higher office, encouraged people to faithfully and correctly perform the rites for their rank, in the hopes that they too could be transformed into a superior man, and obtain the benefits of the higher ranks. At the same time, the rites attempted to prevent the wealthy from buying rank through conspicuous consumption by setting boundaries for what types of expenditures people of various ranks should incur. The regulations also attempted to reverse the trend of lavish burials, as these could potentially bankrupt poorer families, and wasted the time and resources of the people. Despite the emphasis on social distinctions, the rites also united All Under Heaven in the same system: all men from the Son of Heaven down were expected to follow the same ritual patterns.[92]

Second, the standardization of the rites precluded the appearance of another sage. By attributing the *Rites* classics to Confucius and the rites themselves to the Kings of Zhou, the Classicists, who assumed authority over the texts and the theories of ritual they presented, essentially declared the system perfected, and prevented the possibility that another could rise to challenge their system. Sages could still exist, but only within the ritual system organized by the Classicists; a

[91] Colours and styles of dress corresponded to rank, thereby providing a clear indication of hierarchic relationships.
[92] Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 191.

sage would understand the rites, but also understand that there was no need for change. In the words of Xunzi:

> Gongshu (Ban) was unable to improve upon the marking-line. There is no sage able to improve upon the rites. The rites are the model for the common man, who does not understand them, and the model for the sage, who does understand them.
> 公輸不能加於繩，聖人莫能加於禮。禮者、眾人法而不知，聖人法而知之。[93]

By taking this position, the Classicists hoped that they would establish themselves as the only experts on ritual, and, by appealing to the ideal of the golden age of the past, they attempted to prevent any usurpation of power by one who offered an alternate form of governance.

Third, the standardization of the rites prohibited variance[94] and by so doing, reinforced both the hierarchical distinctions and the authenticity of the rites. Standardization also enabled more widespread dissemination of the rites:

> Because the rites function as a social language, addressing the gods, the dead, and other members of the local community, they must be conventionalized to some degree in order to be understood and appreciated.[95]

The uniform rules for general decorum and larger rites provided a standard to which men could be held and allowed their superiors to reward them for embodying the rites. The rites were also standardized to unify and regulate earlier practices. It is especially evident in the mortuary rituals that these rites were not the invention of the Classicists: they were likely a conventionalization

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[93] *Xunzi*, "Fa xing" 法行 ICS, 143/30/1-2. Gongshu Ban was a military technologist and inventor who later became the god of craftsmen.
[94] There was still a good deal of variance between individual and regional practices, but this occurred within the larger, inflexible rite.
[95] Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 171.

of popular practices that had their roots less in Classicism than they did in folk beliefs.[96] Some of these practices will be examined below. The standardization of these practices also gave the Classicists a chance to re-interpret them within the context of the Classicist tradition, and this may be why the rites are often presented in terms of filial piety rather than deal with cosmological affairs.

The conventionalization of the rites, however, also created problems. The now static rites became rigid, leaving little room for variance, and began to "function as barriers, rather than gateways, to transformation."[97] In addition, it seems from the continued debates on moderation in burial and on the three-year mourning period itself, that many people still used the rites as a way of displaying their wealth and piety simply as a means to increase their social standing. With the increasing socio-economic gaps in the Eastern Han came a greater dissatisfaction amongst the people as to the efficacy of the rites and government,[98] and rituals began to be used in ways other than those intended. This reaction against standardized rituals will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[96] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 32-33, notes that it is rare to see rituals "invented." It is possible to adapt them according to the needs of the times, but invented rites rarely last or hold any authority.
[97] Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 172.
[98] Ibid., 173.

Chapter 3: Ritual and Sincerity

While the ritual texts and theories of the Warring States and Han periods give us a general idea of how those in charge of structuring the ritual system hoped it would function, neither the *Xunzi* nor the *Li ji* explain why these systems were adhered to, or were rejected.[99] Although this "native" perspective will remain central to the discussion, it cannot account for the reasons why the ritual system (as we shall see) began to be used in ways that directly opposed the patriarchal model it was supposed to reinforce. In order to explain this shift, I would like to introduce the theory of ritual and sincerity as presented by Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon, in their monograph *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (2008), and discuss its relationship to the theories of the early Chinese ritualists.

For Seligman, et al., ritual exists within a fractured world, and it seeks to create a subjunctive order: an idealized world "*as if* it were truly the case."[100] The members of the community agree upon this "subjunctive world," and have a vested interest in its continued enactment. The authors take into consideration both the cultural significance of ritual, which owes its emphasis in modern theories to Clifford Geertz, as well as the social functions, derived from Radcliffe-Brown, but argue that ritual exists to fulfil both cultural and social

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[99] To what extent the rituals were performed according to their prescribed forms will be discussed in the following chapters.

[100] Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (New York, NY, 2008), 20.

needs, and they explore the "incongruity between the world of enacted ritual and the participants' experience of lived reality."[101] Using Xunzi as an example, they argue that in the Chinese case "the goal of ritual is to bring order, hierarchy, principle, and ethics to a world that is otherwise chaotic, amoral, and indifferent – to live *as if* the world were actually a moral, coherent universe."[102] This ritual subjunctive functions only if the members of the social group agree upon the terms and can benefit from following the rites necessary to the maintenance of this subjunctive order. Describing Xunzi's chapter on ritual, Paul R. Goldin proposes that "ritual is the formulaic expression of the nexus of contracts to which members of a society all consent. Rituals work because they are *recognized* as such."[103] In China, maintaining this order required, theoretically, that people accepted their places within the ritual hierarchy, and therefore there must have been some incentive for them to participate in this ritual system. As discussed above, this incentive could come in the form of upward social mobility, with the material gains that were associated with a rise in status, as well as the respect of one's community. Participation in ritual and the shared subjunctive order could not only maintain the existing order, but also bring benefits to individuals in the real world.

Ritual, for the authors, also requires the participants' agreement that the world is fractured, and that harmony and peace can only be achieved through

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[101] Ibid., 20. See also Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, NY, 1973) and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (New York, NY, 1965).
[102] Seligman, et al., 20.
[103] Paul Rakita Goldin, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (Chicago, IL, Open Court), 63, emphasis retained.

ritual (though this perfected world will never, in reality, be achieved). In China, it was believed that the sages created ritual to mimic the ritual actions of the ancient sage kings who, because of these rituals, lived in an idealized golden age, to which the new rituals sought to return the world.[104] Indeed, appealing to the authority of the past was a common trope in early Chinese writings, and especially in ritual texts, as we have seen above.

The ritual reforms beginning in 31 BCE required the standardization of the rites, and their promulgation in the various ritual texts, to encourage empire-wide participation. Seligman, et al. notice this "closing of the canon" to be a problem in all ritual systems, and was not exclusive to the early Chinese. Their discussion is worth quoting at length:

> To begin with, there will be tendencies in a ritual order to close the canon, to declare that a given ritual order is complete and can allow no further additions or modifications. As such, no actions outside the current canon can be allowed in, and all such nonritual actions become radically devalued. In short, the lines between ritual and nonritual action become rigid and absolute. Once this happens, ritual can easily turn into pure repetition, being enacted more and more forcefully against what is perceived to be a complete disorder in the world of mundane reality. Ritual, in short, becomes endless, compulsive repetition – a cultural equivalent of the stereotypical compulsive-obsessive, constantly attempting to deny the fractured nature of lived experience through a turn to ever more purified repetition.
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> This danger always plays in relation to the opposite danger. If one of the goals of ritual is to create humans who are, to follow our Chinese and Judaic ritual theorists, sages, then we can potentially find a danger from the other end. Sagely action, by definition, is outside the dictates of ritual precedent, but it can and often does become precedent for new rituals. This means that a ritual order that allows too many sages can quickly cease to work effectively, because it would mean endless innovation and thus the end of a meaningful

[104] Seligman, et al., 32-34.

> tradition. A canon that is closed absolutely can create problems; a canon that is too open can create problems as well.[105]

As we have seen above, closing the canon to prevent the appearance of another sage was indeed one of the goals of the Classicists, who did not recognize the dangers of so doing. Michael Nylan has also noted this problem with the ritual texts in early China:

> Conventionalization slips all the more easily into ossification when objects, beliefs, and practices are written down, especially in liturgical texts, which pitifully reduce vivid practices attuned to living concerns to sketchy sets of instructions.[106]

Nylan argues that this ossification compromised the feelings of authenticity in the rites on a personal and social level; as the rites became internalized, the practitioner lost any urge to change, and ritual performance became mere habit.[107] This problem, according to Seligman, et al., is one of sincerity, or the lack thereof, in an inflexible ritual system: "attempts to close a ritual canon tend to provoke a response of claims of sincerity – claims that rituals are simply rules of conformity that prevent sincere belief."[108]

"Sincerity often grows out of a reaction against ritual;"[109] it denounces ritual as empty action, without any spiritual or emotional effect (ironically, this agrees with Radcliffe-Brown's theory of ritual). The sincere movement rejects ritual

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[105] Ibid., 41.
[106] Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 172. While we do not know to what extent practice of the rituals became stagnant, or ossified, the ritual reforms that attempted to close the canon in the Han precluded any innovation in the rites.
[107] Ibid. Perhaps it was because there were so many competing ideologies in the Han that the performance of these very rigid and supposedly ancient rites began to lose their authenticity.
[108] Seligman, et al., 41.
[109] Ibid., 103.

action and ornament, arguing that it is useless without any emotional foundations. The sincere movement emphasizes the individual experience over the shared communal ritual experience: in this model, the individual is valued more than the group, and, indeed, is encouraged to act against the formal ritual system in order to replace it with sincere modes of action. This sincere movement rising as a reaction against a closed ritual system is not unique to China: it is clearly expressed in the Protestant Reformation, wherein individual faith was said to be stronger than communal activity, Catholic rituals, and good works: "this is the confidence of the believer: he is sure that in faith he is taken outside himself, away from the necessity of proving himself to God in his works."[110] Individual faith was all that was needed, and while this faith may manifest itself in good works, it was no longer necessary to participate in the organized rituals promoted by the Church.

Sincerity seeks to destroy ambiguity and boundaries to create a utopia on earth, while ritual seeks to maintain those boundaries, to act *as if* the utopia existed, but while all the same acknowledging the ambiguities and differences inherent in life: "ritual orientations stress the performative, repetitive, subjunctive, antidiscursive, and social. Sincere orientations, on the other hand, tend to privilege the indicative, unique, discursive, and private."[111] Looked at in this light, ritual is far more capable of adapting, and handling out-of-the-ordinary events, whereas sincerity is inflexible, and takes no accountability for error in its

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[110] Berndt Hamm, "What Was the Reformation Doctrine of Justification?" in *The German Reformation* (Oxford, 1999), 78-79.
[111] Seligman, et al., 112 and 115.

judgements. "Ritual, in its iterated movement between different orders of being, accepts the existence of rupture and contradiction much more than does the sincere mode, which seeks to bring different orders of existence into a unitary framework."[112] In other words, ritual seeks to be inclusive; to create an order in which all members of society can participate, while sincere movements seek to impose the individual's will upon the group. These sincere movements may appear within the general framework of the ritual system they seek to overthrow, as we will see below, but also have the ability to become more radical movements, frequently millenarian or, in modern terms, fundamentalist.[113] Sincere movements, argue the authors, have existed throughout human history, but have been privileged in the post-enlightenment world. In modern terms, they tend to be described as "fundamentalist," and, indeed, many of the movements the authors discuss are modern, fundamentalist movements that reject what they consider to be outdated methods of religion and politics.[114]

This vision of sincerity and ritual is itself a modern one, one that has developed out of post-reformation language and thought. While aspects of it apply to the early Chinese mentality, this definition does not fully encompass the idea of sincerity in Han times. During the Han, the rhetoric of sincerity was closely linked to ideas of morality and virtue. In this vision of sincerity, spirits would respond only to one who was virtuous: the relationship remained a reciprocal one, but it was predicated on the inherent virtue of the sacrificer or

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[112] Ibid., 123.
[113] Ibid., 122.
[114] Ibid.

mourner. While individual belief remained important, it was not the sole factor in sincerity. The filial son had to live his life virtuously if he were to be able to interact with his ancestral spirits.[115] The performance of sincerity was also important, for it was this external manifestation of sincerity that could be evaluated rather than personal belief. Confucius famously said that one should sacrifice to the spirits *as if* they were present,[116] and as we will see below, the performance and rhetoric of the mourning rituals became very important.

While the sincere movement that emerged in mourning rituals in the Eastern Han was not violent or organized like the fundamentalist movements discussed by Seligman, et. al., sincerity in mourning rites emerged out of a time of growing political and religious discontent, and these rites existed alongside other, more extreme, movements. Without outright rejecting the structure of rites, the mourners who chose to rebel within the system called into question some of its fundamental beliefs, focusing instead on personal belief and merit. This subversion was widespread and lacked any organizing force, revealing a pervasive dissatisfaction with the rigid system of rites.

Movements of sincerity, while acting against "empty" rituals, do not emerge solely for this reason. While their proponents do genuinely stress sincere modes of action, these movements appear at times when the ritual systems they attack are vulnerable. The vulnerability of ritual systems comes from either failure in rituals themselves (e.g., failure to prevent against natural disasters, failure to

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[115] This belief in sincerity was not the only mode of thought concerning interaction with the ancestors. For further discussion on this view of sincerity, and of other modes of thought, see Brashier, pp. 195-201.

[116] *Lun yu*, 3.12. Arthur Waley, trans. *The Analects* (London, 2000), 89.

secure military victory against the 'other', etc.) or the failure of the institution that promotes them to support them and provide the promised benefits for correct performance of rituals. This was the case in the Eastern Han dynasty, which, following the short-lived Xin (新 9 – 23 CE) dynasty, sought to re-establish the organization and ritual policies that came out of the reforms of the Western Han. The Eastern Han was never able to assert its authority in the same way, as the emperors of the Eastern Han were forced to rely on the great families and chieftains who had supported the restoration of the dynasty, and, over time, these great families came to dominate the court.[117] The emperors' marriages were based on politics rather than affection, and the consort who ultimately became empress was not necessarily his favourite. This led to further struggles within the emperor's own palace, as well as amongst the great families, each hoping to position their sisters and daughters above the other women of the harem.[118] These problems were magnified when it became time to choose an heir. During the Eastern Han, the political influence of the mother's family was often more important than primogeniture in selecting an heir, and this often resulted in the promotion of a son who was not born to the empress, nor even the emperor's first-born.[119] This constant juggling of factions, as well as the influence exerted by the empress dowagers and their relatives resulted in division at court. In

[117] For a more detailed discussion of Eastern Han politics, see Hans Bielenstein, "Wang Mang, the Restoration of the Han Dynasty, and Later Han," in *The Cambridge History of China: Ch'in and Han Empires 221 BC – AD 220* (Cambridge, 1987), 223-290.
[118] Bielenstein, 259.
[119] Ibid., 280-87.

addition, the eunuchs became another powerful group at court, and, at times, their power rivalled that of the great families and empress dowagers.

Because of all of these internal troubles, as well as, perhaps, growing dissatisfaction amongst the people, the rulers made various efforts to reform government, and to make men more moral. Several attempts were made by the court in the first century CE to encourage morality and merit as criteria for recommendation to office, rather than based simply on their political connections, or purchase.[120] In addition, efforts were made by government ministers to base education on the literal meaning of the Five Classics, and discouraged non-traditional scholars from either following or writing their own commentaries and interpretations.[121] Encouraging participation in the inherently moralizing ritual system was another method through which the Eastern Han tried to maintain order. While the Eastern Han emperors promoted the ritual system, hoping that it would encourage support of the emperor and reinforce the patriarchal model, they were unable to enforce the correct performance of these rituals, either through reward or punishment. In addition, the central government had less control over the empire than in previous times, and groups of educated men began to deviate from the ritual prescriptions, perhaps as an act of subversion against the imperial government.

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[120] Loewe, "The Conduct of Government and the Issues at Stake, AD 57-167," in *The Cambridge History of China: Ch'in and Han Empires 221 BC – AD 220* (Cambridge, 1987), 294.

[121] Ibid., 298-99. It was argued that new commentaries could lead to heterodoxy and that it was more important to follow the literal meaning of the texts, as well as the commentaries of the masters.

Chapter 4: Mourning Prescriptions

Funerary Rites

The mourning rituals were only one part of a much larger body of rites that were performed during the mortuary process. These rites began before mourning dress was donned, and continued to the end of the three-year mourning period. As these rites were performed alongside the mourning rituals, they bear a brief discussion. Accompanying the mourning rites and funerary rituals listed below, were a series of sacrifices to the spirit of the deceased, intended to both nourish the spirit, and help his transformation into an ancestor.[122]

The first ritual to be performed following a death was the "soul-summoning" (*fu* 復) ritual, which was performed either immediately after death, or as he was breathing his last.[123] At this point, the summoner, usually the primary mourner, was sent to call the soul back. He took an article of the deceased's clothing, left the house, climbed up a ladder at the front end of the east wall onto the roof, and, standing in the centre and facing north, he called the soul, waving the clothes, and yelling three times "Ah! So-and-so, return!" He then threw the clothes from

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[122] For an outline of the various sacrifices and their timing, see Brashier (2011), 58-59.

[123] Wu Hung asserts that the *fu* ritual was performed before the person actually died, and should therefore not be considered as part of the funerary rituals. However, there is also evidence to show that the *fu* ritual was performed on persons already dead, and that it had to be performed so that the subsequent rituals could take place. In addition, a person could not be officially pronounced dead until the ritual had failed to revive him. See Wu Hung, "Art in a Ritual Context: Rethinking Mawangdui," *Early China* 1992: 111-44; Constance A. Cook, *Death in Ancient China: The Tale of One Man's Journey* (Leiden, 2006); and Yü Ying-shih, "O Soul, Come Back! – A Study in the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 1987: 363-95.

the roof, where they were picked up in a basket, and he descended by the back end of the west wall.[124] The texts disagree with what happened to the clothes: the *Yi li* account has them being used to dress the corpse, while the *Li ji* states that they were not used in any of the subsequent funerary rituals, and were buried.[125] After the soul-summoning ritual failed to revive the deceased, he was moved back on to the bed upon which he had been placed before he died (the primary wife's bed *zheng qin* 正寢), remaining in the purified room in the women's quarters.[126] A servant plugged the mouth open with a spoon, so that it would be able to receive later offerings, while another servant propped the deceased's feet on a stool and bound them to it, to keep the corpse looking neat, and to allow the servants to place shoes on the body later on. The clothes were removed, and a shroud was placed over the body, so that the mourners would not be exposed to the naked body, prior to the dressing of the corpse. At this point, servants brought up various offerings, climbing the east steps onto the platform, including dried flesh, hash, must, and wine, perhaps to entice the soul to return, or to offer it nourishment.[127] The room or hall was then curtained off, out of respect for the deceased, the family, and to prevent the visitors from seeing the unadorned corpse. The shroud was placed over the corpse to hide its nakedness,

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[124] John Steele, trans., *The I-Li, or Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* (London, 1917), 45.
[125] Ibid, 45, and Legge, vol. 2, 175. Regardless of whether or not they were used to dress the corpse, the clothes were not used by the living for any other purpose.
[126] Qian, 597.
[127] Steele, 46.

which was considered dangerous.[128] The primary mourner was excused from the first three days of the funeral preparations, as he was theoretically in so much grief that he would be unable to properly dress the corpse, and still hoped that the deceased would return to life.

Notice would then be sent to his superior, at which point the family members (those who would wear the highest level of mourning) arranged themselves near the body: the primary mourner to the east of the bed, facing west, with his male relatives arranged behind him, and the females to the west of the bed, facing east. The other relations would assemble themselves, grouped by gender, behind the nearest relatives.[129] Following this, the *Yi li* describes how the mourners were to act when visitors arrive to pay their condolences and possibly offer grave clothes.[130]

At this point, preparations were made for the dressing of the corpse. The first step to be undertaken was the preparation of the funeral inscription, also known as the name banner. This banner was very important, as when the corpse was placed in the first coffin, he would no longer be identified by his body, but by this banner. The banner was hung on a bamboo staff, set under the eaves of the house, where a temporary pit would be dug to contain the coffin. The name

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[128] Robin D.S. Yates, "Purity and Pollution in Early China," in *Chung-kuo k'ao-ku-hsüeh yü li-shih-hsüeh cheng-ho yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1997), 506.

[129] Steele, 46. This configuration was likely related to Yin-Yang cosmology. The men stood on the Yang side facing the Yin, while the women stood on the Yin side, facing the Yang.

[130] The grave clothes offered by friends, relatives, and even the ruler or other government officials would generally not be used to dress the corpse, but rather appear to have been buried in the tomb, perhaps for use by the deceased in the afterlife, or at least simply to acknowledge that they belonged to the dead and not the living.

banner would later be buried, placed on top of the innermost coffin, the *jiu* 柩.[131] The inscription, according to the *Yi li* was to read: "The Coffined Corpse of X, with Y Surname" "某氏某之柩."[132] Following this, pits would be dug for the disposal of the washing utensils and lesser dressings, a stove would be built to heat the washing water, and the utensils for washing the corpse would be cleaned and laid out.[133] The grave clothes were then laid out, beginning with the underclothes, made of a soft, white fabric, followed by all of the accessories that would adorn the dead person's body, including jewellery, plugs for the orifices (jade, if the family was wealthy or the deceased was of high rank), and a cloth covering for the eyes, so that the mourners would not have eye contact with the deceased, for fear of being polluted, and would not be offended by his image.[134] For the same reason, either grain and cowrie shells or a jade plug would be placed in the deceased's mouth, to protect the corpse from want and decay, and to stop the corpse-vapours (*shiqi* 尸氣) from leaving the body.[135] Finally, the

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[131] The most famous example of a name banner is that found on the coffin of Lady Dai, at the Mawangdui tomb complex. While the Mawangdui banner is not inscribed, it has been argued is a visual representation of the deceased. See Wu, "Art in a Ritual Context."

[132] *Yi li*, "Shisang li" 士喪禮, *Yi li tonglun* 儀禮通論 *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Shanghai, 2002), 610.

[133] Steele, 49. The utensils for washing the corpse included: a new basin, a slop pail, a dipper, a rice jar, and caldrons. These were generally buried in a pit after they had been used, as they were contaminated with death.

[134] Cook, 36-37. Pollution could be transmitted by eye contact, causing illness in the living.

[135] Cook, 36-37 and *Li ji*, "Tangong xia" 檀弓下, 85. See Li Jianmin, "Contagion and Its Consequences: The Problem of Death Pollution in Ancient

rest of the garments and shoes were laid out, in the order in which they would be put on. The grave clothes that were given as gifts were laid out after these, but were not used.[136]

Following this the corpse was brought outside, and the washing began. This was one of the most dangerously polluting times for both the deceased and the mourners, as the body was naked and therefore all of the attendants were exposed to the pollution of death. Four attendants washed the corpse; these were usually women of the household. The body was placed on a bed, designed for this purpose, and was held at an angle by two of the attendants, allowing the water to drain into a basin or pit made specifically for that purpose.[137] After this, the nails would be trimmed and the hair would be styled in the usual fashion of his lifetime: for women, this included a number of (often expensive) accessories (Lady Dai - the best preserved corpse from the Han period - had a total of 32 accessories in her hair).[138] The food and treasure would be placed in the mouth, any other plugs would be inserted, and then finally the grave clothes would be put on. The grave clothes would be tied together, horizontally across the arms, and then another rope would lead from the centre of the body and loop around the feet. After the corpse was dressed, the spoon used to fill the mouth, hair and

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China," in *Medicine and the History of the Body* (Tokyo, 1999), 201-17, for a discussion on the dangers of corpse-vapors.

[136] Steele, 50.

[137] Cook, 36.

[138] Steele, 53, and Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館 and Zhongguo kexueyuan yanjiusuo 中國科學院考古研究所, eds., *Changsha Mawangdui yihao Han mu* 長沙馬王堆一號漢墓 (Tomb no. 1 at the Changsha Mawangdui Tomb Complex (Beijing, 1973), 31.

nail clippings, and any other clothes used to dress the corpse would be buried in the pit.[139] The corpse would receive another dressing, and would ultimately have a total of 19 robes placed on it.[140] This marked the end of the lesser dressing of the corpse, at which point preparations would be made for the coffining.

The coffin was brought into the house, and the hall was once again curtained off. The corpse was moved to a mat on the floor, and the clothes for the greater dressing were placed on him. These have been called "corpse quilts" (*chenghuixiu* 乘會繡), by archaeologists, made specifically for this purpose, and evidence from excavated tombs suggests that they were of a light colour, yellow being the most prevalent.[141] Following this, the body would be bound using strips of cloth to prevent any of the articles from becoming dislodged, and to contain the corpse. The corpse would be lifted into the coffin, by the primary mourner, attendants, and ritual specialist, if any. The cover was placed on top, and the coffin would be lowered into the temporary hole. Offerings of grain were placed at the sides of the coffin, and then the hole would be plastered over. The name banner would be set by the hole, later it would be placed on top of the coffin and buried in the tomb.[142]

At this point, the coffin could remain in the temporary pit for quite some time: the proper location and time of burial had to be properly divined, and sometimes

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[139] Steele, 54.
[140] Ibid., 55.
[141] Hunan County Museum, 29-31.
[142] Steele, 64. The text does not specify when the inner coffin was placed inside the others, but presumably it was done before the corpse had been moved.

the most auspicious day was weeks or months later.[143] Throughout this time, and up until the end of the mourning period, sacrifices would be offered to the deceased's spirit at the place where he was temporarily interred, for his tablet would not be placed in the ancestral temple until after he had been properly buried.[144] Before the burial, there was a large farewell feast, usually held at midnight. The following day, the coffin would be transported first to the ancestral temple, where it would be brought inside, and the mourners would arrange themselves to the east and west, according to propriety, to formally announce the death and burial to the ancestors.[145] The coffin would then be transported to the tomb, accompanied by the offerings and spirit vessels (*mingqi* 明器) that would be buried with him. These would also be accompanied by everyday objects that the man had possessed in life, including musical instruments, arms, written works, etc., perhaps to identify him in the afterlife, or provide him with tools for his occupation. Excavated tombs have revealed a

[143] For higher status individuals, there was often an enforced delay between death and burial, to allow subjects to pay their respects. These were: for the Son of Heaven, 70 days, a minister (*dafu* 大夫), 50 days, a *shi*, 30 days. See Miranda Brown, "Did the Early Chinese Preserve Corpses? A Reconsideration of Elite Concepts of Death," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 2002: 210. Almanacs (*ri shu* 日書) from the Han also reveal that certain days were auspicious or inauspicious for burial, and divination for the burial date was a part of the funerary rites in the *Yi li*.

[144] Steele, 72-77 and 93. There are no stipulations regarding the period between coffining and burial.

[145] Steele, 79-80.

wide variety of objects that would be representative of that person's life or beliefs.[146]

After the burial, the living and dead would gather together in a burial feast, either within the tomb, or just outside. This feast was an essential part of the funerary rituals, as it marked the beginning of a new family order, with the deceased officially removed from the world of the living, but not yet an ancestor himself. As such, he would be represented by a corpse-impersonator (*shi* 尸, literally, corpse), who was ideally a grandson, or other young male relative. The corpse-impersonator sat at the head of the table, and represented the presence of the spirit. As soon as food was placed in front of him, all wailing was to stop, as "The services for the living were over, and those for the ghost have begun" 生事畢而鬼事始已.[147]

Mourning in The *Yi li*

The most detailed descriptions of mourning rituals for the *shi* are given in the *Yi li*. However, from the texts alone we are unable to determine to what extent the mourning rituals were actually practiced in their stipulated forms. This is problematic, as in the case of mourning rituals, unlike burial rites, we do not have any physical evidence to compare to the texts. In the Western Han,

[146] Here there is a major disagreement between the *Yi li* and the excavated tombs: the *Yi li* stipulates that no sacrificial vessels are to be buried 無祭器. However there have been many such vessels discovered.
[147] *Li ji* "Tangong xia," 101.

there are also no written descriptions of individual instances of mourning rites. These appear in the Eastern Han (東漢 24-220 CE), in the form of stone inscriptions, indicating that by that time the performance of these mourning rituals had become widespread, and that they were an important way for men to show their social standing and ritual proficiency. We do, however, have one piece of evidence that indicates that these rituals were performed during the early Han, in modern day Changsha, Hunan province, far from the area where Classicism had long been prevalent. A silk diagram was found at the Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb complex (sealed 168 BCE) which depicts a mourning system remarkably similar to that described in the *Yi li*.[148] From this, it is likely that this mourning system was being followed by elites in early Han period China; however, it is still unwise to assume that there was a universal way to perform mourning rituals in the early Han.

While the *Yi li* provides us with rich descriptions of the mourning rituals, including the rituals to be performed, the participants and their comportment, and the important sacrifices and divinations that were performed, it does not give us any information as to why it was considered so important to perform these rituals in such a precise way, or why the rituals themselves were so elaborate. Some reasons for why the rituals were performed are offered in the *Li ji*.

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[148] This diagram will be discussed further below, see Lai, "The Diagram of the Mourning System from Mawangdui." Many Classicists texts have been discovered in this area, suggesting that the tradition was more widespread than previously thought.

Most helpful to our understanding of early Chinese mourning rituals are the chapters in the *Li ji* that discuss why certain rites were practiced in these specific forms. The chapters "Wen sang" 問喪 (Questions about Mourning) and "Sannian wen" 三年問 (Questions about the Three-year Mourning Period) attempt to explain the rationale for the rituals and the complexity of their forms. These chapters seem to borrow extensively from earlier texts, most notably the *Xunzi* and the *Analects* (*Lun yu*) 論語. These two chapters will be discussed further below. The *Li ji*'s discussions on the specific rites were thus intended as the rationale for why these rituals were performed according to the forms outlined in the other ritual texts. These explanations of ritual, along with Xunzi's theory, represented one ideological position rather than a universal agreement on the theory of ritual. It is perhaps because there was no universal agreement that the *Li ji* sought to explain why the rites were performed in these forms.

Mourning Dress

According to the *Yi li*, full mourning dress was to be adopted on the third day following the death of the deceased. This three-day delay gave the mourners time to prepare not only funeral goods, but also their own clothing and accessories. What mourning dress had to be worn and how long the mourning period lasted depended on one's relationship with the deceased and the status of the deceased. These rules are outlined in the *Yi li* chapter "Sang fu" (Mourning

Dress).[149] The deepest mourning (*zhancui* 斬衰) consisted of wearing "an untrimmed sackcloth coat and skirt, fillets of the female nettle hemp, a staff, a twisted girdle, a hat whose hat-string is of cord, and rush shoes."[150] According to the commentary attached to the chapter, the staff was carried because it was considered that the internal pain one felt would manifest itself as physical weakness, and the staff was thus used for support.[151] The primary mourner, usually the heir and eldest son of the deceased, who would inherit his father's rank and ritual privileges and who wore this, would also be expected to sleep on the ground, with straw bedding and a clod for a pillow, in a shack built of rushes at the side of the house. He would remain in this shack until the end of the first year, although after the sacrifices of repose (*yu* 虞) which occurred three months after death, he would be permitted to add lintels and door-posts, and place a mat over the straw. While living in this shack, he was only permitted to eat congee twice per day with one handful of grain, and after the sacrifice of repose, he was permitted to eat coarse rice. During this period, he would wail day and night, with no set times. At the end of the first year, the *xiaoxiang* 小祥 sacrifice was made, and the primary mourner would move to a structure called the "outer

[149] *Yi li* "Sang fu," 479-603.
[150] Steele, 9.
[151] Ibid., 10. This is a common theme throughout the descriptions of mourning dress and comportment: emotional pain is manifest through physical pain, and many of the prescriptions are intended to show the physical suffering of the mourners, but especially the primary mourner. There is much debate on the authorship of this commentary, which was likely written post-Han, and it is the only chapter of the text to have a distinct commentary. See Steele, 217-19.

sleeping apartment," which was built outside the door of the sleeping quarters, and was unplastered, and it was at this point that he would be allowed to eat fruits and vegetables, and his mourning would lessen by one grade.[152]

The *zhancui* mourning dress would be worn by a son for a father; by lords for the Son of Heaven (i.e., the emperor); by a father for his heir; by a man for his adopted successor; a wife for her husband; a concubine for her lord and master; an unmarried daughter for her father; and a girl who had returned home after marriage would wear it for her father.[153] It was worn into the third year, and, over time, the restrictions in dress and actions were gradually lessened.[154]

The second level of mourning, *zicui* 齊衰, consisted of "a coarse hempen coat and skirt trimmed. The fillet was of male hemp, the hat having strings of grass-cloth.[155] The staff carried was pared at the end. The girdle was of cloth, and the shoes were of coarse texture."[156] This mourning, if worn for three years, would be worn with the same hat as the *zhancui* mourning. It was worn for three years for a mother, stepmother, or foster mother (if the father was dead), and a

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[152] Steele, *I-Li,* 9-11. See Brashier, *Ancestral Memory*, 58-59, for a list of the various sacrifices performed after death.
[153] Steele, 11-12.
[154] Over the course of the three-year mourning, the primary mourner would adopt lesser degrees of mourning with the passage of time. For example, after the first year, he would adopt the second level of mourning, and be able to resume certain activities. These changes corresponded to the various sacrifices offered to the deceased.
[155] This gender change in dress, from female to male hemp likely corresponded with *Yin Yang* philosophy. The female was associated with *Yin*, and death was a *Yin* state. The transition from the *Yin* to *Yang* dress marked a distance from one's involvement with death.
[156] Steele, 13-14.

mother wore it for the heir.[157] This next level of mourning dress was worn for one year, and consisted of a sackcloth coat and skirt that were trimmed at the edges, with a fillet of male hemp, and a pared staff. The hat had hat-strings made of cloth, and the shoes were of openwork. It was worn for one year for: a mother, if the father was still alive; a husband wore it for his wife; a son of a divorced wife who was not the heir wore it for his mother; and it was worn by children living with a stepmother for her, if their father was dead. This mourning dress could also be worn for one year without the staff, and with hempen shoes instead of those of openwork. It was worn for: grandparents; elder and younger paternal uncles and their wives; a son in succession of a great officer wore it for his wife; a man wore it for his brothers; a father wore it for his sons who were not the heir; it was worn for nephews and unmarried nieces; a man wore it for his grandson in the succession; an adopted heir wore it for his birth parents; a married woman wore it for her parents and for her brother who was the heir; a son for his stepfather, if he lived with him; a wife wore it for her husband's lord. It was also worn for paternal aunts; married daughters who had no children; a man for his lord's parents, wife, eldest son, and grandparents; a concubine wore it for her lord's wife; a woman for her in-laws and her husband's nephews; a concubine of a duke or great officer wore it for his son; a daughter (both married and unmarried) wore it for her grandparents; all concubines wore this dress for their parents. The son of a great officer wore this for his older and younger paternal uncles, their wives, and their children; his older and younger

[157] Ibid., 13.

brothers and their children; and for his married aunts and his own married daughters, if they had no "manager" in charge of sacrifices.[158]

The trimmed mourning could also be worn for three months by: a ruling duke in exile for the ruler in whose state he lived;[159] the people for the prince of the state; a man wore it for his stepfather if he did not live with him; a son wore it for his great-grandparents; and women wore it for their grandparents.[160] These last relationships are all hierarchical, but also indicate that there was a good deal of distance between the mourner and the deceased. It was still necessary to show respect for the deceased, as long as the mourners knew their roles in relation to the deceased.

The third level of mourning was the *dagong* 大功, which was worn for one who died prematurely (i.e., one who had not yet reached adulthood) for either nine or seven months, and consists of "a grass-cloth coat and skirt, and male hemp nettle fillet."[161] There would be no other form of mourning dress following the *dagong* worn for early death. It was worn for nine months for a child who died in mature youth (ages 16 to 19), or for seven months for a child in middle youth (ages 12-15). The *dagong* mourning could also be worn for nine months for: married paternal aunts and daughters; older and younger first

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[158] Ibid., 16-23. According to the commentary "'No Manager' indicates the circumstances of the titled lady [i.e., the wife of the great officer] who has no one to perform the sacrifices to her spirit."
[159] Some of these prescriptions imply conditions that existed during the Warring States period. It is not stated in the text if or how they were adapted during the Han.
[160] Ibid., 24-26.
[161] Ibid., 27.

cousins; an adopted heir wore it for his biological brothers; a man wore it for his grandsons if they were not in succession, and for the wife of his son in succession; married daughters wore it for their brothers, nieces, and nephews; a wife wore it for her husband's grandparents, uncles, and their wives; a great officer wore it for his uncles, aunts, children other than the eldest, and his brothers and their children, if they held the rank of ordinary officer; women wore it for the married daughters of their husband's brothers; a concubine of a great officer for the sons of her lord who were not in succession; a daughter for her paternal uncles and their wives, and her paternal aunts; and a ruler wore it for his paternal aunts, and daughters who were married to the rulers of other states. After three months, this mourning dress was replaced by the *xiaogong* 小功 coat of "dolichos bean fibre cloth" and this was worn until the nine months were complete.[162] The *xiaogong* mourning dress was worn for those who died in early youth (ages 8 to 11). It consisted of a coat of coarse dolichos cloth and a fillet and girdle of decorated hemp. It was worn for younger paternal uncles, grandsons in succession, and brothers, paternal aunts and unmarried sisters, who died in early youth. An adopted son would wear it for his brothers and first cousins if they died in mature youth; a wife wore it for her husband's younger paternal uncles who died in mature youth. A wife would wear it for her brothers' sons and daughters, her husband's brothers' sons and daughters, in early youth. It was worn for nephews and grandsons not in succession and their wives, who died in mature youth. Concubines of great officers wore it for their

[162] Ibid., 28-31.

lords' sons not in succession, in mature youth.[163] Children who died under the age of eight were said to have died a "mourningless death" and they were wailed for one day for each month of their lives. According to the commentary, children were given a name at three months, and so a child without a name was not wailed for. No mourning dress was worn for children under the age of eight.[164] If it was not specified, the mourning for those who died in middle youth was a degree less than for those who died in mature youth, and two degrees less for those who died in early youth.[165]

The same *xiaogong* mourning was worn for five months by: a man for his grand-uncle, his wife, and his uncle once removed, with his wife; for his second cousins, married female first cousins, and married granddaughters; his maternal grandparents, and a maternal aunt, once removed, with her husband; an adopted heir for his married sisters and maternal grandparents; a woman for her husband's paternal aunts and the wives of his brothers; a concubine of a great officer wore it for his married daughters by concubines, for the wives of his sons not in succession, and for the father, mother, and sisters of the ruler's mother. Finally, a grandson of a ruler wore it for the concubine of his father who wet-nursed him.[166] For these relationships, after two months had passed, the hemp

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[163] Ibid., 32-34.
[164] Ibid., 27.
[165] Ibid., 39. These age categories suggest that one was not considered a full member of society until after he had reached adulthood and had been married. Men and women were not ritually complete without a spouse, and so they may not have been granted the same obsequies as married couples.
[166] Because the concubine (presumably the child's biological mother) was not his father's legal wife, he would mourn the legal wife as his mother, and so the concubine would be granted lesser mourning rites. See Lee Jen-der, "Wet

girdle was replaced by a bean-fibre girdle, which was worn until the end of the five-month period.[167]

The final grade of mourning dress was the *sima* 緦麻 or, fine hemp mourning. It was worn for only three months by: a man for his great grand-uncle and his wife, his grand-uncle once removed and his wife, his uncle second removed and his wife, for a third cousin, for the wife of his grandson not in succession, and his grandson if he died in middle youth, for his paternal aunts, once removed, if they were married, for his uncles once removed, and his second cousins if they died in mature youth. He wore it for his daughters' sons, for first cousins and nephews who died in early youth, and for a maternal aunt who died in middle or mature youth. A woman wore it for her husband's younger paternal uncle, who died in early youth. An ordinary officer wore it for his mother, if she was a concubine, and for his senior servant and senior concubine. A man wore it for his wet nurse, for his second cousins' sons, his great grandson, his father's elder paternal aunt, his maternal first cousin, his sisters' sons and their wives, sons-in-law, parents-in-law, paternal aunts' sons, maternal uncles, and uncles' sons.[168]

There was one final category of mourning dress that was worn only until the interment of the corpse. It consisted of a coat and skirt of the *sui* 澻 cloth, and a

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Nurses in Early Imperial China," *Nan Nü*, 2000, for a more detailed discussion of the relationship between a child and his wet nurse.

[167] Steele, 34-35.

[168] Ibid., 36-39.

male hemp fillet. This was worn by the great officers for the emperor.[169] To summarize, there were five main types of mourning dress, the *zhancui, zicui, dagong, xiaogong,* and *sima*, and six main durations of mourning: three years, one year, nine months, seven months, five months, and three months. Simply put: the closer one's relationship to the deceased, the longer the mourning period, and the more uncomfortable the clothing and living conditions. The closer relatives would have been more affected by the deceased's passing, and also, in the case of the primary mourner, stood the most to gain from the death. The coarseness of the garments and the restrictions on living conditions were intended to be an external manifestation of grief: the extended relatives were likely less affected by grief, and their clothing represented a memorial for the deceased, as well as a demonstration of the kinship system to which they belonged.

The garments and durations could be mixed together, creating a flexible mourning system, following instructions and precedents set out in the ritual texts. The *Yi li* also offers us a description of the construction of the mourning dress, allowing us to visualize these garments:

> (a) The pieces of which the garments were made were, in the case of the coat, bevelled from the waist out, and of the skirt from the edge in. There were three pleats to each piece in order to secure this.
> (b) In the trimmed sackcloth mourning the edges of the skirt were turned up inside, and of the coat outside.
> (c) The back of the coat was carried up beyond the shoulder pieces one inch.
> (d) The lappets were four inches broad, and projected at either side of the chest-piece.
> (e) This chest-piece was six inches long and four broad.

[169] Ibid., 32.

(f) The waistband of the coat was a foot deep.
(g) The lapels were two feet five inches deep.
(h) The sleeves were attached to the body of the coat by their edges.
(i) The coat was two feet two inches from collar to waist.
(j) The cuffs were one foot two inches wide.[170]

Presumably, these measurements were intended for adult males, and no measurements are given for the dress of women and children, although it seems from the text as though they wore identical garments. While the rules described in the *Yi li* encompass mourning dress for both kin and non-kin, the non-kin mourning regulations were based on the kinship rules, showing a parallel between the kinship group and the socio-political structure.[171] While the socio-political structure varied between the pre-Han period, when the *Yi li* was largely composed, and the Han, the reverence shown to superiors and elders was fairly constant throughout. Non-kin mourning regulations generally had a lower-ranked individual mourning his superior, as in the case of the various lords for the emperor. The text does not prescribe any mourning for inferiors.

It is difficult to prove whether or not these mourning rituals were practiced in the stipulated forms during the Western Han, for we have no physical evidence of the mourning garments. There is, however, one diagram, discovered in Mawangdui Tomb 3, that lends credence to the idea that these rituals were well known and practiced during the Western Han. The diagram is referred to as either the *sangfu tu* 喪服圖, *sangzhi tu* 喪制圖, or *sangli tu* 喪禮圖, and it was found in a lacquer box in the eastern compartment of the tomb. It can be divided

[170] Ibid., 43.
[171] Lai, 55.

into three sections: at the top, there is a "red, umbrella-shaped canopy."[172] Underneath the canopy, in the middle section, there are symmetrical inscriptions on the right and left sides. They describe the system of mourning: "the short texts on the left side are self-contained; each sentence identifies a mourning period and clothing appropriate to the specified kinship category, while the text on the right only identifies the mourning period of three years."[173] Under the canopy are a series of black and red squares, arranged centrally in six rows and six columns. They are connected by black lines, representing kinship and descendants. There were no labels attached to any of these squares "so" according to Guolong Lai, "it seems that for the Han dynasty viewer of the diagram, the inscriptions to the left and right were sufficient explanation of the relationships depicted."[174] The diagram represents five degrees of mourning, and reveals a very similar mourning tradition to that described in the ritual texts, but "represents differently the degrees of mourning that people were obligated to observe for the death of a relative."[175] In the Mawangdui diagram, the mourning garments and mourning periods are treated synonymously, and there is no variation, as we see in the *Yi li*, for mourning garments being worn for varying periods of time. The Mawangdui diagram, the mourning regulations for non-kin, children, and women are not described, nor is there a differentiation between eldest sons and other sons.[176] This diagram perhaps represents a slightly

[172] Ibid., 48.
[173] Ibid., 50.
[174] Ibid., 50-51.
[175] Ibid., 51.
[176] Ibid., 58-59.

different and less elaborated kinship system, concerned only with the males of the lineage. Its burial in the tomb suggests that it must have been of importance to the tomb occupant, a relative of the Marquis of Dai, or to the mourners, and perhaps it was his hope that his descendants mourned him according to these grades.

Despite the differences between the *sangfu tu* from Mawangdui and the "Sang fu" chapter of the *Yi li*, it is apparent that this type of kinship-based mourning system was already quite common in the Western Han and it is likely that it had its roots in even earlier periods. The mourning regulations that became standardized in the ritual texts were not inventions of the classicists, but were likely "a modification of an older ritual tradition,"[177] which reached a more concrete form by the time of the compilation of these texts, and the attempt to institute an imperial ritual system in 31 BCE.

Mourning in the *Li ji*

Despite the very detailed instructions for the various types of mourning dress, nowhere in the text are any reasons given for why these rituals were performed, or why they were so elaborate. The earliest explanations for this system are offered in the *Li ji*: "The different rules for mourning rites were established in harmony with (men's) feelings." They were intended to show the

[177] Ibid., 81.

differences in social relations, and to "set forth the extremity of the grief."[178] As for why the mourning rites should continue into the third year, there are several explanations offered. First, it was argued that, while one would never fully lose the feelings of grief following the loss of a relative, there must be a limit to the amount of time spent serving the dead, and that it was necessary to return one's thoughts to the living, after a certain amount of time:

> The withering pain was not yet ended, the loving thoughts were not forgotten, but in cutting off the mourning dress in this way, was this not to show that the services to the dead had ended, and it was time to resume the work of the living?
>
> 衰痛未盡，思慕未忘，然而服以是斷之者，豈不送死有已，復生有節也哉？[179]

The cessation of the mourning period after three years was said to have been the work of the ancient kings (*gu xianwang* 古先王), who felt that three years was long enough to sufficiently express one's grief.[180] Locating the roots of this practice with the ancient sage kings was common in early Chinese texts, and by returning to the ritual practices of the ancient kings, that idealized period could be established in the current age.

The three-year period was also linked to the services rendered by parents to their son, and idea that is also seen in the *Analects*:

> Confucius said: "A child, three years after his birth, is released from his parents' bosom. Mourning a man for three years, this is the way of mourning for all under heaven.

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[178] Legge, *Li Chi*, Vol. 2, 391. Rituals, according to Xunzi, were intended in part to preserve social distinctions, and this was necessary to maintain a well-ordered society.
[179] *Li ji,* "Sannian wen," 551.
[180] Legge, 393.

> 孔子曰：「子生三年，然後免於父母之懷；夫三年之喪，天下之達喪也。」[181]

In the *Li ji*, the three-year period is also linked to the cycle of seasons that are observed in heaven and earth: one year of mourning follows one cycle of the seasons, and the three-year period (or twenty-five months) is intended to double this, to make the mourning more impressive. It was also argued that there needed to be an end to mourning, so that the living could resume their work, and that three years was a sufficient amount of time. "All things between heaven and earth begin their processes anew. The rules of mourning are intended to resemble this."[182]

As mentioned above, the primary mourner would live in a shack built to the side of the house, sleeping on the ground, and did not return to his bed until the final mourning sacrifice was offered. The explanation for this in the *Li ji* is that:

> When the grave was completed and he (the primary mourner) returned, he did not dare enter and dwell in his chamber. He lived in the mourning shack (lit. the leaning hut), grieved that his parent was outside. He slept on the grass with a mound for a pillow, grieved that his parent was in the ground.
>
> 成壙而歸，不敢入處室，居於倚廬，哀親之在外也；寢苫枕塊，哀親之在土也。[183]

This explanation shows the primary mourner attempting to mimic the suffering of the deceased, as well as the respect shown to the father's spirit. The son dared

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[181] *Li ji*, "Sannian wen," 552.
[182] Legge, 393.
[183] *Li ji*, "Wen sang," 541. He resumed sleeping in his usual room after the sacrifices marking one year, but presumably slept on the floor for the remainder of the mourning period. The text does not specify the specific sleeping arrangements.

not yet occupy the position of head of the house so soon after his father's death, and, as we will see below, he was also in a period of transition, and thus had to be ritually removed from the home in order to be aggregated into his new role.

Rules also dictated how the primary mourner was supposed to act during this period. He was not to touch his father's things, or occupy his rooms. He was not supposed to look others in the eye, and was restricted in his speech:

> When wearing the *zhancui* mourning, one acknowledges that he is being spoken to, but does not reply. When wearing the *zicui* mourning, one replies, but does not speak (of other things). When wearing the *dagong* mourning, one speaks of other things, but does not enter into a discussion. When wearing the *xiaogong* or *sima* mourning, one discusses other things, but does not do so for pleasure. This is how sorrow is manifested through speech.
>
> 斬衰，唯而不對；齊衰，對而不言；大功，言而不議；小功、緦麻，議而不及樂。此哀之發於言語者也。[184]

The deeper the mourning, the more taciturn they were to be, reflecting the level of grief they should feel during the mourning period. The text here does not provide any allowances for men's actual feelings; it only specifies how men should act according to their relationship. Restrictions were also placed on the kinds and quantities of food they were allowed to consume; for the son in mourning: "Therefore his mouth could not (bear to) taste sweets, his body could not find repose in anything pleasant" 故口不甘味，身不安美也.[185]

All of these restrictions, from the duration and clothing worn by the mourners, to the restrictions placed on their lives were, according to the *Li ji*,

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[184] *Li ji* "Jian zhuan" 閒傳, 548.
[185] *Li ji*, "Wen sang," 540.

intended to express sorrow and respect following the loss of one's parent.[186] However, this explanation does not elucidate how or why these practices came about, and, if we are to accept that both the *Yi li* and *Li ji* were top-down standardizations and explanations of earlier, popular practices, then we can only accept these explanations as a rationalization of Han period scholars who may not have known the original reasons for these rituals, and who also had political and intellectual motivations in the creation of these texts. Texts that are commonly referred to as "philosophical" were much more political than this classification leads us to believe, and rituals in Han period China were a form of politics as much as they were an expression of belief. It is here that, lacking written explanations from the period, it may be helpful to turn to other theories on ritual to understand the origins and motivations behind these rites.

Popular Practices

One of the lenses through which we can look at the early Chinese mourning rituals is that of purity and pollution. This approach, as elaborated by Mary Douglas, may help us to understand the origins of these rituals. Douglas defines pollution as "matter out of place," and it occurs when boundaries in society are crossed, where form is attacked.[187] In other words, pollution appears when there is a change in the status quo, with birth and death being the most extreme

[186] The *Li ji* mostly discusses the motivations and emotions of the primary mourner. It generally suggests that the behavior of those following lesser grades of mourning should be similar to that of the primary mourner, but decreased according to their relationship.
[187] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 2002 [1966]), 130.

examples. When society was disrupted, whatever causes the disruption was considered polluting, as were those who were involved in the disruption. Pollution is thus present during rites of passage, when families or societies reshape themselves, and especially so in the case of death, which results in a major change in the social order. In early China, not only was the corpse polluting, but the mourners were as well, by their marginal state and proximity to the deceased. The rituals associated with these rites of passage served to purify, as well as prepare the participants for their future role. A large part of the ritual served to rid society of pollution, and thereby reassert the social order. Pollution was a major concern in Chinese society, and death was considered to be one of the most polluting events. The mortuary rituals served to contain and purify the polluting corpse, whose harmful corpse-vapours could harm others.[188] The primary mourner, being closest to the deceased, absorbed the most pollution, and was therefore also considered a threat to the purity of others. Because the primary mourner was in a state of transition himself, he was also polluting, and would not re-enter society until the mourning period was over. Concepts of pollution were also linked to social status and gender: women were considered to be very polluting, especially when menstruating. Men of lower classes were more polluting than the elites, and the emperor himself was the paragon of purity, as he held the most spiritual authority as well as Heaven's mandate. As a result, one who had been polluted by death following the death of his father was not permitted to serve the emperor during the three-year mourning period, for

[188] Li, "Contagion and Its Consequences," 204-5.

fear of tainting his purity.[189] While the rituals performed served to control and contain death pollution, so that the mourner would not harm others, only the passage of time could fully rid one of death pollution, and so, only at the end of the mourning period, could one return to normal life and resume imperial service.

By looking at the mourning rituals in terms of culturally specific notions of pollution, we can begin to understand how they might have evolved. The primary mourner, who stood to gain the most at the end of the mourning period, was closest to the deceased, and therefore absorbed the most pollution. He was also in a period of transition himself, a liminal period (discussed below), and was therefore also causing a disruption in society. The primary mourner was confined to a shack beside the house to remove him and his pollution from the living space of others. Other purification rituals would have been performed in the house following the removal of the corpse, making it safe for others to live in, but the primary mourner, were he to live there, would reintroduce the pollution. The mourners were marked by their specialized dress, an outward demonstration of the fact that they were polluted, so that the unpolluted members of society could avoid them. The deceased was also in a liminal state, and therefore was a danger to himself and others. Many of the rituals therefore also served to contain the spirit of the deceased, and assist him in his transition to the afterlife. The various mourning periods were required because closer relationships were

[189] Yates, "Purity and Pollution in Early China," 490. Certain Han emperors realized how debilitating this practice could be to the government, and so provisions were put in place to allow someone whose service was essential to serve during the mourning period (such as generals during times of war).

considered more polluted and polluting by death than distant relationships, and so the time it took for the pollution to dissipate was different. A distant relation wearing only the three-month mourning dress would be far less polluting and therefore less dangerous than one wearing the three-year mourning dress for a father.

The connection between the three-year mourning period and childbirth can also be explained by concepts of pollution. Childbirth was also considered to be a very polluting event, with mother and child secluded from society for a period of time. The death and birth rituals may also be similar because they both represent very important rites of passage, and cause the biggest disturbance to the existing social order. In addition, the deceased was essentially being "reborn" as an ancestor, and the rites ensured that this transition went smoothly. Failure to correctly establish an ancestor could result in his haunting the living as a hungry ghost.

The Chinese mortuary rituals also seem to follow the "rites of passage" model as presented by Arnold van Gennep. Van Gennep describes three stages that occur in all rites of passage: separation, margin, and aggregation. [190] In the Chinese case, the funeral preparations and burial can be interpreted as the separation phase; the mourning period, the margin stage; and finally, aggregation occurs when the final sacrifices are offered and the deceased is inducted into the ranks of the ancestors and the primary mourner is established in his new role in the family. The three-year mourning period is a liminal phase for both the

[190] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago, 1960), 146.

deceased's soul as well as for the mourners. Victor Turner describes liminal beings as "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial,"[191] and this describes the Chinese situation very well. As discussed above, the primary mourner was not permitted to serve the state, all those wearing mourning dress were limited in their communications with others, and they were also excluded from performing other ceremonies, such as marriage, for fear of tainting them with their pollution.

The mortuary rituals were transformative for both the living and the deceased. One of the primary functions of the mortuary process was to properly establish the deceased's soul as an ancestor,[192] so that he would be able to watch over and assist the living and not become a ghost that could cause problems. The primary mourner was also transformed by the process: no longer the eldest

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[191] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York, 1969), 95.

[192] While a discussion of the soul is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be briefly mentioned. There is a good deal of debate surrounding the early Chinese concepts of the soul. One explanation is that there were two souls that formed a human at birth, and their separation caused death. These souls, the *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄, left the body at death, with the *hun* flying off towards the heavens and perhaps undertaking a difficult journey through the spirit realm, and the *po* remaining near the body until it descended into the earth. With this explanation, the *hun* soul was sacrificed to and ultimately established as an ancestor, while the *po* soul needed to be enticed to stay in the tomb by foods and entertainment so that it would not be tempted to wander amongst the living. For this view, see Yü Ying-shih, "O Soul, Come Back!" Other scholars have called this *hun-po* dualism into question, arguing that it may have been more of a scholastic approach towards the soul rather than a generally held belief, see Kenneth Brashier, "Han Thanatology and the Division of 'Souls,'" *Early China*, 1996. Regardless of whether or not there were dual souls, the ultimate goal of the sacrifices to the dead was the establishment of the deceased as an ancestor.

son, at the end of the mourning process he became the head of the family, and the family re-centred itself around him. The establishment of the deceased as an ancestor and the primary mourner as family head occurred at the same time: when the final sacrifices were offered at the end of the three-year period, the primary mourner was finally permitted to sleep in a bed.[193] The death pollution surrounding him had dissipated, allowing him to return to society, resume his work (if he served the state), and take over the household. The other mourners were not as restricted in their work as those wearing the highest grade of mourning, and they removed their mourning at the end of the allotted time.

Turner also argues that those in the liminal phase who are removed from society enter into a state of "communitas," wherein social distinctions are broken down, and the liminal beings generally wear a similar uniform, which serves to visibly remove them from society. These liminal beings develop strong bonds amongst each other, thus entering the state of communitas.[194] The Chinese mourning dress is a prime example of this, as the garments worn by the mourners (natural coloured sack-cloth or hemp clothes) serve to not only identify them as a group of mourners, but also to symbolically remove them from society. The colour of one's clothing was indicative of rank, and so to wear un-coloured cloth was tantamount to being socially dead. In addition, clothes were associated with one's earthly life: the first ritual performed following a death was the "soul-summoning" ritual (*fu* 復) wherein the primary mourner would take his father's

[193] Legge, vol. 2, 388.
[194] Turner, 95-96.

court robes, climb to the roof of the house, and wave the garment, while yelling for his father's soul to return. While the mourners wore different dress depending on their relationship, they were still recognizable as a group, and, especially amongst those wearing the highest degree of mourning, they would generally not associate with people outside the mourning group.

The mourning rituals must have also evolved out of an emotional bond, a feeling of loss for the deceased and mutual support amongst the survivors. The various ways in which one should act, such as not talking to others, not partaking of flavourful, nourishing foods, and symbolically accompanying a parent to the earth reflect the internal emotions that one should have felt. While many of those who mourned the passing of the emperor would not have had any real emotional bond with him, they should still have respected him as a father, and feel pain at his loss. The uncomfortable, rough cloth, and the occupation of a shack with a bed of straw, would have brought the primary mourner real, physical pain: an external manifestation of his loss. This physical suffering made public the pain that the mourners were feeling, and demonstrated the mourners' filial piety towards their deceased kin, showing regret that they have left the earth, rather than celebrating their life. The *Li ji* states that the mourning rituals evolved from and were intended to demonstrate one's emotional reaction, but it remains to be seen why the government wanted to regulate expressions of grief.

While we do not know the exact origins of the mourning rituals, it is highly unlikely that these rituals were simply invented by the authors of the ritual texts

during the Han dynasty. What is far more likely is that the texts were composed to standardize practice, and then selectively compiled by the Classicists to create an imperial ritual system. Attempts were made to enforce adherence to these rituals and the sumptuary regulations; a recently discovered statute from Tomb No. 77 at Shuihudi 睡虎地, dating to Han Wendi's reign 漢文帝 (r. 180-157 BCE), reveals that some sumptuary laws were imposed upon parts of the funerary rites, and it is possible that future discoveries will reveal the enforcement of other sumptuary regulations.[195] It is reasonable to propose that these rituals evolved out of beliefs concerning pollution, the soul(s), and the creation of ancestors, probably over a long period of time before they were recorded in texts. Why then did it become so socially important to perform these rituals according to the correct forms, and why did the government want to regulate the performance of these rituals?

While filial piety was a very important element, rituals were also fundamental to the maintenance of social distinctions. One was supposed to be buried and mourned according to his status in life, and families who provided too elaborate a burial for their kin could be criticised and even dismissed from office if their transgression was too egregious. If one exceeded the rites for their rank, he risked the failure of the rite, which could either be manifest directly in their life, or in the form of omens. For example, Confucius himself is said to have exceeded the rites owed to his parents when he buried them, and the grave mounds were washed away. Although he desired to replace the mounds, he

[195] See Peng Hao.

feared that transgressing the boundary once again would bring greater problems to him and his ancestors.[196] There were also cases of scholars attributing natural disasters to people exceeding sumptuary regulations to impress their peers.[197]

By standardizing the rituals for each rank, it is possible that the Classicists were attempting to make mortuary rituals a realm in which social power could not be negotiated. However, this goal was never realized, for rewards were often given to those who demonstrated extreme devotion in burying or mourning their parents, as we will see below. Many people still tried to outdo their neighbours by performing elaborate funerals and mourning, in order to improve their status, but this was generally looked down upon by the Classicists. Indeed, on several occasions during the pre-Han and Han periods, rulers sought to restrict the lavishness of mortuary rituals, for both economic and social reasons. Han Wendi, shortly before his death, passed an edict drastically reducing the amount of time one was permitted to mourn, and expected this new system to be followed after his death. He maintained the proportions in the system, simply substituting weeks for months, days for weeks, and so on, hoping to thereby avoid the bureaucratic standstill that took place following the death of an emperor, if all the officials were to mourn him as a father. This system, however, was not followed, and the edict was withdrawn following Wendi's death.[198] Ultimately, it was hoped that through these ritual prescriptions, men

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[196] *Li ji* "Tangong shang" 檀弓上, 49.
[197] Brashier, *Ancestral Memory*, 287. The examples Brashier gives are taken from the *Han shu*, but are commenting on earlier times.
[198] *Han shu*, 4.132, cited in Lai Guolong, "The Diagram of the Mourning System from Mawangdui," 87-88.

would know the correct rites for their rank, and would perform them according to the texts, rather than try to exceed them, or, even worse, ignore them altogether.

As we have seen, the *Yi li* provided very detailed instructions on how to correctly perform the mourning rites, including not only what one must wear, but also how they must behave during the mourning period.[199] According to Poo Mu-chou:

> It should be clear that there is an obsession with the minute details of ritual action based on social hierarchy. The preparation for the afterlife, therefore, was also a procedure for constructing or consolidating proper social relations among the living.[200]

Followed correctly, these rituals served to not only establish the deceased as an ancestor, showing him the respect he deserved according to his rank and position within the household, but they also renegotiated the social space of the living, easing their transition into their new roles in society and the family.

While the three-year mourning continued to be debated during the Han, it appears from the debates surrounding it that it was at least at the front of many intellectuals' minds, as they sought to create a more moral society. In the subjunctive world, all would follow these rites and maintain a correct and harmonious society. But what happened when the rewards for correctly following the rituals were not obtained, and when the court, which was encouraging participation in this ritual system, was riddled with corruption and

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[199] The text also provides instructions on the various rituals associated with mourning, such as sacrifices, receiving a guest, and so on.
[200] Poo, "Ritual and Ritual Texts in Early China," 298.

factional struggles? The subversion of mourning rituals will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Mourning Deviation

The above prescriptions for mourning were highly idealized, and it is safe to assume that there was a good deal of variation in their performance according to both rank and region. However, it appears that the general ritual structure was followed, and that the government made some attempts to enforce the sumptuary regulations. According to Michael Nylan:

> Of course, one can easily imagine infractions of the sumptuary regulations. But there can be no doubt that sumptuary rules existed in Han, even if scholars are not of one mind on how far sumptuary regulations prevailed at the time.[201]

While no legal statutes have been found demanding the enforcement of the correct performance of mourning rites, evidence reveals that the government did, to a certain extent, regulate mourning, mainly in terms of government leave.[202] There were numerous debates on the amount of leave a government official was entitled to, and in 116 CE the court required that senior ministers follow the three years of mourning, the first time it had done so.[203] Prior to this, and after it was rescinded in 121 CE, the average leave time given was thirty-six days,

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[201] Michael Nylan, "Constructing *Citang* in Han," in *Rethinking Recarving: Ideals, Practices and Problems of the "Wu Family Shrine" and Han China* (New Haven, CT, 2008), 201.

[202] This type of official "home leave" (*hao gui* 告歸) was not unique to the Han, dating back to perhaps the Qin state (according to the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策). Qin statutes reveal some of the regulations on this leave, and the practice continued into the Han. See A.F.P. Hulsewé, "The Ch'in Documents Discovered in Hupei in 1975," *T'oung Pao* 1978: 204-8.

[203] Loewe, "The Conduct of Government," 300. The mourning period was enforced in the hopes that it would create more moral officials in a corrupt and faction-ridden court.

although it appears as though it was up to the individual to decide whether or not he should mourn his parent for the full three years.[204]

While it is impossible to determine whether failing to correctly perform the mourning rites was a punishable offence, men still had reasons to follow them, for it was possible to be rewarded for faithful performance of these rites. The title "Filial and Incorrupt" (*xiaolian* 孝廉) could be bestowed upon one who demonstrated his filial piety, especially through mourning, and this title was important for promotion within the bureaucracy.[205] Some Han emperors rewarded those who mourned "according to the rites" with territory,[206] and a display of unfiliality could also result in censure. Indeed, in the Eastern Han, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the three-years mourning. According to Miranda Brown, in the Eastern Han discussions on mourning, "three years mourning had become an overriding consideration […] it was so important that sons ought to choose to leave office to wear mourning rather than continue to serve."[207]

Despite this incentive to follow the prescribed mourning rites, many in the Eastern Han did not follow them according to the book, choosing instead to subvert the intended purpose of the rites by wearing the deepest level of

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[204] Loewe, *The Government of the Qin and Han Empires*, 79-80.
[205] Brown, *The Politics of Mourning*, 51. This title was created during Han Wudi's reign 漢武帝 (r. 141 - 87 BCE), Loewe, *The Government of the Qin and Han Empires,* 74.
[206] Ibid., 28.
[207] Ibid., 57. This is in contrast to the Western Han, when men did not take the full "three years" leave, proving their filiality by public service rather than private mourning.

mourning, intended only for a father or a lord, for their mothers and friends. Not only did they violate ritual principles in this way, stele inscriptions from the Eastern Han detail the grief and extreme mourning of sons for their mothers, almost to the exclusion of similar eulogies for fathers. Brown, in her monograph *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (2007), argues that the political rhetoric surrounding filial piety changed dramatically during the Han, and this reflected the growing power of the local elite during the Eastern Han compared to the decline in power of the central government. Brown, however, does not consider the ritual significance of the changes in performance of mourning rites, and it is this ritual significance that will be discussed in this chapter, within the ritual and sincerity framework. I will begin with an overview of Brown's work, followed by an analysis of what the changes represent in a ritual context.

Brown takes as her sources the stele inscriptions commissioned by families and written by eulogists that discuss mourning practice; these inscriptions were new to the Eastern Han, none exist for the earlier period. In them, Brown notices that they focus on the emotions of the mourners, and that inscriptions exist for various groups of people, even children less than 8 *sui* 歲 (years), who were not to be mourned at all. The eulogies express the emotions of "grief and loss, but also frustration in their loss, an emotion that the authors of the ritual classics believed could not be expressed." [208] The Eastern Han documents and inscriptions provide substantially more accounts of men and women wearing mourning and displaying their grief than exist for the Western Han, where there

[208] Ibid., 42.

are relatively few. According to Brown, this change is representative of "the rise of a particular belief about what constituted filial obligation," one that stressed the private, personal obligations (*si* 私) over public service (*gong* 公).[209] In the Western Han, she argues, men could show their filial piety to their parents by being a good official, even if this meant not observing the full mourning period, emphasizing the public over the private.[210] The rise of private obligations over public service was itself representative of the changing power dynamics during the Eastern Han, with the rise of local elite families to the detriment of the central government. Despite, or perhaps because of, the change of emphasis in mourning, performance of the rites became increasingly important to one's status. Men were still rewarded for their piety as displayed through mourning, and their performance was subject to close public scrutiny. Mourning became a subject of gossip, and a means by which to promote or attack someone's character in the Eastern Han,[211] suggesting that by this time mourning according to the rites had become fairly ubiquitous among the learned ranks, and that they were expected to be aware of the mourning prescriptions, as well as the deviations that were becoming increasingly common.

One of the major deviations that Brown noticed in her study of Eastern Han mourning documents is that a large number of the recorded cases reveal that men were mourning their mothers for a full three years; in the material record, the

[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid., 31.
[211] Ibid., 53.

number of these cases far outweighs accounts of men mourning their fathers.[212] Brown argues that mourning a mother rather than a father (or at least commemorating her death) represented

> An alternative to the values encapsulated by slogans about "duty to lord and father" (*junfu zhi yi* 君父之義), values that asserted the primacy of the paternal, the official, and the overtly hierarchical.[213]

This was due to the perceived differences in relationships: fathers and sons were regarded as more official relationships, whereas the relationship between mothers and sons was more intimate,[214] a sentiment that is clearly expressed in the *Classic of Filial Piety*, quoted above in Chapter 2. As discussed in the previous chapter, according to the ritual classics, if one's father was still alive, the mother was to be mourned for only one year, so that the children would not neglect their duties to their living father.[215] Divorced mothers were not to be mourned at all, for they had been ritually removed from the patriline, and had lost their place on the family altar. These prescriptions maintained the patriarchal hierarchy, but surely ran contrary to men's emotions. If a son felt a closer, more intimate bond with his mother, then it must be the case that he desired to perform full mourning rites for her and express his grief, even if she had been divorced or outlived by his father.

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[212] Brown notes that we cannot assume that the men who mourned their mothers did not also mourn their fathers to the same extent. What is visible to us is only that the expressions of grief for mothers were recorded and became important to elites in the Eastern Han (78). There are no similar records documenting the ways in which women mourned.
[213] Ibid., 66.
[214] Ibid., 66.
[215] The father would also wear this for his wife. See *Yi li* "Sang fu," 479-603.

Because the mother belonged to the private sphere, and the father, the public, mourning each of them had different political implications:

> By mourning his father, a man expressed his "dutifulness to lord and father" and "conscientiousness and dutifulness." In contrast, mothers inspired in their sons feelings of the greatest intimacy. Obligations to mothers not only fell outside the bounds of "duty to lord and father," but in the minds of many Eastern Han men, such obligations could be at odds with official duty.[216]

In other words, mourning a father displayed tacit support of the patriarchal model promoted by the government, while mourning a mother emphasized one's private feelings, placing them at odds with the state and in support of local power.

The second main deviation in the records on mourning rites that Brown notices is that a large number of these funeral stelae were commissioned by men for their colleagues of equal or lesser rank, rather than for their superiors, as has long been assumed to have been the norm.[217] This practice, too, represents a subversion of the traditional patriarchal hierarchy, as following the "lord-father analogy," men were to mourn their superiors as fathers, and be mourned by their inferiors. The mourning prescriptions indicate only briefly how one was to mourn for a friend, and these prescriptions do not include the donning of mourning dress, only the offering of condolences and perhaps funeral gifts.[218]

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[216] Brown, *The Politics of Mourning*, 83.
[217] Ibid., 86-87.
[218] The chapters in the *Yi li* do not directly specify when one should send their condolences or gifts, but it does provide instructions to the mourners on how to receive those friends who do come to pay their condolences. See *Yi li* "Shi sang li" 士喪禮, 605-654.

Following the "Five Confucian Relationships"[219] one was only supposed to show their deference and loyalty upwards in the four hierarchical relationships, and receive equal treatment from the fifth, that of friend-friend. Showing excessive mourning and respect that could not be repaid to a man of equal status was an oddity, but showing this respect for an inferior was an inversion of the traditional bonds between men, and, as such, could be seen as an attack against the patriarchal system. Brown argues that this, too, represents the rise of local power:

> While hierarchical and paternalistic rhetoric did indeed inform political associations among the elite, this rhetoric competed with an alternative rhetoric that emphasized the ostensibly horizontal ties between friends and colleagues.[220]

Stressing the bonds between members of a local community, rather than between those of a more restrictive hierarchy, reveals a desire to strengthen a communal group, which itself is an expression of sincerity.

Before discussing these deviations in terms of their ritual significance, it is important to note that not all members of the Eastern Han elite disregarded the mourning prescriptions. A descendent of Xunzi, Xun Shuang 荀爽 (128-190 CE) argued, like his forebear, that following the three years mourning was essential to the maintenance of order. Because the rituals were thought to be ancient patterns aligned with the cosmos, not following the prescriptions could bring about the collapse of the dynasty. Xun Shuang was vocal in his petitions

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[219] As enumerated by Mengzi: Father-Son, Lord-Subject, Husband-Wife, Elder Brother-Younger Brother, and Friend-Friend.
[220] Brown, *The Politics of Mourning*, 86.

to the court opposing policies that did not permit officials from taking leave for the full three years.[221] Like Xunzi, he believed that ritual was important to society, and perhaps his words stemmed from the fear that the movement towards sincerity in mourning rituals was indeed subverting the traditional patriarchal system, and that such sincere orientations might ultimately bring about the fall of the Han.

Brown has convincingly shown how this shift in mourning practice was used to subvert central power and represented the rise of local authority, but it remains to be seen how these mourning practices represented the changing belief landscape of the Eastern Han. The Classicist ritual system was not the only belief system that existed in the Han; indeed there were many competing ideas about nature, the cosmos, the spirits, and the afterlife. This was especially so in the case of death and the afterlife, according to Kenneth Brashier, "the experience of death itself particularly evokes numerous inconsistencies in understanding because, by definition, no one ever lives to tell about it."[222] These apparently conflicting views on the afterlife were able to co-exist and borrow from each other. While there was no unified concept of the afterlife, various realms were believed to have existed, and it was to these that the soul might travel after death. This travel, however, did not prevent it from being established as an ancestor. Beliefs in the existence of realms such as the Blessed Isles of the East, the domain of the Queen Mother of the West, or the Yellow Springs were all current during the Han, and burials often included the symbolism of each, in

[221] Ibid., 57-59.
[222] Brashier, *Ancestral Memory*, 187.

order to properly equip the deceased for all possible outcomes.[223] These realms, as they became more clearly defined, changed the needs of the ancestor, and thus the relationship between the living and the dead. While a discussion of the various conceptions of the afterlife is well beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that, as these ideas developed, the ancestors were thought to become increasingly responsive to and dependant on their living descendants, and so the way the living behaved towards the dead necessarily had to evolve.[224]

The relationship between the living and the dead in ancient China is often seen as a reciprocal one: I give in order that you will give. The sacrifices offered to the ancestors were intended to bring about a reciprocal gift. This form of ancestral sacrifice dates back to the Shang (商 ca. 1600 – 1045 BCE), as revealed in the oracle bone inscriptions. Despite the changing nature of beliefs in the periods between the Shang and Han, the idea that ancestors could be bartered with remained central to ancestral worship. The spirits required some form of nurturing and protection from the living, and, according to Brashier:

> The living prolonged the longevity of their ancestors, and in turn, the ancestors assured that the same family continued to spread into the future. By bequeathing lineage longevity, the ancestors would be securing their own survival, assuring remembrance by future generations. Beneath the wine, millet and pigs, this sacrificial exchange was a reciprocal gift of time.[225]

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[223] For a discussion of these realms, see Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death*, 25-37.

[224] See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety: Daoism and the Birth of Rebirth in China* (Berkeley, CA, 2007), 4-5. While the ancestors during the Eastern Han were not as fully dependent on the living as they were during the period of division, they were seen to respond to the actions of the living, and required worship.

[225] Brashier, *Ancestral Memory*, 190.

Over time, however, perhaps because of a lack of response from the ancestors to particular problems, an increase in natural disasters, or simply from the over-repetition of the rites, many began to question whether or not the relationship was as purely reciprocal, or if it required something more on the part of the living.[226] Brashier identifies a number of thinkers who began to argue that one must be sincere in order to communicate with the dead, and that "those who argued for sincerity in sacrifices explicitly separated themselves from the simple reciprocal approach."[227] The mourners of the Eastern Han who chose to mourn according to their inner, sincere feelings rather than according to the mourning prescriptions were doing so because they believed that it simply was not enough to follow the ancient texts; that it was necessary to be sincere in action in order to give the dead the commemoration they deserved.

Brashier has observed that the stelae inscriptions that were commissioned during the Eastern Han were erected because the mourners felt that the three-year mourning period was not enough,[228] that their dead deserved more, and that their inner nature would not allow them to abandon mourning without leaving a more permanent remembrance. The same can be said for those who wore the heaviest grade of mourning for people other than their father or lord. As we have seen from the *Yi li*, the mourning rites and grades of mourning were intended to reinforce the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of society by

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[226] While the ritual texts are largely silent on the subject of the spirits, they maintain that performing the rituals according to the stipulated forms was required to properly serve them.
[227] Ibid., 185-87. Brashier emphasizes, however, that this sincere orientation coexisted with other orientations towards ancestral communication.
[228] Ibid., 163.

clearly defining who was at the top of the pyramid through the level of mourning they would receive after death. The successors, too, were reminded of this structure, as the primary mourner and his wife had more responsibilities than the other mourners, even if all the sons wore the heaviest grade of mourning. The *zhancui* dress was only to be worn for one's parent or superior, and it was only worn for three years under specific circumstances. The mourning of mothers for three years was not prescribed by the *Yi li* unless the father had already passed away and been mourned (and even then the mourners wore only the second grade of mourning dress), so it was highly irregular (according to the prescriptions) to mourn a mother for an extended period if the father was still alive, and to wear the *zhancui* mourning for her. Additionally, it could be seen as an insult to the father, who, being the head of the household, should have been the son(s)' top priority. Wearing the *zhancui* dress for one outside of the text's prescriptions questioned the validity of the hierarchy in both family and state and reveals changing perceptions on the needs of the spirits.

The choice of who to mourn for the extended period is also indicative of changing beliefs. As Brown has argued, mourning of mothers and friends was an act of subversion, for it directly countered the "lord and father" analogy, which sought to maintain the male-dominated hierarchy even in the spiritual realm. In the worship of ancestors, as time progressed, earlier ancestors would be "forgotten" after several generations, and they would no longer receive annual sacrifices, in a process that Brashier has dubbed "structured amnesia."[229] Under

[229] Ibid., 65-66 and 111-14.

this system, only the lineage founder (*gaozu* 高祖) would have a permanent place in the ancestral shrine, with his descendants all ultimately fading away: as an ancestral spirit grew older, it lost its potency and ability to affect the living. During the Han, a number of emperors were granted permanent status based on their accomplishments in expanding the territory of the empire, but eventually it became commonplace to extend permanent status to even the most ineffectual of Han emperors.[230] Permanent status for the ancestors was, however, only limited to the Sons of Heaven, and even then there were many who argued that the permanent sacrifices should be terminated for all but the most influential of former emperors. Men who erected a commemorative stele for their fathers, mothers, or friends, were essentially granting them permanent status; while their tablets may not have remained in perpetuity on the ancestral shrine, the memory of their spirits was preserved for millennia, and, according to Brashier, memory was essential for the ancestors' survival.[231] As Brown's research reveals, many more commemorative stelae have been discovered for Eastern Han mothers than for fathers, revealing that the mourners wanted to bestow the gift of memory and time upon their mothers.[232]

While the worship of female ancestors was nothing new to the Eastern Han, the extended mourning of mothers seems to have come from different

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[230] See Ibid., 102-183, for a detailed discussion on the debates surrounding permanent ancestors and the attempts to revoke permanent status.
[231] Ibid., 190.
[232] The difference in numbers of stelae preserved for mothers rather than fathers could be the result of later editors of literary compendia choosing to include more inscriptions for women than men. This is not to be seen as evidence that mothers were mourned to the exclusion of fathers, and it is possible that there were other types of commemoration for fathers that are now lost to us.

motivations and with different goals than in earlier periods. Female ancestors were an important part of the Shang pantheon, and we can see them being appealed to in a number of the oracle bone inscriptions. However, these were royal mothers, and they were being appealed to by the royalty who had specific requests, usually related to fertility. In the Eastern Han, the mourning of mothers was less of a public affair, and it seems the men wanted to commemorate their mothers for the good works they had done during their lives. We see this, too, in the stelae dedicated to officials by their friends: in the case of Chancellor Jing 景 (stele engraved 143 CE), a stele records a "list of eighty-seven people who claim to have observed some form of three-year mourning" for him.[233] These people mourned him not because he was their kin, but because they respected what he had done in his life, and the impact he had had on the mourners' lives. This is a very personal, sincere orientation towards the mourning rites, one that we do not find expressed in the ritual texts.[234] While the mourners still followed many of the prescriptions found in the texts, they exceeded them, and modified them in a way to fit their own needs, in a way that undermined the principles of the system.

While this shift in orientation initially appears to be a small one, it represents a significant change in how people perceived ritual and belief. As Brown has argued, these changes in mourning practices were indicative of a growing dissatisfaction with the political and social status quo, and also revealed

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[233] Ibid., 162.

[234] It is unknown whether or not these eighty-seven people actually did don mourning dress for the full period, but it is important to note that they wanted to commemorate Chancellor Jing in a way that was outside of the ritual prescriptions.

the rise of local authority against the central government. These dissatisfactions, as well as the natural disasters that occurred during the Eastern Han (and the government's failure to adequately deal with them), were tied together with the changing beliefs in the role of ritual. As Seligman, et. al. have argued, trends towards sincerity often emerge at a time when the ritual system is vulnerable to attack,[235] for it was at this time that people began to call into question whether or not the prescribed rites that they performed were actually efficacious.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, the mourning rites prescribed in the *Yi li* likely evolved out of popular, non-elite traditions, but they were adopted by the Classicists, who compiled and standardized them to fit with their own intellectual model of society and government. The prescriptions of the *Yi li* and the theories presented in the *Li ji* and the *Xunzi* all sought to maintain order in society, or to correctly re-centre it after the death of one of its members. Very little is said in these texts about beliefs, and while the mourners were expected to be sincere in action (as demonstrated by the restrictions placed upon them), sincerity was not as important as performing the rites correctly, and, indeed, the texts attempted to curb overzealous displays of grief.[236] The specificity of the *Yi li* was perhaps a contributing factor to the deviations from it: had the prescriptions been less stringent and allowed for a more flexible mourning system that took into account emotions as well as the ideal social structure, it

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[235] See Seligman, et. al., 131-37.

[236] As seen, for example, by the termination of the mourning period, even if one is not fully ready to resume his life, or in the conditions placed upon the food restrictions for the primary mourner: one was not supposed to deprive himself to such an extent that it caused weakness or illness. This idea is presented throughout the *Li ji* "Tangong xia" 檀弓下 chapter, 81-109.

might have been more difficult to rebel against it. However, as we have seen, many in the Eastern Han felt that the mourning prescriptions were not enough on their own, and they therefore adapted the system to fit their own needs, undermining the structure the texts sought to maintain.

The changes in mourning practice in the Eastern Han reveal that many were no longer willing to participate in the "subjunctive world" that the ritual system sought to create in order to maintain social order. The rejection of the simple *do ut des* relationship, which seemed to not take into consideration men's feelings or virtue, between the living and the dead shows us that many believed that the rites were not effective. In their current, ossified state, they had lost meaning, or sincerity. While the deviations from the mourning prescriptions were by no means as drastic a sincere movement as the millenarian movements that emerged towards the end of the Eastern Han, they were indicative of a subtle, but fundamental, shift in the way people saw ritual and belief.

Conclusion

The ritual landscape of early imperial China was complex and contained many internal contradictions. Individual belief often conflicted with the prescribed ritual system, and the Classics-based ritual system went through several reversals during the Han, depending on the needs of those who held the power. As we have seen, however, throughout much of the late Western and Eastern Han periods, attempts were made to encourage conformity to the ritual system, beginning with the ritual reform of 31 BCE, and various rewards were offered to those who correctly performed the rites, in the hopes that men would become more moral and the hierarchy would remain harmonious.

The ritual system, based on purportedly ancient texts, that was promoted by the Classicists at court, ostensibly hearkened back to the "golden age" of the Zhou dynasty, when men supposedly lived their lives according to ritual principles. While these rites described by the texts were unlikely to have been exactly the same as those performed during the Zhou, they were declared to be so by the Classicists, for the past had long had great authority in China. These rituals were not the creation of the Classicists; they were more likely based on rituals that had long existed in China that had emerged from folk beliefs regarding the danger of funerary and other transitional stages. It is likely that many of these prescriptions were modified to fit in with the ideological agenda of those editing the texts, as the texts seem to emphasize filial piety and the hierarchy within the family and state to a great extent, and deal little with discussions of the supernatural. The texts that contain theories on ritual, such as

the *Xunzi*, and the explanations offered in the *Li ji*, offer an interpretation as to why these rites emerged in such precise forms in order to bring them into compliance with the ideology of filial piety and what the Classicists saw as the ideal of good governance.

This ritual system sought to regulate society and re-establish order during times of disruption. According to the *Shi ji* "The *Rites* regulates human relations, and so is excellent in matters of conduct:"[237] the texts' concern with the minutiae of human behaviour is evidence that the authors and promoters of this system believed that, through following the prescriptions, order and peace would be achieved, with everyone knowing their place and how to act with their superiors and inferiors. The rites not only served to regulate human relations, but also to maintain balance among the triad of Heaven, Earth, and Man, and so the spirits, too, were an integral part of the ritual system.

While the spirits seem to be conspicuous only by their relative absence from the ritual texts, they were not unimportant. Their absence can perhaps be explained by the vast number of competing ideas surrounding the afterlife, including the quest for immortality. As mentioned above, these competing beliefs were able to co-exist to a certain extent during the Han, perhaps because no one knew what really lay the other side of death, and a convincing enough interpretation had not yet become popular in China. However, these belief systems did not require the termination of the ancestral sacrifices and mourning rites prescribed by the ritual texts, for, regardless of where the soul travelled or

[237] Burton Watson, trans. *Records of the Grand Historian, Han Dynasty*, vol. 2 (Hong Kong, 1993 [1961]), 51.

what happened to it after death, it was still worshipped as an ancestor, and, especially during the first few years of its being a spirit, it required the support of the living. Over the centuries beliefs changed and began to develop further, until ultimately, the dead were completely reliant upon the living, and unable to bring them anything but misery. This was a substantial change from earlier periods where an ancestor could become an angry ghost only if it had not been properly looked after, while a satisfied ancestor could provide the living with protection and longevity. While this change was not complete until after the fall of the Han, the trend towards sincerity in mortuary rituals is evidence that this belief had begun to enter into the minds of the educated classes. The introduction of Buddhism as well as the increasingly influential Daoist cults also likely influenced these changing beliefs, especially in the turmoil following the end of the Han.

The ritual system based on the Classics failed to account for these changing beliefs towards the ancestors, nor did it account for variations in men's feelings. The prescriptions presented the most cut-and-dry, ideal modes of conduct for what the authors *believed* men should feel and believe, and while the system could be flexible in some respects, in regards to who was to be the most revered member of the family, it was inflexible. The closing of the corpus may have been one of the factors contributing to the reactions against the system, for without flexibility, the rites began to lose their meaning, and, if the mourning rites did not correspond with men's feelings, then they were unlikely to satisfy the mourners. We can see from the detail in the instructions of the *Yi li* that there

had once been a desire to perform the rites in accordance with the ritual principles, and that there was a need for clarification, for perhaps not all men knew exactly how to perform all of the rites and ceremonies correctly.

Ultimately, however, while still maintaining the importance of the mourning rites, the forms stipulated by the *Yi li* were manipulated to become more in accord with men's feelings and beliefs about the life after death. This sincere orientation came about at a time when there was widespread dissatisfaction with the central government, corruption, factions, and the rise of local power. It may be asked whether or not this shift in orientation would have occurred if the central government had remained stable and strong, and if the ritual system had served the needs of the people. While it is impossible to answer this question, it may be reasonable to consider that while beliefs towards the ancestors and the afterworld would have continued to evolve (as they have done throughout Chinese history), especially with the introduction of Buddhism, they would likely have evolved in such a way that integrated the overtly hierarchical ritual system, if the members of society agreed that those rites were adequately nurturing the spirits.

While the sincere shift in mourning rituals was by no means as extreme as other sincere movements that emerged towards the end of the Eastern Han, it does represent a shift in the belief. In choosing to reject the rigid forms of the mourning system, Eastern Han men were emphasizing their individual beliefs, as well as honouring those who they felt had made a substantial contribution to their life or society, those such as their mothers or extraordinary colleagues.

This shift towards a sincere orientation reveals a changing belief system that threatened the ritual system of the central government; that this sincere orientation spread to influence the mourning rites that were an integral part of the Classicist ritual program shows how pervasive this idea was, even if the modifications to the mourning rituals did not themselves have any influence in the downfall of the empire.

The ritual system did not adapt to meet these changing beliefs, and during the period of division, the idea of a united empire that was ruled by a government that followed ritual principles was never abandoned.[238] The texts that were the foundation of the reformed imperial ritual system remained important through later dynasties, and while interpretations may have changed, the mortuary rites followed a similar form from the time of the Han through to the end of the imperial period.[239] Indeed for the Song, "the Han came to represent what the Western Zhou meant to the Han: nothing less than an age of heroes."[240] During the Song, filial piety was emphasized by the government, and the mortuary rituals were a means of reinforcing filial piety, especially in the case of imperial death, where it was important in ensuring a smooth succession.[241] While the conflict between the ritual system and sincere beliefs was never fully resolved, they managed to co-exist in later periods, each

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[238] Ibid., 357.
[239] For example, Evelyn S. Rawski finds that the imperial funerals during the Qing dynasties maintained characteristics of ancient Chinese funerary rituals, as well as an emphasis on filial piety in order to facilitate succession. See Rawski, " The Imperial Way of Death: Ming and Ch'ing Emperors and Death Ritual," in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Berkeley, CA, 1988).
[240] Brown, *The Politics of Mourning*, 129.
[241] Rawski, "The Imperial Way of Death," 229.

allowing for the possibility that one could believe in a different system and yet still honour the ancestors in the traditional way.

The neo-Confucian revival of ritual in the Song, promoted by Zhu Xi among others, was largely based on the rites laid out in the *Yi li* and *Li ji* in an attempt to rid the state of objectionable practices that were influenced by other traditions.[242] Zhu Xi intended his *Family Rituals* to be a more accessible manual than the *Yi li*, and he recognized the need to provide guides and education in ritual principles for all.[243] The standardization of ritual that was present in late imperial China was largely the result of the manuals written during the Song, based on the Han dynasty texts.[244] Indeed, Zhu Xi's chapter on funerary rites is remarkably similar to that of the *Yi li*, although with some changes to make them easier to understand and more relevant to the Song practitioners.[245] The efforts of the Han period Classicists to standardize and disseminate the rites to all the people may not have been realized during their lifetimes, nor even during their dynasty, but they laid the foundations for future Chinese ritual practice.

While the changes in mourning rites during the Eastern Han reflected changing ideas towards filial piety, the rise of local powers, and the importance of private obligation over public duty, they cannot be explained or evaluated solely on these terms. The mourning rites, while important in the re-organization

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[242] Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals: A Twelfth-Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites* (Princeton, NJ, 1991), xx-xxi. The extent to which Zhu Xi's reforms were prevalent in the Song is beyond the scope of this paper.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid., xxix.
[245] See ibid., 65-152 for a translation of Zhu Xi's chapter of funerary rites.

of family and society following a death were not exclusively for the living, and any changes in the performance of the rites for the dead necessarily indicate a changing belief in the spirits, the afterworld, and the role of ritual in people's lives.

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