

THE CHINESE STATE RELIGION

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THE Chinese language, peculiar as it may seem, has like the Hebrew tongue, no generic term for the word religion. The word "*keaou*," which has the meaning of "to teach," or, better still, "the things taught," "doctrine," or "instruction," is very often applied by the Chinese to the religious sects of Taou and Buddah, as well as to the ethical sect of Confucius.

The same word is also used by the Chinese to denote the Christian as well as the Mohammedan religion. The Chinese, however, do not apply this term to the State religion. Inasmuch as it only consists of rights and ceremonies, rather than something to be taught, learned or believed. The State religion has been practiced from time immemorial by the court at Peking as well as by the other provincial governments. The *Ta Tsing Hwayteen* and the *Ta Tsing Leuh-le* contain the code of laws dealing with the State religion of China. From a careful perusal of the above two works, we can safely conclude: (a) as to the persons or things to whom the sacrifices are presented, or the objects of governmental worship; (b) the ministers or priests who are to offer the sacrifices, and the minute preparation required of them for the performance of this grave religious service; (c) the sacrifices and offerings, the specified times of presenting them as well as the necessary and peculiar ceremonies that must accompany them, and (d) the penalties for informality or the neglect to perform the prescribed ceremonies as directed in the above works.

Let us first consider the necessary objects of worship or the things natural to which sacrifices must be offered. It was customary to divide the state sacrifices into the following three classes: (a) The *Ta sze*, or great sacrifices; (b) the *chung sze*, or intermediary sacrifices; or (c) the *seaou sze*, or the minor sacrifices. The

Chinese priests also designated the last as *kiun sze*, or heard sacrifices. The word *kcun*, "a flock of sheep," was used as a simple noun to denote multitude. In the following list which we quote below, the first, second, third and fourth are the specified objects or classes of objects to which the great sacrifices were to be offered; while, on the other hand, from the fifth to the thirteenth are those to which the intermediary sacrifices were offered; while those from the fourteenth to the end are offered to the minor sacrifices.

- (1) *Tccn*, which is used as a designation by the Chinese for "sky" or "heaven." This word is also sometimes translated by the "azure heavens"; while *hwang kung yu* is used to designate the "imperial expanse."
- (2) *Te*, the earth.
- (3) The *meaou*, which is used as a designation for "the great temple of ancestors." By this designation, the Chinese mean all the tablets on which are inscribed prayers to the manes or shades of the deceased emperors of the last dynasty. In as much as rank or dignity is always denoted by the height of the title which a Chinese emperor or nobleman has after his name, and in as much as the lines or columns of Chinese characters are always read from top to bottom, the Chinese were always careful when inscribing prayers to the deceased emperors or to their manes in placing all titles of equal size in height.
- (4) *Shay tseih*, by which the Chinese mean the "Gods of land and grain."
- (5) *Jeih*, the "sun"; called also *ta ming*, the "great light."
- (6) *Yue*, the "moon"; called also *yay ming*, the "night light."
- (7) *Tseen tae te wang*, the "manes" of the emperors and kings of former ages.
- (8) *Seen sze Kung sze*, the "ancient master," Confucius.
- (9) *Seen tsan*, the "ancient patron" of the manufacture of silk.
- (10) *Seen wang*, the "ancient patron" of agriculture.
- (11) *Teen Shin*, the "gods of heaven."
- (12) *Te ke*, the "gods of the earth."
- (13) *Tae suy*, the "god of the passing year."
- (14) *Scene*, was regarded the "ancient patron" of the healing art.
- (15) *Choo jin kwe che tse*, designated the "innumerable ghosts of deceased philanthropists, statesmen, scholars and martyrs."
- (16) *Sing shin*, the "stars," are sometimes placed next after the sun and moon.

- (17) *Yun*, the "clouds."
- (18) *Yu*, the "rain."
- (19) *Fung*, the "wind."
- (20) *Luy*, the "thunder."

These atmospheric divinities are usually placed in one column.

- (21) *Woo yo*, the "five great mountains of China."
- (22) *Sze hae*, the "four seas"; i. e., "all the waters of the ocean."
- (23) *Sze tuh*, the "four rivers."
- (24) *Ming shan*, "famous hills."
- (25) *Ta chuen*, "great streams of water."
- (26) *Ke tuh*, military "flags" and "banners."
- (27) *Taou-loo-che Shin*, the "god of the Road," where an army must pass.
- (28) *Ho-paou che Sin*, the "god of Cannon."
- (29) *Mun Shin*, the "gods of the gate."
- (30) *Howjtooche Shin*, the "queen goddess of the Ground."
- (31) *Pih keih*, the "north pole."

From the above, we may safely conclude that the Chinese State religion chiefly consisted in the worship of the material universe and in subordination to it, the celestial as well as terrestrial God, infernal ghosts, and the work of their own hands, such as flags, banners and destructive cannon. We can also strengthen the above contention that the material universe was the object of worship from other sources than those quoted. The imperial high priest was compelled to wear robes of azure color which was to correspond to the color of the sky when he worshipped the heavens. He, however, wore robes of yellow material representing the clay of this earthly clod when he worshipped the earth. When he worshipped the sun he wore red robes and when he deified the moon, he wore pale white robes. The kings, nobles and centenary of the official hierophants, however, were accustomed to wear their usual court dresses. The altar on which the sacrifices to heaven were performed, was round, so as to represent heaven, so to speak, while the altar on which the sacrifices to earth were performed was square. No reason was given for the use of either type of altar.

The "prayer boards" or *chuhpan* are of the same color as the emperor's robes. In the worship of heaven, an azure ground with vermilion letters was used; while in the worship of earth, the yellow ground was used with black characters; for the worship of ancestors, a white ground was required with black characters; for the sun, a

carnation with vermilion characters; while for the moon, a white ground with black characters.

In this, the second part of our paper, we shall consider the sacred persons who performed the rights of sacrifice. The priests of the Chinese State religion are the emperor, the kings, the nobles, the statesmen and the civil and military officers who are known as *pi kwan*. The emperor fills the position of high priest, the "*pontifex maximus*"; the lower dignitaries are subordinates to him. The civil and sacred functions are usurped by the *joo keou*, or "sect philosophers." Women and priests are forbidden entrance at the grand state worship of nature; the empress and the several grades of imperial concubines only take part in the sacrifice to the patroness of silk manufacturers, which takes place by itself.

The Chinese hierophants had to meet two requirements: they were to be freed from any recent legal crime, and were not to be in mourning for the dead. In order to perform the first order of sacrifices, they are required to prepare themselves as the priests amongst the Hebrews did, during the time when the Jewish temple stood in Jerusalem, namely, by ablution, a change of garment, a vow in the fast of three days. During this time, they must occupy a clean chamber and abstain from (a) judging criminals; (b) being present at feasts; (c) listening to music; (d) cohabitation with wives or concubines; (e) inquiries about the sick; (f) mourning for the dead; (g) drinking wine; (h) eating garlic. The above were carefully to be fulfilled in as much as sickness and death were believed to defile, while banqueting and feasting dissipate the mind and make it unfit to commune with Him who holds sway over this great earth.

The third division of this paper deals with the victims sacrificed and the things offered. The animals or bloody sacrifices that were made use of for sacrifices of heaven and earth were divided into four classes:

- (a) A heifer, or *new tsze*.
- (b) A bullock, or *new fco*.
- (c) Oxen generally.
- (d) *Sheeo*, or pigs.

The things that were offered were chiefly silk, about which we shall speak elsewhere. The first essential in sacrifice was that the victims should be whole and sound, while an azure black colored animal was much preferred. The victims were to be purified nine decades or cleansed ninety days for the grand sacrifices; three decades for the

intermediary class, or only one decade or ten days for the herd or flock of sacrifices. These seemed to be no ceremony connected with the killing of the animals. Contrary to the Greek custom of decorating with wreaths and garlands and the Jewish custom of sprinkling the blood, the Chinese sacrifice seemed to be simply slaughtered the day before they are to be offered and dressed. After being laid on the altar, they were ready to be distributed among the *tse fuh jou*, "the sacrificial blessed flesh," which the civil and military priesthood no doubt relished after a three-days' fast. The sacrifices are offered at specified times; on the day of the winter's solstice, those to the earth, and at regularly appointed times the others were offered.

The following ceremonies characterize the grand worship of nature: bowing, kneeling and knocking the head against the ground, or, as it is termed in Chinese, *pac kwei kov*. The emperor when he officiates in *propria persona* at certain sacrifices, bows in the place knocking his head against the ground. The emperor makes three kneelings and nine bows, instead of three kneelings and nine knockings of the head against the ground. The knocking or bowing, or, as it is known in Chinese, the *kov* or the *pac*, seems to effect a material or rather a feeling difference in the estimation of his majesty.

Our last topic deals with the penalty of informality. The forfeiture of a month's salary or a specified number of blows with the bamboo stick, which very often was avoided by the payment of a trifling sum of money, instead of the lawful punishment for the neglect of due preparations, imperfect victims, etc., etc. The displeasure of the things or beings worshipped is not considered; man's wrath is only to be appeased by a forfeiture or a fine. The number of blows adjudged to the delinquent determines the amount of fines. But while such easy penalties are reserved for the delinquents, for the hierophants and philosophical legislatures; the common people who presume to arrogate the rights of worship, being heaven and earth, announcing their affairs thereto, or of lighting lamps to the seventh stars of ursa major, are punished bonafide with eighty blows of strangulation. The State religion is in reality a worship regarded proper for monarchs and philosophers, and one that is not to be desecrated by the worship of the vulgar plebian. Such, then, do we find to be the worship of the Chinese State religion prior to the nineteenth century, before the Occident got a firmer hold on Oriental China.