**ritual/礼(Lǐ)**

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"Rite" is the core concept of Chinese culture. In Chinese history, except the Qin dynasty and the Han Dynasty, almost all dynasties had made ceremonies (rites). Hence, ancient China was known as the "state of ceremonies". Nonetheless, the understanding of the concept of "rites" is very complicated since the concept of "ceremonies" has multiple characteristics.

It is generally accepted that the historical origin of "The Rites" is the primitive religious ceremony. This understanding has been confirmed in ancient Chinese literature. In the *Book of Rites*, there is an article called *History of Rites*, claiming that the beginning of ceremony is food: "Originally, the rites began with eating and drinking. Ancient people at that time had not invented pottery. They washed millet and teared pork, then baked them on the hot stone. Besides, they excavated the ground in the form of deep water hole, and scooped the water from it with two hands as to drink wine. They also made an earthen drum with clay to beat as reverence to the spirits and ghosts." This was the original "rite". In essence, rite is the activity to serve gods and obtain blessings.

However, the connotation of rites has been expanding with the development of history. In the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods of China, "Rite" had become a core concept, which can be understood from several aspects.

First of all, "Rite" means " the general rules conforming to the nature". Rites played the role of rule in its broadest sense. Everything has its own internalized rules, which were represented by "Rite". In the heaven, there is cycle of four seasons and and on the earth there is high and low terrain. These rules are all manifestations of "rite". As we listen to music, music moves people as its tunes are in accordance with the rhythm of people's hearts.

In Chinese civilization, "rite" as the general norm, is the difference between human and beast. In an article called *Elements of Rites* in the *Book of Rites*, it says,"A parrot can learn to speak, but it is still a bird. A chimpanzee can learn to speak, but it is still a beast. Now if a man is without good behaviour, though he can speak, does he have not a beast’s mind? Birds and beasts are without the rites, so the father ad son may have a common wife. When she sages came to the world and worked out the rule of rite, they educated people by using it and made people know the difference between beasts and themselves." In this sense, the relationship between people is not biological, but ethical. "Rite" is the core content to ensure ethical. For this reason, Chinese people tend to take the distinction between people and birds as an example to evaluate the breakthrough of basic moral bottom line. Chinese idioms "be worse than a beast", and "Even a vicious tiger will not eat its cubs" and so on can prove it.

From an anthropological perspective, modern people may take it for granted that primitive religious rituals can all be understood as "rites". It can’t be denied that when religious rituals are performed, there are specific rituals to express people’s devotion to gods and ghosts and people can feel the devotion. Nonetheless, Chinese "rites" are not merely religious rites, but also those rites being in line with the nature. For instance, the emperor’s worship of heaven and earth with devotion is viewed as "rite"; however, wizards and sorcerers casting spells before the altar is not.

Secondly, "rite" is a series of specific ritual norms, whose mainly function is to settle human’s emotions and feelings. Among them, the first category is the ritual performed at some important moments in the course of one's life. In ancient Chinese classics, *The Book of Rites* recorded the coronation ceremony, wedding, funeral, worship, drinking ceremony and other specific rituals, and also included the ways of combining people on different occasions. Throughout one's life, being an adult, getting married, the death of family members, all mean a new stage of life. At these moments, people need specific rituals to express and settle their feelings and emotions. Through the ceremony of coronation, marriage, funeral, memorial, so that the emotions can be expressed and settled.

The second category is the confirmation of human relations. In Chinese civilization, human relations are the most important way to combine people. In ancient China, there were five cardinal relationships between father and son, husband and wife, brothers, ruler and subject, and between friends. Among them, relationships between father and son, husband and wife, and brothers are family relationships, while relationships between ruler and subject and between friends are political and social relationships beyond the family. Among the five cardinal relationships, relationships between father and son, ruler and subject in terms of establishing a family and country. These cardinal relationships are tied with morality. The father's morality is "kindness" and the son's morality is "filial piety". If the father is kind and the son is filial, the family will be well-organized. The king's morality is "righteousness", the minister's morality is "loyalty", the king's loyalty, and running a country and bringing peace to the whole nation. Whether it is father and son, emperor and minister, husband and wife, brother or friend, the establishment of these human relations mainly depends on "rites".

From the point of view of "rites", morality is not only the impulse and consideration of human heart, but also should be carried out in specific rituals. Rituals that embody morality are called "rite". According to *Elements of Rites* in the *Book of Rites*, morality can only be realized in rites, and all relations can only be established in the norms of rites. "Morality, benevolence and righteousness cannot be performed without the rites. The instruction of the people to put customs in order cannot be perfect without the rites. Dispute and argument cannot be discriminated without the rites. The sovereign and ministers, or the father and the son, or the elder brother and the younger brother cannot determine their status without the rites. The relation between teachers and pupils while learning cannot be close to each other without the rites. Ranks, armies and laws will lose their dignified power without the rites. The offering of sacrifices to the spirits cannot show sincerity and gravity without the rites." Therefore, a man of virtue and nobility should be respectful, restrained, self-contained and yielding to understand the significance of rites. The enlightenment must be achieved relying on rites. The relationship between monarch and minister, father and son, husband and wife must be reflected in rites. Courtly, military action, must be dignified. Worship to gods and ancestors must be carried out in rites to reflect devotion and piety. In a word, ceremony, as a code of conduct, is the concrete manifestation of the implementation of human ethics.

For instance, in terms of ethic between father and son, *The Classic of Filial Piety* says: "In terms of filial son's service to his parents, in the daily household, the son should try his best to be respectful to his parents. In the food and drink life, the son should maintain a happy mood to serve. When the parents are ill, the son has to take care of them with anxiety. When his parents died, the son tried his best to grieve and sacrifice with solemnity." This described the performance of filial son in different stages of serving his parents, which means the inner feelings of filial son must be presented by behaviour in accordance with propriety. Among them, "sacrifice" is considered the most important rite because it is a ritual to communicate with deceased ancestors. In sacrificial rites, ritual places and utensils are essential. In the article *Elements of Rites* in the *Book of Rites*, it says, "when a noble family was about to build a house, an ancestral temple should be built first. When a high minister is about to manage his own clan, he should make sacrificial vessels at first. "

Again, "rite" is the generic term of the system of national laws and regulations, that is, the "system of rites and music".

Xunzi, the Confucian master of the Warring States period, revealed the political significance of "rite", which was the most typical. Xunzi held that rite is the foundation of the country and society. In the *Theory on Rites*, he explained the origin of rites: "What is the origin of rites? I answer that human beings are born with desire. If you can't get what you want, you seek for it. If there is no tolerance or boundary, humans will argue; strife means chaos, chaos means poverty. The former king hated chaos, so the system of propriety and justice was created to raise people's desire, to meet people's demand. In this way, desire cannot just depend on material wealth, and material wealth will not be subject to desire. This is the origin of rite." Xunzi presupposed a society similar to Hobbes' "state of nature". In such condition, people have a variety of desires, but the desire can never be exhausted. So when this desire expands over a certain standard, people can not avoid conflicting with others. The more conflicts and disputes over material things, the more chaos and even collapse the state and society will become. In this case, in order to maintain the normal state of the state and society, the ancient sages set rules and boundaries. Hence, we got "rite". In this sense, etiquette establishes the basic boundary between people in the political field and enables human society to exist as a community.

In ritual classics, the *Rites of Zhou* emphasizes the political significance of rites most. This book is said to be the record of rites and music set up by the Duke of Zhou. According to the great Confucian scholars Liu Xin and Zheng Xuan of the Han Dynasty, the *Rites of Zhou* was produced by the Duke of Zhou in the early years of the Zhou Dynasty. The Zhou Dynasty was able to keep the world peaceful for hundreds of years just by carrying out the *Rites of Zhou*. The *Rites of Zhou* described not only the rules of etiquette, but also the rules and regulations that shaped the whole nation. There are six officers, namely, heaven officer, earth officer, spring officer, summer officer, autumn officer, and winter officer, in *Rites of Zhou*. Each officer had administered sixty men and there are three hundred and sixty official position altogether. Zheng Xuan, a master of rites at the end of the Han Dynasty, believed that *The Rites of Zho*u were the "Rites Classics" while the *Book of Rite* was only the specific norms of rites classics. Zheng Xuan's study of rites had a decisive influence on the later generations. The concept of "rite" not only refers to norm, but also refers to a system of national laws and regulations.

In *Rites of Zhou*, sacrifice officer, the Great Zongbo, was responsible for the running of various rituals. Rites charged by the Great Zongbo included the sacrifice to the god of heaven, the sun, the moon and the stars, the state, the king’s ancestors, also the ceremonies held when emperor paid hunting visit to the states and when dukes worshiped their emperor. The rites above were related to a series of relations relevant to the formation and operation of a country: The relationship between the emperor and the heaven, the emperor and dukes, the dukes, the war and punishment, and so on. In Chinese history, since the Han Dynasty, emperors of all dynasties would proclaim ritual and music system of his dynasty which always took the record of the Great Zongbo in the *Rites of Zhou* as a reference.

Among all these national systems, the heaven worship held in the Southern Suburb was the most important ceremony. According to ancient records, the Duke of Zhou began to worship the heaven in the Southern Suburb. Later dynasties confirmed their political legitimacy by the same ceremony. According to traditional Chinese thought, every dynasty arose because of the "mandate of heaven." However, after the Han Dynasty, the emperor started to have a "ceremonial status", that is, "the son of heaven". Only as a son of heaven could he gain the legitimacy to rule the world. As the son of heaven, the emperor must make sacrifices to heaven on a fixed day every year. Only the "Son of Heaven" had the right to worship heaven. In Chinese history, the worship ceremony held in Southern Suburbs is related to how to understand "heaven". There have been a lot of debates on the heaven. Is it the boundless existence above human’s head? Or is it the heaven of the will? Or is it an personal God who can directly produce sons ? Different understandings of heaven become the core issues of cosmology in different dynasties.

The political nature of "rite" was regarded as autocratic in ancient China. It can’t be denied that in some period of Chinese history, the strictly hierarchical structure of "rite" had led to the idea of "the emperor wants the minister to die, the minister must die". However, that was not the case in terms of the origin of rites. Chinese civilization underlines the continuity of nature and culture, which is especially evident in rites. In *History of Rites* of *Book of Rites*, rite was described to be "to the way of heaven and human feelings and common customs". Ancient Chinese people understood the "nature" mainly in two aspects: first, regarding heaven and earth as the existence of nature, and understanding human beings and history from the rhythm of heaven and earth, such as four seasons, Yin and Yang, five elements; Second, regarding human nature as a product of nature. In this case, the natural emotions of human beings could be settled in rites. For example, filial piety is considered as a naturally formed ethic. A man with the quality of filial piety is believed to be loyal to his sovereign when he become an official. The natural color of "rite" is very strong. In ancient China, it is said that each sage king "had made rites and music". It means that the sage king is causing the rites and music to arise according to the internal rules of nature. Therefore, rites and music, which are culture, are not the result of the creation of any sage king, but naturally formed. It can be seen that Chinese civilization underlines the continuity of nature and culture.

In summary, "rite" in Chinese civilization is not only the basic rule of human life, but also a specific etiquette norm. It can even present the whole system of national laws and regulations. The intention of "rite" is appropriate behavior, while the extension of concept is much more broadly. From the perspective of comparison of Chinese and Western civilization, the understanding of "rites" in Chinese tradition is one of the fundamental differences.