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Bi yong 辟雍

(Jade-ring moat)

The *bi yong* was considered in the Han period to be a western Zhou ritual building established by the Son of Heaven (the Zhou king) . It has been likened to the **Ming tang**. The first archaeological evidence of the *bi yong* dates from **Wang Mang** 's reign (9–23 CE) . It was modelled on the *ya* - (冢) shaped tombs of Shang royalty and comprised a four-square room on a round raised platform in a square courtyard, surrounded in turn by a circular moat. Wang Mang performed rituals in each season according to **Wu xing** (Five Phases) theories of correlative cosmology. In effect, the *bi yong* ritual signals the full subjection to a moralised cosmic authority of emperorship in the Han.

Reference:

. **Wang Aihe, 2000:** 169–71.

Feng shan 封禪

(Royal sacrifices to Heaven and Earth)

These sacrifices to Heaven (**tian**) and Earth (**di**) were usually performed on **Tai shan** (Mount Tai), and only by the emperor. They were also some of the most textually fetishised imperial rites (**li**), having no basis in the Classics, but beloved by the Han historian **Sima Qian**, and classical commentators from **Zheng Xuan** to **Kong Yingda**, all of whom agreed on their archaism and importance. Modern scholars, however, think they date from the First Emperor of the Qin (r. 220–210 BCE). They were performed by only six other rulers as well: **Han Wudi** (r. 141–87 BCE), Han Guang Wudi (r. 25–57), Tang Gaozong (r. 649–683), the Empress Wu Zhao 武照 (r. 684–705), Tang Xuanzong (r. 712–756), and Song Renzong (r. 1022–1063).

The rites were an early amalgam of seeking immortality for the imperial person with announcing to Heaven and Earth the success of his/her reign. They included the sacrifice of animals, the preparation of special foods and the pouring of alcoholic libations, along with chanting and the offering of specially produced jade tablets. (For the Feng shan rites in the Han, see **Confucianism and religious cults of state in Han times**.) It was precisely these details that most exercised the ritual cognoscente of the Tang (618–907) when charged with the revival of rites that had not been performed since around the first century CE. Though monarchs during intervening years performed sacrifices at the other sacred peaks, no one attempted the **Feng** and **Shan** rituals until the Tang.

Under Tang Taizong (r. 627–649), officials clamoured for the sacrifice and organised themselves, with his permission, for research into the proper protocols. There was opposition only from the ritual minimalist **Wei Zheng**. The ceremonial protocols were eventually appended to the *Zhenguan li* 貞觀禮 where it was noted that, since the *Feng* and *Shan* were absent from the Classics and each dynasty did it their own way, Emperor Taizong should essentially please himself as to how to carry them out.

Taizong never did so but his son Gaozong did finally orchestrate a yearlong journey to Tai shan and performance in 665–666. Perhaps most notable about Gaozong's 'revival' was the participation of his wife, the Empress Wu,

who made the secondary offering at the Shan altar, dedicated to the yin/feminine earth spirits. Wu brilliantly used the textual disarray of the historical record to insert female participation at the highest levels of ritual for the first time in Chinese history. She in fact performed the *Feng* and *Shan* herself at Songshan (Mount Song), the central of the **Wu yue** (the Five Peaks), in 696.

Wechsler, emphasising imperial ritual as a tool of legitimation during the Tang, notes that the audience for the sacrifices were the 'opinion makers' of the day, and that, like other rituals of the dynasty, these fit his identified trend toward 'more openness, greater inclusivity of participants and the seeking of ends more public and political than personal and private' (Wechsler, 1985: 194).

The Tang records of *Feng* and *Shan* present to an historian of state ceremonial the first glimpse of the organised and sustained effort of the *imperium* to 'invent tradition' for its present from its own past, and despite trends toward more 'rational' forms of rule, one must not discount the profound importance of the emperor's presence at the heart of such activities.

References:

0. **Chavannes, 1910**;
0. **Qin Huitian, 1761**: 49.1a–b;
0. **Wechsler, 1985**.

Ji Tian 祭天

(Sacrifice to Heaven)

The Sacrifice to Heaven, carried out at a Round Mound (*yuan qiu* 圓丘) outside the southern wall of the king's city at the winter solstice, was often

associated with a Sacrifice to Earth (*ji di* 祭地) performed on a Square Mound (*fang qiu* 方丘) to the North of the city at the summer solstice. It was thus part of the 'suburban sacrifices' (*jiào sì* 郊祀), and the prerogative of the king according to the **Zhou li** (*Rites of Zhou*), and then of emperors after Qin Shi Huangdi (r. 221–210 BCE) – although not elevated to an importance equal to that of ancestral sacrifices until well into the Former Han (206 BCE–8 CE), under the reign of Han Chengdi (r. 33–6 BCE). By the time of the Tang (618–906), The sacrifice to Heaven was classified within the foremost of the three categories of sacrifice: the Great or *Da*, the Middling, or *Zhong* and the Lesser, or *Xiao*. Each dynasty thereafter produced some form of ritual handbook for imperial usage for this and all other sacrifices, so that the textual record concerning the Sacrifice to Heaven is rich and dense.

By the eighteenth century, all levels of sacrifice shared an identical ceremonial order. They began with as many as five days of preparation (in the case of *Ji Tian*) during which participants were secluded, animals killed and things placed in prescribed fashion upon altars, while people's places were marked. On the day of the ceremony, the emperor moved in procession toward the altar and himself offered each of the Three Oblations (*san xian* 三獻) of jade, silk and cups of liquor. Music and dance accompanied his movements, interspersed with the recitation of hymns. The foods thus sacrificed were first 'inspired' by the appropriate spirits, and then parcelled out among participants according to a strict hierarchy that such eating, indeed, helped to create. Differences in the importance of a sacrifice were signalled by the types and amounts of foods, music, dances etc.

The Sacrifice to Heaven always seems to have preoccupied ritual theorists as a universalising complement to the more personalised sacrifices to imperial ancestors (see **Ji Zu**). Wechsler notes that legitimacy for Tang emperors depended much less upon bloodlines than in the Han; hence, the growth in importance of this more 'public' rite of the assumption of power (Wechsler, p. 108). Its power lay in being 'an imperial monopoly linking the emperor to an "ancestor" who was also a universal deity'. (Wechsler, 1985: 109), literalising the notion of the emperor as 'Son of Heaven' (**Tian zi**).

In fact, the rituals of the Sacrifice to Heaven provided a serious arena for working through an ongoing paradox of imperial authority: should it be invested in filial sons of blood kinship or in sages who inherit the mantle of authority by virtue of their literate virtue? Authority was thus created and invested through a delicate dialectic of body and brush (Zito, 1997). Two areas are of note when trying to understand the web of meaning that gave form and effect to the politics of such ritualisation: first, the amount and style of research that went into producing the handbooks that sought to recover tradition and recover it in terms of present-day concerns – which we might think of as sages trying to control sons. And, as a counter-measure, the constant pressure of the monarchy to collapse their own ancestral veneration and the Sacrifice to Heaven – which we might construe as the sons outflanking the texts of the sages through insistence upon actual exigencies of performance to the aggrandisement of their own reign.

Not surprisingly, the relationship between Ancestral Sacrifice and Sacrifice to Heaven was a constant source of tension for ritual-ists, who argued over their modes of performance in every major dynasty. They argued over, firstly, should Heaven and Earth be jointly worshipped in one ceremony, or separately; secondly, should this worship take place on open altars or in a roofed temple, and thirdly, how many, and which, imperial ancestors should appear beside Heaven's spirit tablet as associative deities. In other words, how literally was the emperor's title 'Son of Heaven' to be taken?

Worshipping Heaven in a closed hall was thought by some to be too much of a conflation of the **gong**, communal, with the **si** or *jia* 家, familial. The first Ming emperor (r. 1368–1398) succeeded in building a temple for the joint sacrifice of Heaven and Earth only in the face of bitter opposition from his *imperium*.

The most famous case of choice of imperial ancestors as cause of dissension was the Great Ritual Controversy (*Dali yi* 大禮議) of the Ming (1368–1644). Ming Shizong or the Jiajing emperor (r. 1521–1567) wished to honour his natal parents, while most ritualists urged him to adopt into the main branch of the family, honor the father of the former emperor as his own, and treat his bio-father as an uncle (Fisher, 1990). Shizong was an agnatic descendant who did not wish to relinquish his own filial obligations. In effect, he wanted to have two fathers, to conflate his choice as heir by

virtue of his suitability with a simple inheritance dictated by kinship necessity. This canny move allowed the emperor to overload his own role and collapse within himself sageliness and sonship, and all as he performed his own version of the Sacrifice to Heaven.

One might measure the closeness with which an emperor managed his realm by how seriously he took his ritual responsibilities. The great emperors of the mid-Qing (Kangxi, r. 1661–1722, his son Yongzheng, r. 1723–36 and Qianlong, his grandson, r. 1746–95), the last dynasty to rule China, took those responsibilities very seriously indeed. They either performed the sacrifices themselves or appointed members of the imperial clan to carry them out for them. The importance and centrality that this sacrifice held as key for legitimating the Chinese monarchy can be seen finally in the attempt in 1914 by Yuan Shikai 袁士凱 (1859–1916), the first president of the Republic, to revive the Sacrifice. He was unsuccessful for by then the social and cultural practices mobilised and reinforced by the ritual of Sacrifice to Heaven had themselves changed too much.

References:

- 0. **Bouillard, 1923:** 34 (Jan–Mar): 53–67;
- 0. ***Da Qing huidian (Assembled Canon of the Qing), 1899;***
- 0. ***Da Qing tongli (Comprehensive Rites of the Qing), 1756;***
- 0. **Fisher, 1990;**
- 0. **Wechsler, 1985:** 107–22;
- 0. **Zito, 1997.**

Tai shan

(Mount Tai) 泰山

This highest peak in present-day central Shandong province in eastern

China rises 4,992 feet (1,522m) above sea-level. During the Han times both *fang shi* wizards and early Confucian scholars designated it as a sacred peak and competed with each other to influence the throne. Mount Tai, known as 'The First Peak' or 'East Peak' among the **Wu yue** (the Five Peaks), was linked to the absolute monarch, also known in his imperial ritual role as 'The One Man'. As it became the site of the famous and mysterious **feng shan** sacrifices to Heaven (**tian**) and Earth (**di**), 'Going to Mount Tai' came to signify gaining possession of the empire. As metaphor, 'Tai shan' signifies something huge, valuable, stable and solid.

References:

0. **Chavannes, 1910;**
Wechsler, 1985.

Wu yue 五岳

(The Five Peaks)

The Five Peaks or five sacred mountains, included the eastern **Tai shan** in Shandong; the southern, Hengshan in Hunan; the western Huashan in Shanxi; the northern Hengshan in Hebei, and the central peak of Songshan in Henan. In Han correlative cosmology of **Wu xing** (Five Phases), earthly topography linked to heavenly virtues, and mountains were thought to stabilise the surrounding landscape as a good monarch would do the social world. They also connected Earth (**di**) to Heaven (**tian**), providing a gathering place for the rain-clouds so necessary to good harvests and prosperity in an agricultural civilisation. Buddhist and Daoist temples dot each of these ranges, testifying that they shared a respect for mountains with the state Confucian tradition.

Reference:

- . **Chavannes, 1910.**

