

Sima Guang's (1019–1086) Thoughts on Death Rituals

During the reign of the Song emperor Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1022–1063), traditional Confucian death rituals (*sangzang li* 喪葬禮) were significantly revived, and “three-year mourning 三年喪” became a legal obligation for civil officers.¹ However, non-Confucian and noncanonical ritual practices, specifically Buddhist rituals, prevailed in all social strata, including scholar-official and royal families.² Moreover, the government employed Buddhist monks to carry out state-sponsored mass burials and death rituals.³

Financial concerns also came into play. Economic disparities at the time were especially manifest in funeral practices: wealthy people, merchants in particular, performed “lavish burials,” whereas many of the poor turned to cremation or water burial due to lack of resources. In order to rein in overconsumption involving funeral and burial practices, the government promulgated *Ordinances for Funerals and Burials* (*Sangzang ling* 喪葬令) in 1029, which specified spending limits in accordance

¹ Li Tao 李燾, *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979–1993; hereafter *CB*) 97, p. 2242. “Three-year mourning” refers to various forms of ritual, including funeral, burial, mourning, and obsequies to be performed for one’s parents. After the Western Han court adopted Confucianism as the state’s ideology, the term also could refer to the institutional practice of state officials’ taking leaves of absence to observe those ritual requirements. During the Han, scholars debated the exact number of months to fulfill the period – 25 or 27 – and the proper form of burial – lavish or simple. See Mu-chou Poo, “Ideas concerning Death and Burial in Pre-Han and Han China,” *AM* 3d ser. 3.2 (1990), pp. 25–62.

² Song Sanping 宋三平, “Songdai de fentan yu fengjian jiazhu” 宋代的墳庵與封建家族, *Zhongguo shehui jingji yanjiu* 52.1 (1995), pp. 40–47; Chikusa Masaaki 笹沙芽章, “Sōdai funji kō” 宋代墳寺考, *TYGH* 61 (1979/80), pp. 35–66; Bai Wengu 白文固, “Songdai de gongdesi yu fensi” 宋代的功德寺和坟寺, *Qinghai shehui kexue* (2000.5), pp. 76–80; Patricia Ebrey, “Education through Ritual: Efforts to Formulate Family Rituals During the Sung Period,” in John W. Chaffee and William Theodore de Bary, eds., *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1989), p. 281; idem, “Cremation in Song China,” *American Historical Review* 95.2 (1990), pp. 406–28; Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 2001), p. 180; Zhu Ruixi 朱瑞熙, “Songdai de sangzang xisu” 宋代的喪葬習俗, *Xueshu yuekan* 學術月刊 (1997.2), pp. 69–74.

³ Mark Robert Halperin, “Buddhist Temples, War Dead, and the Song Imperial Court,” *AM* 3d ser. 12.2 (1999), pp. 71–99; *CB* 166, p. 3985; 239, p. 5807; 253, p. 6297; 297, p. 7231; 297, p. 7233; 297, p. 7234.

with the deceased's official rank.⁴ The ordinance set forth regulations concerning the burial even of low-ranking officers—the fifth, sixth, and seventh ranks—about whom there was no particular guidance given in the *Record of Rituals* (*Liji* 禮記), a collection of pre-Han to late-Han texts that eventually entered the Confucian canon and received intense commentative work and disputation among scholar-officials. For all social classes, the Song state proscribed extremely luxurious burials. Nonetheless, the ordinance seems to have failed to change people's funeral and burial practices, judging from many archaeological reports.⁵

While some scholar-officials considered the above-mentioned practices acceptable, Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) and others profoundly concerned with ritual viewed non-Confucian funeral rites as indicators of decadence in Chinese culture and advocated a return to classical Confucian death rituals as orthopraxis.⁶ Yet there was no single authoritative text that the *shidafu* 士大夫, that is, the elite families, could consult,⁷ and so each family followed its own traditions. This impelled Sima to author *Shuyi* 書儀 (*Letters and Rituals*), a type of manual for both formal epistolary writing and domestic rites. It was the most comprehensive manual of this kind to appear during the Northern Song era and became the single most important reference book for Zhu Xi's

⁴ Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, Lishi yanjiusuo, annot., *Tianyige cang Mingchaoben Tianshengling jiaozheng: Fu Tangling fuyuan yanjiu* 天一閣藏明鈔本天聖令校註: 附唐令復原研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), pp. 351–67. *CB* 118, p. 2798; 140, p. 3361; 167, pp. 4025–26; 217, p. 5275; Tuo Tuo 脫脫, *Song shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977; hereafter *SS*) 124, p. 2909.

⁵ Dieter Kuhn, *A Place for the Dead: An Archaeological Documentary on Graves and Tombs of the Song Dynasty (960–1279)* (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 1996).

⁶ On the life of Sima Guang, see Kida Tomo 木田知生, *Shiba Kō to sono jidai* 司馬光とその時代 (Tokyo: Hakutei sha, 1994); Gu Kuixiang 顧奎相, *Sima Guang* (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1985). For a systematic study of Sima's thinking, see Demerie Paula Faitler, "Confucian Historiography and the Thought of Ssu-ma Kuang," unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of Michigan, 1991); Anthony William Sariti, "Monarchy, Bureaucracy, and Absolutism in the Political Thought of Ssu-Ma Kuang," *JAS* 32.1 (1971), pp. 53–76. For a recent delineation of the political history of the mid-Northern Song dynasty via Sima Guang's thought and career, see Xiao-bin Ji, *Politics and Conservatism in Northern Song China: The Career and Thought of Sima Guang (A.D. 1019–1086)* (Hong Kong: The Chinese U.P., 2005). For a study comparing Wang Anshi and Sima Guang, see Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transition in Tang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1992), pp. 212–53; idem, "Government, Society, and State: On the Political Visions of Ssu-ma Kuang and Wang An-shih," in Robert Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer, eds., *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1993), pp. 128–92; Paul J. Smith, "Shen-Tsung's Reign and the New Policies of Wang An-Shih, 1067–1085," in Paul J. Smith and Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 5, Part I: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907–1279* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2009), pp. 347–483.

⁷ According to Patricia Ebrey, composing a ritual manual for one's family came into vogue in the late Tang and belonged within a genre known as *shuyi* 書儀, that is, "letters and rituals"; Patricia Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A Social History of Writing about Rites* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1991), pp. 39–40.

朱熹 (1130–1200) *Family Ritual* (Jiali 家禮). Six of *Shuyi*'s ten chapters address the matters of funeral, mourning, burial ritual, and memorial services, underscoring each one's particular significance.⁸ The contents indicate that *Shuyi*'s assumed readers were mainly of the *shidafu* group, more broadly, but also – to a lesser extent – commoners.

Sima Guang's *Shuyi* was a product of an era when debates over sacrificial rites, funerals, and memorial services reached their zenith. It was written during Sima's stay in Anyang from 1071 to 1084; he had withdrawn from the imperial court, as had many of his sympathizers who were critical of the New Policies (*xinfa* 新法) engineered by Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086). The text of *Shuyi* provides us with clues for solving questions about how the discourse and practice of funeral ritual played a role in the rise of Confucian revivalism among the elite; in particular, how scholar-officials' ideals concerning politics and society were connected to their understanding of rituals. This essay builds on a study of Sima's conception of ritual; it explains how Sima, in writing *Shuyi*, negotiated with the authority of the Confucian ritual canon whenever he adjusted regulations to meet the needs of his Confucian contemporaries. A deep analysis of the text reveals his standards and rationales for endorsing or condemning certain contemporary ritual practices. Here, particular attention is devoted to the issue of how the Confucian notion of transcendence and the spirit-world factored into Sima's condemnation of certain ritual practices, and how this condemnation was linked to his overall vision of a correct society and how it could be realized through ritual reform.

SIMA GUANG'S RITUAL THEORY: RITES FOR A HIERARCHICAL SOCIAL ORDER

Sima Guang entered into various ritual discourses at the court and quickly rose to become a leading voice in favor of ritual reform for government and society.⁹ His conception of ritual crystalized early in his career – during the period 1049–1053, when he received a post in the state Rites Academy (*Taichang liyuan* 太常禮院). He was employed

⁸ The “letters” section (*j.* 1) deals with the proper forms of memorials and private letters in accordance with the status of and relationship between correspondents. The “ritual” section covers capping (*j.* 2), marriage (*j.* 3–4), and funerary rituals (*j.* 5–10). For a discussion of weddings in *Shuyi*, see Christian de Pee, *The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China: Text and Ritual Practice in the Eighth through Fourteenth Centuries* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2007), pp. 55–64.

⁹ Carney T. Fisher, “The Ritual Dispute of Sung Ying-tsung,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 36 (1987), pp. 109–37; Ji, *Politics and Conservatism*, pp. 94–109.

as an officer of admonition to the emperor from 1061 to 1065, during which time he was actively involved with ritual affairs at court. In 1066, he began his large historiographical project that would become a principal resource for studies of Chinese history through to the present day, namely the great work titled *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governance*); he expounded it to the emperor in person until his retreat from the court in 1070 due to conflicts with Wang Anshi.

Sima's ideas on ritual can be best understood by placing them in a social context and by comparison with Wang Anshi's thought and politics. Wang identified a major economic problem that confronted the state, one for which he held rich landowners, large merchants, and moneylenders, who monopolized the grain trade and the private banking business, responsible.¹⁰ Wang accepted that the desire for a luxurious lifestyle was a natural human disposition; the crucial task for the government was to prevent the rich from making money inappropriately rather than regulate their consumption patterns.¹¹ He propounded a comprehensive policy that was named "New Policies" (*xinfa* 新法); through them the government engaged in the grain trade and lent money to benefit the poor, while taking action to prevent the rich from abusing their power.¹² Without promoting any specific pragmatic alternatives to Wang's policies, Sima placed less emphasis on the role of government in society; rather, he focused on moral reform within the bureaucracy. By reforming ritual, Sima thought people's desires would be transformed and, in turn, society would become ordered.¹³ We might conceive how ritual could serve such a role in part by discussing some of the semantic underpinnings of the concept of "ritual," or "rite," as understood in China's earlier periods, as well as by Sima Guang and others of his time.

The Shang dynasty of antiquity had developed ritual practice in the context of *zongfa* 宗法, a social organizing system in which kinships (*zu* 祖) were traced and observed hierarchically. In various rituals passed

¹⁰ In fact, however, many families of officials were rich landowners who were active in the grain trade and money lending. On ostentatious consumption by Song-era wealthy persons, see Christian de Pee, "Purchase on Power: Imperial Space and Commercial Space in Song-Dynasty Kaifeng, 960–1127," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53.1 (2010), pp. 149–84.

¹¹ Wang Anshi, "Shang Renzong huangdi yanshi shu" 上仁宗皇帝言事書, in *Wang Linchuan ji* 王臨川集 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1933; hereafter *WLCJ*) 39, pp. 85–86; and "Feili zhi li" 非禮之禮, *ibid.* 67, pp. 51–52.

¹² Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, pp. 246–50.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 219 and 250–51.

down in writings this was expressed by, for example, the robes worn by participants that distinguished their status and rank within the social system.¹⁴ After the disintegration of the *zongfa* system, Confucius (551–479 BC) redefined the concept of *li* 禮 by taking it as the universal ground in which individuals acted morally.¹⁵ Confucius's concept of *li* encompassed propriety, etiquette, and ritual practice. He regarded *li* as one of the cardinal virtues; it formed an inner quality of virtue (*de* 德) that was to be linked with an outer quality, namely, ritual practice. *Li* was the thread of continuity between social relationships and one's relationship to Heaven. Later, Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 310–218 BC) argued that rituals served the ethical function of moderating human desires and the social function of clarifying the hierarchical order by their positing of distinctions (*fen* 分) amongst people.¹⁶ At the same time, in Xunzi's understanding, since rituals had become the sole criterion of moral and social behavior among the *shi* 士 group (the administrative officers), rituals thus had become an end in and of themselves.

During the Northern Song, as scholarly debates and legal disputes came to center on various imperial rituals and the funerals of state officers at the imperial court, Song scholars developed theories on the matter of ritual. Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) was the preeminent exponent of the conception of ritual as a cosmic-moral principle that ought to be manifest in individuals. According to Zhang's understanding, the concept of *li* 理, meaning "principle," or "pattern," permeated that of *li* 禮 (ritual); thus, ritual could be seen as possessing a metaphysical basis and acting at different levels of human intellectual and moral life.

In general, ritual is principle (*li* 理). It must be this: to study principle to its utter end; if so, then ritual is what enacts the [moral] meanings [of principle]. If one understands principle, one can institute ritual. In this case, then, ritual emerges from principle subsequently.¹⁷

Sima Guang was less metaphysical, in that he placed ritual in the position of a broad base for social actions. His conception is laid out clearly in his opening comment in *Zizhi tongjian*:

¹⁴ Yongping Liu, *Origins of Chinese Law: Penal and Administrative Law in Its Early Development* (Hongkong: University of Oxford Press, 1998), pp. 19–86.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 87–110.

¹⁶ "Li lun" sect. in *Xunzi* 荀子 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1969), pp. 105–26; Yuri Pines, "Disputers of the Li: Breakthroughs in the Concept of Ritual in Preimperial China," *AM* 3d ser. 13.1 (2000), pp. 35–40; Kurtis Hagen, "Xunzi and the Nature of Confucian Ritual," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72.2 (2003), pp. 371–403.

¹⁷ Zhang Zai, *Zhang Zai ji* 張載集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978), pp. 326–27.

Your minister Guang says, “Your minister has heard that, among the Son of Heaven’s responsibilities, none is greater than ritual (*li*); in ritual none is greater than social roles (*fen* 分); in social roles nothing is greater than [their corresponding] titles (*ming* 名). What is ritual? It is the guidelines (*jigang* 紀綱) [of public order]. What are social roles? They are [the rank of] ruler and minister. What are titles? They are duke, feudal lord, councilor, and great officer.”¹⁸

Here, Sima takes ritual, or *li*, as *jigang*, the guidelines for public order that set forth the roles of individuals within social institutions. This understanding echoes Xunzi’s theory of ritual, which conceptualizes the double role of *li* as the basis of social hierarchy and as an ethical imperative.

In another passage of *Zizhi tongjian*, Sima specifies the social functions of rituals:

Ritual’s application in things and affairs is indeed great! When ritual is applied to the body, both one’s movement and stillness have guidance, and all actions are perfected. When it is applied to the family, then there are distinctions between men and women, and the nine clan ranks are in harmony. When it is used for villages, the old and the young have ethics, and vulgar customs will become refined. When it is used for the state, the ruler and ministers have hierarchical order, and governing will be perfected. When it is used for the whole society, all feudal lords will obey [the ruler]; and the guidelines of public order (*jigang*) will be upheld.¹⁹

Sima perceives social relations as the sum of the complementary relations of individuals within the hierarchy.²⁰ The universal principle of ritual as establishing hierarchical divisions becomes applied to familial and social relations, and to the state; society in turn would function as a unified whole. In essence, Sima defined ritual as the preeminent mechanism for achieving a hierarchical and thus harmonious social order.

Sima Guang’s use of the term ‘ritual’ operated on two levels of meaning: concrete action and abstract principle. Ritual as concrete action primarily served as a means to express and cultivate virtues within

¹⁸ Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981) 1, p. 2.

¹⁹ Ibid. 11, p. 375.

²⁰ “[T]he high commands the lowly, as the heart moves hands and legs, and as root controls branch and leaf. The lowly serves the high, as hands and legs guard the heart; and as branches and leaves rely on the main root. Be that as it may be, afterwards the top and the bottom rely on each other; and the state is governed in peace.” Ibid. 1, p. 2.

social activities. Ritual as abstract principle operated as ethical imperative and the guidelines for public order, based on which, individuals responded to given situations ritually. Therefore ritual as abstract principle both embraced and transcended concrete ritual actions by presenting itself as the conceptual basis for the former. Sima believed that ritual as principle was unchanging, although the regulations for its situational application did allow for modification. Ritual as principle is thus universal and can be applied to everyone, whereas ritual as concrete action draws hierarchical divisions among social members. Sima emphasized that these dual aspects of ritual are both unifying and dividing, and are thus the means by which a society can achieve a hierarchical social order in the form of an organic unity in which each part knows and performs its function. For Sima, the classical ritual laws, or ritual system, of the Zhou dynasty best manifested the dual aspect. He felt that the later Han-Tang rituals did not correctly conform to those classical ritual laws. However, he was not advocating for a return to an ancient system; his goal was to reinstate ritual practice as the foundation of the social and political system of his day.

Sima and other, like-minded, scholar-officials attacked vernacular religious practices of their day under the rubric of “popular customs” (*fengsu* 風俗) and “unsanctioned ritual (literally “nonritual rituals, *feili zhi li* 非禮之禮”). In general, prescribed rites in the classical texts were called *li*, but those without authoritative textual sources were called *su* 俗, or customs. Sima used the word *su* with connotations of crudeness and challenged the validity of such acts because of this lack of canonical warrant. In his “Discussion of Notes on Contemporary Customs” (“Lun fengsu zhazi” 論風俗劄子), Sima was particularly concerned that some literati were not following Confucian practice to the letter, and moreover were continuing to perform rituals associated with Buddhism and/or Daoism: two notable examples were Wang Anshi and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101). Sima, for his part, referred to officials such as Wang as “vulgar Confucians (*suru* 俗儒).”²¹

Whereas Sima Guang was Wang Anshi’s political critic, Wang was critical of Sima’s ritual theory. Wang thought that the economic, social, and political realms were the foundations of human life, and that ritual helped to sustain these.²² He therefore viewed ritual practice as one component of culture and society, but not the mainstay. In

²¹ The word *suru* 俗儒 appears in *CB* 346, p. 4866; and 357, p. 8533; Sima, *Zizhi tongjian* 27, p. 881.

²² Wang Anshi, “Liyue lun” 禮樂論, in *WLCJ* 66, p. 42; Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, p. 228.

response to ritualists, Wang wrote essays titled “*Fengsu*” and “*Feili zhi li*.” In “*Fengsu*” he used the concept of *su* as a neutral term translatable as a “prevalent contemporary practice.” He included both cultural customs and social customs, and focused more on the latter in terms of reform.²³ He said, “[The current social] customs do not care about loyalty (*zhong* 忠) and trustworthiness (*xin* 信). People’s lack of sense of shame is extreme.”²⁴ He thought that promoting “positive social customs” was one of the responsibilities of the government and believed his reform policies would do just that.²⁵ He therefore criticized opponents for taking ancient ritual laws as the standard by which to judge contemporary customs.²⁶

Sima Guang consistently advocated correct rituals based on the classics – for emperors and for scholar-officials, and wrote memorials that criticized the emperors’ non-classical practices. On the other hand, Wang Anshi wrote various prayers to be used in Buddhist and Daoist rituals offered on behalf of royal family members.²⁷ Wang believed that reformation of the society could be achieved through the implementation of his well-known new policies, not through ritual reform. He did not hold that canonical ritual texts should be the standards for judging the worth of contemporary ritual practices, and therefore the government could facilitate Buddhist and Daoist rituals simply to address practically people’s important needs. Sima, on the other hand, promoted Confucian rituals as the mainstay of governance, through which both the moral lives of individuals and the public order would be reformed.

NEGOTIATING WITH CANONICAL AUTHORITY AND CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES

Reflecting on his vision of a ritual-based social order, Sima Guang wrote his manual *Shuyi*, which was intended for his own family and those of fellow literati. Given that he was a fervent advocate of the “classical rituals,” how did he incorporate the latter in this new ritual

²³ *WLCJ* 69, p. 74.

²⁴ *CB* 243, p. 5921.

²⁵ *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* reads, “Wang spoke to the emperor, ‘If Your Majesty would like to foster virtue necessary for governing, he will need to follow the social and cultural changes and obtain the desired customs, or *fengsu*. If today’s absurd customs are not transformed thoroughly, I’m afraid that virtue necessary for governing will not be developed.’” *CB* 242, p. 5894. See also *CB* 215, p. 5232; 250, p. 6135.

²⁶ Wang Anshi, “Menxi” 閔習, *WLCJ* 69, pp. 75–76; *CB* 249, p. 5855.

²⁷ These are collected in *j.* 45 and 65 of *WLCJ*.

text? To what extent did *Shuyi* allow for flexibility in applying classical ritual prescriptions in an effort to make them suitable in the contemporary context?

In seeking to correct rituals, in some sense to make them orthodox, Sima consulted texts of unquestioned authority. Three early compilations – *Liji* (see above), *Zhouli* 周禮 (*Rituals of Zhou*), and *Yili* 儀禮 (*Ceremonies and Rituals*) – were considered to be the authoritative writings on ritual, and authorship in all cases was attributed to Confucius.²⁸ Patricia Ebrey sums up how the authority of the classics was generally conceived: they were “created by the human sages who understood the principles of heaven and earth, including the social and psychological needs of people.”²⁹ In addition, Sima drew on another major primary source that was compiled for and during the Tang dynasty, namely, the *Kaiyuan li* 開元禮 (*Rituals of the Kaiyuan Reign-period*). This imperial ritual code of the Tang issued in 732 was an outcome of a concerted academic endeavor of the court to present a systematic manual for all of its ritual programs, based on centuries of Confucian texts and commentaries.³⁰

Sima used *Yili* as his primary source for *Shuyi* because it contained individual chapters prescribing the funeral and mourning ritual procedures for ordinary administrative officers – the *shi*.³¹ It would appear, based on the descriptions in *Liji*, that during ancient Zhou times, the word *dafu* 大夫 referred to officials of the second grade; and *shi* to the third, fourth, and fifth grades.³² During the Song, many centuries later, *shidafu* came to connote a social group familiar with Confucian teachings;³³ it consisted of *shishi* 適士 (literally, “appropriate scholars”) with official titles, and *shushi* 庶士 (literally, “commoner scholars”), or

²⁸ Tang-dynasty scholars in the 7th and 8th cc. accorded unchallengeable prestige to these three compilations by citing them for their new canons of imperial ritual. See David McMullen, “The Ritual Code of the Tang,” in David Cannadine and Simon Price, eds., *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1987), p. 182; Michael Nylan, “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis’ Then and Now,” in Kai-wing Chow, On-Cho Ng et al., eds., *Imagining Boundaries* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 17–56; Kai-Wing Chow, “Between Canonicity and Heterodoxy: Hermeneutical Moments of the Great Learning (Ta-hsueh),” *ibid.*, pp. 147–64.

²⁹ Patricia Ebrey, “The Liturgies for Sacrifices to Ancestors in Successive Versions of the Family Rituals,” in David Johnson, ed., *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion* (Berkeley: Publications of the Chinese Popular Culture Project, 1995), p. 10.

³⁰ McMullen, “Ritual Code of the Tang,” p. 184.

³¹ These sections are *j*. 12, 13, and 14: “*Shisangli*” 士喪禮, “*Jixi*” 既夕, “*Shiyuli*” 士虞禮.

³² The “Wangzhi” 王制 sect. of *Liji* specifies that *dafu* are subdivided into *dafuqing* 大夫卿, and *xiadafu* 下大夫; *shi* are subdivided into *shangshi* 上士, *zhongshi* 中士, and *xiashi* 下士.

³³ For the transformation of the *shi*, see Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, pp. 48–75.

those without. Therefore, by taking all *shidafu* together, Sima prescribed the requirements for the lowest rank set forth in *Yili*. Because the economic position of the *shidafu* varied widely—from rich landowners to poor literati—Sima simplified the material requirements specified in the classical texts in order to soften the demands of ritual performances, including financial burdens. In addition, some particular ritual matters from the classics were no longer available due to vast cultural shifts. This part of my argument will be discussed in detail later on.

Certain scholars who lived earlier in the Song had established that *Yili* and *Liji*, while in some sense timeless, incorporated the customs of merely their own times and that inconsistencies and contradictions now existed among both the various ritual topics and the numerous scholarly opinions lodged in the classics.³⁴ Sima therefore sought to establish an approach to rituals that acknowledged the authority of the classics and met contemporary needs. He organized *Shuyi* by giving a specific heading to a rite via its order as found in *Yili* and *Liji*. Under each heading, first Sima composed the prescriptions for the rite based on directions stated in the two classical texts, also borrowing their archaic language as a way of establishing the textual authority of his own *Shuyi*. Second, under these prescriptions, he inserted his commentary using the vernacular language. He often introduced regulations found in *Kaiyuan li* and other texts in order to compare the vaunted classical prescriptions with later practices.

[heading] Changing Clothes

[prescription] All must remove ornaments from their clothes.

[commentary] These refer to embroidery, red or purple colors, gold, jade, beads, and feathers.

[prescription] And wear clean and plain clothes.

[commentary] *According to Kaiyuan li*, immediately after a death, men are to change into white clothing and no longer bind their hair. Women are to change into blue, unhemmed clothing... . *These days*, people usually do not change clothes and their hair looks especially bad. *Therefore, follow Kaiyuan li*. However, if one is not able to manage white and blue unhemmed clothing immediately after death, then just remove ornaments from clothing... . [C]om-

³⁴ Song scholars tackled these problems. In the beginning of the dynasty, when Taizu commissioned *Sanli tu* 三禮圖, scholars debated whether to revise the regulations in the canonical texts. Feng Qi 馮琦, “Liyue yi” 禮樂議, in *Songshi jishi benmo* 宋史紀事本末 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), p. 8.

moners do not change their ordinary clothes.... *Contemporary custom* has many taboos. Some people have their hair on the left for the father's funeral; on the right for the mother's funeral: on the left back for the uncle's: and on the right back for the mother-in law's. *None of this is in accordance with proper ritual procedure.*³⁵

Using this double-edged style of exegesis, Sima Guang effected authority: he at once endorsed and condemned contemporary customs. By referring to the canonical texts and adopting their linguistic style, he intended his own text to deliver a certain canonical authority. Yet he applied canonical prescriptions selectively to contemporary situations, because he knew it was impractical to condemn contemporary custom solely due to the absence of canonical warrant.³⁶

CONDEMNING AND ENDORSING CONTEMPORARY RITUAL PRACTICES

Through his editing and commentaries on ritual texts, Sima Guang was naturally merging the voice of traditional authority with his own authorial (or, editor's) voice. It would be safe to say that he sought to convince readers that these two were one and the same. It is crucial for our analysis to distinguish the original ideas found in the ritual classic from those added or altered by Sima. This will aid us in developing an understanding of what he found problematic in the ritual practices of his time; what relationship those practices had with the practices given in the classical texts; and which people were the main targets of his criticism.

The purpose of the Confucian funeral ritual prescribed in *Shuyi* was to begin the process by which the deceased depart this world, take their journey to an unspecified other world (which will be discussed later in this article), and return to bless their descendants.³⁷ This parallels the process of segregating the family from society and later reintegrating it. The ritual was comprised overall of five main stages, spanning either

³⁵ Sima Guang, *Sima shi shuyi* 司馬氏書儀 (vol. 35 of Congshu jicheng edn. Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935-1937; hereafter *Shuyi*), j. 5, p. 49.

³⁶ Although Sima did not in any extreme way demand punctilious observance of classical ritual prescriptions, he was at least more sympathetic to strict observance than to looseness. In 1085, Fan Zuyü 范祖禹 proposed obliging people in the palace to wear mourning garments for "three years" after the emperor's death, arguing that it was prescribed in the classical ritual laws. This plan was not approved due to its impracticality. Although Sima did not agree with Fan, he defended Fan's position against other critics; *CB* 359, pp. 8593-94; 359, p. 8607.

³⁷ Laurence G. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction* (Belmont, Calif.: Dickenson Pub. Co., 1969), pp. 47-52.

twenty-five months or twenty-seven months, and each stage consisted of several subsets of rites. The five stages were:

1. *Preparation for mourning* (segregation of the family; preparation for the soul's departure). When death is approaching, the family starts preparing their ritual. Immediately after death, they perform "soul calling," which exhorts the deceased to come back to life. If there is no return, they are assured that the death was final. The family determines who is to be the presiding mourner (*sangzhu* 喪主), and chooses a funeral director (*husang* 護喪) from among the family. Family members change clothes and write letters to inform others of the death, and in the meantime take care of the corpse.
2. *Mourning and condolence period* (receiving guests; the soul is on its journey). The family members accept the condolences of visitors and ritually dress the corpse. They abstain from food and drink and wear the proper mourning clothes in accordance with their relation to the deceased.
3. *Preparation for burial* (practical preparation for the burial). In order to find a fitting burial spot, a hired liturgist (*zhishi zhe* 執事者) undertakes divination. The family worships the god of the earth, who is in charge of the grave site, and they excavate the vault. They prepare the funeral items in advance.
4. *Burial* (procession to the grave and burial; the soul's integration into the other world). The funeral procession leaves the house with the coffin and burial goods. When the procession arrives at the grave site, they make the tomb inscription tablet and wail. The rite of sacrifice follows burial. The next day, the family makes the first offering to the deceased.
5. *Extended mourning period and closure* (the family's segregation from and reintegration into society; the soul's return to the family as an ancestor). A year after the death, the family members make the small sacrifice for auspiciousness (*xiaoxiang* 小祥) to the deceased and change into auspicious clothes. The liturgist places the spirit tablet for the deceased. In the twenty-fifth month after the death, the grand sacrifice for auspiciousness (*daxiang* 大祥) is made. The family clears away the soul seat from the house and other funerary items. Select a convenient day in the second month coming after the *daxiang*, and perform the peace sacrifice before return to ordinary life.³⁸

³⁸ Sima noted that *Liji* prescribes twenty-five months for the length of the "three-year-mourning" because it has the peace sacrifice occur in the same month as the grand sacrifice for auspiciousness. However, he noted that the Song government's ordinance specified twenty-seven months, which followed the commentary of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200 AD). Without presenting his own exegetical judgment, Sima commented that one could not violate the Song's ordinance; *Shuyi* 9, pp. 99, 102; "Lilun" sect. of *Xunzi*, p. 122; see Guolong Lai, "The Diagram of the Mourning System from Mawangdui," *EC* 28 (2003), pp. 57-59.

The participants whose roles were specified in Sima's *Shuyi* were the families, relatives, guests, servants, and ritual specialists. The presiding mourner was typically the eldest son of the deceased, or, if required, the son of the eldest son. He assumed the central role in the funeral process, which included receiving the mourning guests. The funeral director was typically a relative who saw to practical matters, such as sending letters and collecting donations. A liturgist was hired to oversee the sacrifices, which included divinations, reading of prayers, and libations. Among those who might be hired for the procession to the burial site were exorcists (*fangxiang* 方相) and bearers of the funeral items. The female members of the family were often segregated from the male members by occupying designated places or by following gender-specific liturgical sequences. Servants did not participate in the ritual proper, but did perform certain manual tasks, such as the washing and dressing of the corpse.

Many of the ritual elements described above were seen as having been the practice before and after Confucius's time. What, then, were the standards that Sima Guang had in mind when he either endorsed or condemned contemporary practices? In order to understand how he classified ritual elements and used this to endorse and condemn, I borrow analytical terms proposed by Roy Rappaport in *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* as a heuristic device for analyzing *Shuyi*: (i) central messages of the tradition; (ii) canonical liturgical order; (iii) indexical rites that transmit the central messages and/or canonical liturgical order; (iv) nonindexical rites that do not convey any meaning or message in and of themselves, but simply regulate behavior in certain ways by following the canonical liturgical order; and (v) rites with messages that are often at odds with the central messages of the tradition.³⁹

The central messages of the tradition are its core doctrine, which is implied in the many ritual elements and also which justifies performance.⁴⁰ Therefore, participating in the ritual itself denotes a ritual agent's adherence to the tradition's central message. One of these mes-

³⁹ Rappaport proposed two primary categories: "self-referential messages" and "canonical messages." He explained that "self-referential messages" informed the current status of the ritual participant. Canonical messages, on the other hand, were encoded in "canonical liturgical order" and transmitted by "indexical messages" in liturgy. Although Rappaport noted in passing that not all rites were indexical, he did not include the categories (iv) and (v), listed above, in his discussion. Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999), pp. 52-105.

⁴⁰ I modified Rappaport's term "canonical messages" to "central message of a tradition"; *ibid.*, p. 54.

sages in the Confucian tradition is “cultivation of virtue,” and ritual is a locus where such virtues are manifested.⁴¹ By performing death rituals, a ritual agent makes known that he or she is a moral subject who fulfills the duty of filial piety, the foremost virtue and duty. Confucian tradition regards filial piety as a universal virtue because all human beings are children of their parents. It is why the death ritual is seen as a cardinal duty: one’s body is the gift of one’s parents, and taking care of the remains of a parent is a way of showing gratitude. It also derives from the belief that the status of the deceased in the spirit world is, to a large degree, dependent upon how descendants treat their remains; if maltreated, the spirit will likely become a wandering ghost.

The canonical liturgical order, consisting of the proper sequencing of individual rites, was transmitted through the authoritative texts. Because the Confucian canonical texts were meant to be reference books, with discrepancies and gaps among texts and within a text, it was possible that ritual agents could streamline a given ritual by omitting a particular rite, yet maintain the overall sequence. Although Sima was flexible in prescribing particular ritual elements within a given sequence, he was, in my view, taking great caution to preserve the order and formalism of the ritual as prescribed in the canonical texts. He maintained that formalism, despite its supra-individual character, was a means through which a ritual agent’s interior qualities could be ritually manifested.⁴²

The canonical liturgical order in the Confucian canonical texts includes hierarchical differentiations in accordance with official rank of the deceased, in the material requirements, the duration of the mourning period, and the forms of rites and gestures of the participants. Taken together with the central message, this aspect of the ritual constitutes a key liturgical agenda of the tradition: Confucian values are universal, yet their ritual expressions are differentiated according to the official rank of the ritual agent. Sima Guang propounded this liturgical agenda in his theory of ritual, as discussed earlier – ritual upholds the hierarchical social order. The ancient classic *Liji* is extremely clear about how distinctions should be made in rites for each of three distinct groups: rulers, high officials (*dafu*), and low officers (*shi*). Taking *shidafu* as one

⁴¹ Recent discussions on the relation between *ren* 仁 (humanity, or an all-encompassing ethical ideal) and *li* (ritual) include Kwong-Loi Shun, “*Jen* and *Li* in the *Analects*,” *Philosophy East & West* 43.3 (1993), pp. 457–79; Chenyang Li, “*Li* as Cultural Grammar: On the Relation between *Li* and *Ren* in Confucius’ *Analects*,” *Philosophy East & West* 57.3 (2007), pp. 311–29.

⁴² This idea is clearly expressed in his criticism of pretentious wailing in front of other people. *Shuyi* 5, p. 57.

social group, *Shuyi* specifies a hierarchical differentiation with regard to clothing, the style of tomb, the size of tomb inscription tablet, and the number of burial items.⁴³

The indexical rites are intended to transmit the central messages of the tradition and/or canonical liturgical order. Sima allowed any one of them to be altered so long as it fulfilled its purpose. For example, he prescribed that the “soul cloth” (*hunbo* 魂帛) be put on the seat of a chair near the dead body in order to let the spirit in after the death. He then offered a detailed commentary as to why he prescribed this item rather than the *zhong* 重, the spirit seat made of a wooden structure, which was prescribed in the canonical texts.⁴⁴ His explanation of its meaning and function through extensive textual references indicates that his contemporaries were not familiar with the material item, per se:

According to *Ordinances of Funerals and Burials*, in all cases of *zhong* 重, for [the funeral of] the first-rank official one uses six tripod cauldrons 鬲 [to be hung on three horizontal poles]: for the fifth rank and above, one uses four cauldrons [on two horizontal poles]: for the sixth rank and below one uses two cauldrons [on one horizontal pole].⁴⁵ *Nevertheless literati without official titles and commoners do not know of the use of the cauldron. They all use the “soul cloth,” which also follows the principle of serving the spirit.*⁴⁶ (Italics added.)

Here, Sima references ordinances pertinent to an item, but does not advocate that they be enforced rigidly. As most low-ranking officers did not know of the cauldron, he endorsed their customary use of a substitute item – the “soul cloth,” which served the same purpose. In the same spirit, he sometimes adjusted material requirements so that poor people could uphold the central messages of the tradition. For example, concerning mourning clothes, he states: “But commoners and those who cannot afford the requirements of the mourning clothes can follow the current custom.”⁴⁷ If a person was unable to afford a coffin for a deceased family member, Sima endorsed, citing a passage in

⁴³ See, in order, *Shuyi* 6, pp. 66–69; 7, pp. 79, 81, and 80.

⁴⁴ For an image of the *zhong* with horizontal poles on which to hang cauldrons, see Nie Chongyi 聶崇義, *Sanliti jizhu* 三禮圖集注, in *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu*, vol. 129, j. 17, pp. 27–28. For a description of *zhong*, see Sun Xidan 孫希旦, ed., *Liji jijie* 禮記集解, “Tangong, xia” 檀弓下 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989) 10, p. 254; also Kenneth E. Brashier, “Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Stele,” in Martin Kern, ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2005), pp. 268–270.

⁴⁵ *The Ordinances of Funerals and Burials*, article 14 prescribes this regulation. *Tianyige cang Mingchaoben Tianshengling jiaozheng* (cited n. 4, above), p. 353.

⁴⁶ *Shuyi* 5, p. 54.

⁴⁷ *Shuyi* 6, p. 69.

Liji, an economical form of burial that consisted simply of placing the wrapped corpse in a pit.⁴⁸ Clearly, he was advocating leniency toward those who desired the proper rituals, but were unable to meet the canonical requirements. Although later scholars, such as Zhu Xi, found Sima's prescriptions too complicated, Sima's own idea was to simplify the canonical regulations.

Concerning rich mourners, Sima saw that some exceeded the limits determined by their status, limits derived either from Confucian ritual laws or the state's ordinances. In particular, he railed against "lavish burials" that were popular among the wealthy, whether merchants, large landowners, or well-to-do officials:

[Commentary:] In ancient times, only the Son of Heaven was able to have a passageway [into the subterranean vaulted tomb] and all the rest lowered the coffin directly into the grave pit. These days some people often make a passageway; it is against ritual [regulations].⁴⁹

[Commentary:] According to *Ordinances of Funerals and Burials*, the first rank's grave is eighteen feet in depth; each rank below reduces the depth by two feet ... the sixth rank and below cannot be deeper than eight feet, and people of the fifth rank and above can have a tomb inscription tablet.... For all mourning and burials, those who cannot afford the ritual requirements can follow the lower rank's requirements. *People of lower rank, regardless of their wealth, cannot follow the requirements above their rank...*⁵⁰ (Italics added.)

Sima Guang based his case against such practices on two points: first, they violated the Song state's sumptuary regulations, and second, luxurious tombs would tempt grave robbers, which would consequently bring harm to the deceased.⁵¹ Regarding the first point, he cited article 14 of *Ordinances of Funerals and Burials*: "People of lower rank, regardless of their wealth, cannot follow the requirements above their rank."⁵² He condemned the tendency to upgrade one's social status in the ritual setting by making use of one's wealth. Sima recognized the violators' intent in his criticism: "It was unfair and selfish that the rich would be richer in the other world."⁵³ He, however, avoided discussion of the

⁴⁸ Sun, *Liji jijie*, "Tangong, xia," 11, p. 278.

⁴⁹ *Shuyi* 7, p. 79.

⁵⁰ *Shuyi* 7, p. 80.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Tianyige cang Mingchaoben Tianshengling jiaozheng*, p. 358.

⁵³ Sima Guang, "Zanglun," in *Sima Wengong wenji* 司馬溫公文集 (Shanghai: Shangwu yin-

validity of such an assumption by limiting the issue to the realms of practicality and ritual stipulation.

The nonindexical elements of a rite do not have significance in and of themselves, but guidelines for them are specified in the canonical texts. In *Shuyi* we see that such elements are concerned with materials for treating the dead body, mourner's hairstyles, funeral items, and where in the house the dead body could be placed.⁵⁴ Sima expressed considerable flexibility here because many materials used in antiquity were no longer available or very hard to come by. In many cases, he recommended simplification of ritual prescriptions or replacement of traditional materials with those that were currently available. For example, he reaffirmed that the amount of the contribution could not be regulated, because it was contingent upon the donor's financial situation:

[Commentary:] Therefore, in ancient times there were rites for offering condolences that used a variety of items. An offering of pearl and jade was called *han* 含; clothes and blanket for the deceased were called *sui* 襚; cart and horse were called *feng* 贈; [and] material goods and money were called *fu* 賻. All of these items for the deceased's dressing and burial were means to aid the household with the funeral. These days, people bring facsimile paper money, which becomes ash [with the ritual burning]. This is merely wasteful. How does this benefit the bereaved household? Gold, cloth, money, and grain are acceptable as donations; their amount is dependent upon the financial situation of the donor.⁵⁵

Contributions to express condolences were virtuous acts that served the purpose of relieving the family's financial burden. Here, he reemphasized that the amount of the contribution could not be regulated because it was contingent upon the donor's financial situation. His project of simplifying the prescriptions of classical texts was mainly applied to nonindexical elements.

Rites with messages at odds with the central messages of the tradition are also present in the canons. They reflected the customs of the time when the canons were created and which became embarrassing to later Confucians on philosophical grounds.⁵⁶ For example, the rites of

shu guan, 1937) 13, pp. 299-301.

⁵⁴ See, in order, *Shuyi* 5, pp. 50, 49; 7, p. 81; and 5, p. 50.

⁵⁵ *Shuyi* 5, pp. 55-56; Sima, "Xu fu li" 序賻禮, in *Sima Wengong wenji* 11, p. 270.

⁵⁶ Song scholar-officials during Renzong's reign expressed doubts about Heaven's revealing its intention in written words. They vigorously opposed the state's nationwide ritual program of royal ancestor veneration based on beliefs in allegedly revealed texts written by Heaven,

soul-calling,⁵⁷ the worship of the god of the earth,⁵⁸ and the employing of the exorcists during the procession,⁵⁹ all grew out of a belief in the spirit world, which Confucius neither denied nor affirmed. Though the above-mentioned three rites had been practiced since antiquity, they did not derive from a concrete understanding of the world-beyond as a place wherein the deceased would reside. Sima, who did not engage with metaphysical issues, endorsed these practices without elaboration.

Sima reserved his harshest criticism for practices that did not have canonical warrant and were contrary to the central message of Confucianism. These were contemporary customs that can be categorized as follows: (1) noncanonical forms of rite interpolated into classical Confucian funeral practice; (2) the partial use of another kind of ritual, such as leaving the dead body in a Buddhist temple; and (3) a completely different set of rituals, such as cremation.⁶⁰ Examples of noncanonical forms of ritual were the placing of a painted portrait of the deceased behind the “soul cloth” (*hunbo* 魂帛) and decorating the soul cloth:

Some popular customs employ a cap, hat, clothes, and shoes to decorate the cloth as if it were a living person. Its excellence becomes vulgarity, which should not be followed. Another current custom is to place a portrait of the deceased behind the cloth. It is

tianshu 天書. Finally, in 1071, they succeeded in disqualifying this ritual program; see Suzanne Cahill, “Taoism at the Sung Court: The Heavenly Text Affair of 1008,” in *Bulletin of Sung and Yuan Studies* 16 (1980), pp. 23–44; Patricia Ebrey, “Portrait Sculptures in Imperial Ancestral Rites in Song China,” *TP* 87.1 (1997), pp. 42–43; *CB* 74, p. 1699; and 225, p. 5489.

⁵⁷ *Shuyi* 5, p. 47. The origins of the soul-calling rite are often assumed to have had roots in shamanistic practices of ancient southern China. The custom is indeed recorded in *Songs of Chu* 楚辭, presumably written, or collected, by Qu Yuan 屈原 (4th c. BC). It is also endorsed both in *Yili* and *Liji*. See David Hawke, trans., annot., intro., *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), pp. 104–5, 110; Ying-shih Yü, “O Soul, Come Back! A Study in the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China,” *HJAS* 47.2 (1987): 363–95.

⁵⁸ *Shuyi* 7, p. 77. This rite was meant to apologize to the god of the burial spot for invading his territory. It appeared in the *Kaiyuan li*, which means it was later incorporated into the Confucian ritual. Anna Isim, “Status Symbol and Insurance Policy: Song Land Deeds for the Afterlife,” in Dieter Kuhn, ed., *Burial in Song China* (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 1994), p. 311. Also see Terry Kleeman, “Land Contracts and Related Documents,” in Editorial Committee for the Commemoration of Professor Ryokao Makio’s Seventeenth Birthday, *Religion, Thought and Science in China* (Tokyo: Kokisho Kankokai, 1984), p. 12.

⁵⁹ *Shuyi* 8, p. 89. The exorcists were employed presumably to clear the road to the burial spot of unwanted spirits and evil influences; *SS* 124, pp. 2909–10. For a Song scholar’s discussion on the legitimacy of employing exorcists at funerals, see Patricia Ebrey, *Chu Hsi’s Family Rituals: A Twelfth-century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1991), p. 115.

⁶⁰ Although Song emperor Taizu (r. 960–976) prohibited cremation, people continued to practice it anyway. In Renzong’s era, the state reversed its previous regulations and endorsed cremation because land was scarce and the population was dense, hence land burial was not possible in all cases; *SS* 125, pp. 2918–19.

all right to use a portrait of a man that was drawn during his lifetime. However, needless to say this is not the case for a woman. While she was alive, she lived in a secluded women's quarter. When she went out, she traveled by covered wagon, her face veiled. After her death, how can one allow a painter to enter her secluded chamber?⁶¹

Essentially, Sima Guang objected to any show of the deceased's corporeality as if he or she were alive. In this same vein, he also criticized dirges, often sung by hired entertainers who drummed loudly, for the purpose of "entertaining a corpse."⁶² This practice contrasted sharply with neo-Confucian thought, which contended that the substance of the spirit was dispersed after death. Sima followed this idea when he attacked Buddhist punishment in hell, arguing that the dead, having no substance, experienced no bodily pain. Finally, he condemned the burning of facsimile paper money, intended as a payment to the gods on behalf of the deceased's well-being.⁶³ It was widely practiced to the extent that people brought it as a donation, and the government granted facsimile paper money to officials' funerals.⁶⁴ Although Sima was aware that this custom was based on belief in the spirit world, he avoided any explicit discussion of the belief itself, choosing to ground his criticism in practical concerns.

The incorporation of Buddhist practices into funeral rituals was clearly beyond the boundary of canonical warrant. Sima was especially disapproving of scholar-officials who used Buddhist temples for the temporary storage of corpses, even after performing Confucian funeral rituals. To do so was popular, as some wanted to wait for an auspicious burial time and others were unable to afford an immediate funeral.⁶⁵ Sima also brought up the problem of having Buddhist monks preside

⁶¹ *Shuyi* 5, p. 54.

⁶² *Shuyi* 6, p. 65. In 984, the government concluded that dirges and theatrical performance in front of the soul-seat was damaging to culture and humanity, and declared them criminal. Those who hired dirge singers would be jailed and forbidden to take state examinations; *SS* 125, pp. 2917-18.

⁶³ *Shuyi* 5, pp. 55-56. The ritual of burning facsimile paper money was traced back to the Han imperial family. Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang included it as a part of imperial sacrifice and thereby its origins were often ascribed to him. During the Tang, emperors bestowed facsimile burial money to officials. Hou Chinglang, *Monnaies d'offrande et la notion de trésorerie dans la religion chinoise* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des hautes études chinoises, 1975), pp. 9, 14 and 17, argues that from the Sui dynasty on, this ritual became popular among people of all social strata. See Anna Seidel, "Buying One's Way to Heaven," *History of Religions* 17.3-4 (1978), pp. 419-31. During the Northern Song, the practice was used quite widely, from palace royals to commoners. Sima Guang records Confucian skepticism about this ritual.

⁶⁴ *SS* 124, p. 2908.

⁶⁵ *Shuyi* 7, pp. 75-76.

over death rituals after the Confucian one had been performed.⁶⁶ Cremation was often the first step, as per Buddhist tradition, and services were held every seventh day until the forty-ninth day after death in order to accumulate merit for the deceased. Sima argued that these practices violated Confucian norms in numerous ways. First of all, cremation was not a proper treatment for a dead body. Second, in many cases Buddhist practitioners placed *sutras* inside the tomb and built pagodas as a part of the process of accumulating merit for the deceased:

[Commentary:] It is the current custom that [many people] believe in the misleading words of Buddhism. Right after death, seven times on every seventh day, on the hundredth day, on the first and the second anniversary of the death, and on the day of the removal of mourning clothes, they provide food for the monks and hold memorial services. Some perform the Great Water-Land Purgation, copy Buddhist *sutras*, cast sculptures, and build pagodas and temples. *They say that these rituals will obliterate the outrageous sins of the deceased.* [Not only that, but] the deceased will be reborn in heaven and enjoy all kinds of pleasures. Those who do not perform these rituals will certainly enter hell, be sliced, roasted, pounded, and ground up, experiencing eternal waves of suffering... In addition, what Buddhists call heaven and hell is a strategy to encourage goodness and punish evil. But unless one dispenses this [reward and punishment] fairly, how can even ghosts be governed? For this reason, the Tang-dynasty prefect of Luzhou, Li Dan 李丹 (d.u.), wrote to his younger sister as follows: “*If heaven does not exist, that is all. If it does, then virtuous people will ascend there. If hell does not exist, that is all. If it does, then morally inferior people will enter it.*”⁶⁷ (italics added)

In this passage, Sima’s criticism of various Buddhist death rituals points out the wrong notion – that the mourners’ ritual performance could actually influence the ultimate situation of the deceased’s afterlife. By citing Li Dan, Sima neither confirms nor negates the existence of heaven and hell, and, furthermore, he highlights their ability, merely as concepts, to steer people to moral action while alive: if they do not exist, then as to one’s life “that is all”; but if they do exist, then it is only moral persons who will enter heaven. Here, Sima also shows an attitude of agnosticism – typical in Confucian writings – whereby the matter of the existence of heaven and hell is not given a definite posi-

⁶⁶ *Shuyi* 6, p. 63; 7, p. 76.

⁶⁷ *Shuyi* 5, pp. 54–55.

tion. A key Confucian precedent is the following passage in *Analects*: “The Master never talked of wonders, feats of strength, disorders of nature, or spirits.”⁶⁸

In short, Sima, without engaging arguments on Buddhist notions of heaven and hell, has emphasized that heaven and hell were conceptual tools for encouraging moral actions. While leaving a possibility of heaven’s existence, he has indicated that the moral actions of the deceased, not the death rituals offered for the deceased, should be the basis for one’s situation in a world-beyond, if it exists.

Sima’s criticism of Buddhism in general and of Buddhist death rituals in particular, especially the Water-Land Purgation, was linked to his criticism of the government’s facilitation of those rituals for both private and public services.⁶⁹ The government granted tax exemptions to certain temples, recognizing that they had taken up the task of tending family graves and of holding memorial services for various high officials and members of royal families.⁷⁰ Sima showed his distaste for this in his memorials to the emperor that criticized the throne’s desire to build a Buddhist temple near Renzong’s tomb so that monks could care for it. Sima’s criticism was in line with certain scholar-officials’ efforts to suppress the custom of entrusting graves to Buddhist temples. To supplant the practice, Sima promoted the ancient custom of building a family shrine (*jiamiao* 家廟), which had been revived during Renzong’s reign.⁷¹

For Sima, ritual practice amounted to an embodiment of moral and social principles, and it should fit one’s place in the social order. He espoused flexibility in terms of the material fulfillment of ritual requirements when resources were limited, as long as the ritual expressed the universal virtue of filial piety. However, he was sharply critical of the rich for their excessive expenditures in death rituals, on the grounds that they were going beyond what was permitted for their official rank. Finally, he reserved his harshest condemnation for non-Confucian death rituals, especially those presumed to influence the deceased’s well-being

⁶⁸ *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Arthur Waley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 120.

⁶⁹ For Sima’s broad-based criticism of Buddhism and Daoism, see “Yan Yongzhaoling jiansi zhazi” 言永昭陵建寺劄子, in *Sima Wengong wenji* 4, p. 78, and “Chizhuang” 斥莊, 14, p. 316; *CB* 192, p. 4778.

⁷⁰ Chikusa, “Sōdai funji kō”; Bai, “Songdai de gongdesi yu fensi.”

⁷¹ In 1041, the government issued an edict regulating the building of family shrines in accordance with official rank; *SS* 125, pp. 2917–78; *CB* 169, pp. 4070–71. See Chikusa, “Sōdai funji kō,” pp. 49–50. On the later development of this practice, see Timothy Brook, “Funerary Ritual and the Building of Lineage in Late Imperial China,” *HJAS* 49.2 (1989), pp. 465–95.

positively in the imagined world-beyond, which in turn challenged his notion of ritual as having an end in and of itself.

PROBLEMS WITH THE SPIRIT
WORLD AND THE WORLD-BEYOND

Sima Guang recognized that ritual practices that violated Confucian regulations derived from the practitioner's belief in the spirit world and the world-beyond. Yet some Confucian ritual practices did imply the existence of the spirit world; how did he make the distinction between valid and invalid ritual? Even more fundamentally, how did he discuss topics about which the Confucian tradition maintained a deliberate silence? How did Sima deal with certain Confucian ritual practices, such as divination, that were at odds with his conception of ritual but were endorsed in the Confucian liturgical tradition?

Although, as mentioned above, the mainstream Confucian tradition tended to abstain from discussion of the spirit world and the world-beyond, its rituals implied their existence. Examples in *Shuyi*, which gathers from the appropriate classics the proper ritual program in proper order, of the implication of the existence of the spirit world and spirits are the following: (1) the soul-calling rite,⁷² which was an attempt to bring back the soul to this world before it takes off on its final journey; (2) condolences and mourning,⁷³ whereby the deceased is not yet treated as a spirit before his or her integration into the other world; (3) the rite of sending away the coffin,⁷⁴ being a report to the ancestors that the coffin will be removed from the house and go toward the grave; (4) worship of the god of the earth,⁷⁵ which informs the deity that the corpse will be buried; and (5) installation of the spirit tablet after burial:⁷⁶ the deceased joins the ancestors and can bless descendants. In the above rites, which mark off the soul's transition, the spirit world is implied as the background; and spiritual beings such as ancestors and the god of the earth are addressed as recipients of offerings.

Despite the apparent presence of the notion of the spirit world in the Confucian death rituals, the tradition failed to offer a systematic and coherent concept of the spirit world, partly due to the eclectic nature of the canonical rituals themselves. As such, two different ideas of the soul after death are present in Sima Guang's *Shuyi*. One is that the con-

⁷² *Shuyi* 5, p. 47.

⁷³ *Shuyi* 5, pp. 55–58; and 6, pp. 61–66, respectively.

⁷⁴ *Shuyi* 8, pp. 88–89.

⁷⁵ *Shuyi* 8, p. 91.

⁷⁶ *Shuyi* 8, pp. 93–98.

nection between the soul and the body ends with death, and the former disperses with no substance retained. The other suggests that the soul embarks on a journey to the other world and later becomes present in the sacrifice through the medium of the spirit tablet:

The deceased's body and spirit are separate. The deceased's body enters the earth, then decays and disappears along with wood, stone, and so forth. The spirit (*shen* 神) floats like wind and fire. We do not know about it.⁷⁷

Your body returns to the earth, and your spirit (*shen*) returns to the [ancestor] hall. The spirit tablet having been made ready, I humbly request that your revered soul (*ling* 靈) abandon the old [body] and follow the new [spirit tablet], depending on this, relying on this.⁷⁸

The first quotation – from one of Sima's vernacular commentaries – reflects a Song scholar's understanding of what happens to the spirit after death; this was later fully articulated in a popular line of thinking called the Learning of the Way (*daoxue* 道學).⁷⁹ The metaphor of wind and fire is applied to the spirit (*shen* 神) because it has an immateriality akin to that of the *qi* 氣 of the deceased that dispersed completely. Sima derived the second quotation from the liturgical address that occurs when the liturgist installs the spirit tablet in the ancestral hall and calls upon the spirit to be present in the tablet after shedding its physical body. As such, the ritual context of ancestor veneration assumes that the spirit is present in the spirit tablet. The soul's journey to the other world in the soul-calling rite, by contrast, relied on another kind of imagination—one that asserts a dwelling place for the soul in the other world.

Thanks to Confucius' decision to remove the spirit world from his discourse, this kind of conceptual incoherence remained implicit, but unproblematized in the classical texts and by Confucian thinkers.⁸⁰ There was also no notion of communication between spirits and ritual participants, which we see in the *Analects*:

⁷⁷ *Shuyi* 5, p. 54.

⁷⁸ *Shuyi* 8, p. 92.

⁷⁹ Daniel K. Gardner, "Ghost and Spirit in the Sung neo-Confucian World: Chu Hsi on *Kuei-Shen*," *JAO* 115.4 (1995), pp. 598–611.

⁸⁰ Whether or not the soul had knowledge was an issue Confucius avoided. Later, Xunzi would take up the issue, arguing that the dead did not have any knowledge at all, and that the funeral was held to console the mourners; sect. "Lilun," in *Xunzi*, pp. 105–26; see also sect. "Discourse on Ritual," in *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, trans. Eric L. Hutton (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2014), pp. 206–16.

Of the saying, “The word sacrifice is like the word ‘present’; one should sacrifice to a spirit as though that spirit was present,” the Master said, “If I am not present at the sacrifice, it is as though there were no sacrifice.”⁸¹

The words “as though” inform us that Confucius did not really make an issue of whether or not the spirits were present at the sacrifice. Rather, he emphasized that by assuming their presence, practitioners were able to take the ritual seriously. In this context, the spirit world has *syntactic value*, which systematizes rites and renders them meaningful.⁸² This conception of the spirit world was linked to Confucius’s idea of Heaven as the source of ethics, but not something to be known or defined. Whereas Confucians tended to confine transcendence within the limits of syntactic value only, “heterodox” practices presented other notions of the spirit world and the world-beyond. Many narrative imaginations were filling in the blanks concerning Heaven and/or the world-beyond that Confucian discourse had left. The rituals that Sima condemned were expressions of such narrative imaginations. However, just as Confucius left Heaven and the spirit world to the realm of the unspoken, so did Sima.

Sima’s abstaining from engagement with the issue of the spirit world and the world-beyond was well illustrated in his treatment of the widespread practice of geomancy or *fengshui* 風水. Geomancy is a form of divination, itself a general term referring to rituals that consult spirits or other supernatural means to inquire about future affairs. For predicting future affairs, tortoise and milfoil divination (*bushi* 卜筮) had been practiced before Confucius’ time and continued long after his death. On the other hand, for siting buildings there was geomancy, various forms of which had been applied since very early times in Chinese civilization, yet a relatively more unified scheme of cosmic-terrestrial, and other, coordinations appeared only beginning in the Han. It was used especially for siting graves, under the assumption that the appropriate location would positively affect the descendants of the tomb occupant.⁸³

⁸¹ *Analects of Confucius*, p. 97.

⁸² I am borrowing the term, “syntactic value” from Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1998), pp. 116–17. He argues that nirvana has a latent, syntactic value that organizes the other doctrines within Buddhism via its location at the symbolic center.

⁸³ Ole Brunn, *An Introduction to Feng Shui* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 19–23.

During the Song, continuing its long tradition, *fengshui* was employed for selecting the proper time and place of burial. The need for geomantic verification was partly the reason that large number of unburied corpses were kept in Buddhist temples for years and even decades.⁸⁴ Royal families, in particular, often employed geomancy to discover the most suitable gravesites. For example, the mother of Song Taizu (r. 960–976) specified in her will that her body be buried in an auspicious place so that her descendants would flourish.⁸⁵ Sima Guang added his voice to those of other scholar-officials who opposed geomancy for both practical and metaphysical reasons, as seen in his essay, “Discussion of Burials” (“Zanglun” 葬論). He declared, “Wealth and lifespan have nothing to do with geomantic burial practice, but with Heaven’s will.”⁸⁶ By this statement, he debunked the belief that applying geomantic techniques would affect the wealth and lifespan of the descendants; he declared that Heaven was the ultimate agent of determining the human fate. He also discussed this issue in *Shuyi*:

The current custom is to believe in the explanations of burial specialists (*zangshi* 葬師). Having already selected a year, month, date, and hour, burial specialists also select a mountain-and-water configuration [for burial spot]. They believe that geomancy affects many aspects of the lives of descendants including “wealth or poverty”; “social status and intelligence”; and “longevity or premature death.” The reliance on geomancy at the present time is far beyond what is reasonable... Furthermore, *geomancers* (*yinyangjia* 陰陽家) claim that the year, month, date, and hour of birth are sufficient to determine one’s fate for a lifetime... [If this is the case,] [h]ow can one alter it through burial practice? These two explanations contradict each other; but people believe in both. Their falsity has serious consequences. If indeed a burial could result in either harm or a blessing for people, for the sake of descendants, how can one bear to allow one’s parent’s body to smell, decay, and be exposed without being buried, for the sake of one’s self-

⁸⁴ For example, when empress Wencheng died in 1054, her burial was held along with those of her grandparents and parents because their burials had been delayed for many decades; *CB* 177, p. 4287.

⁸⁵ “Sangzang bu” 喪葬部, in Chen Menglei 陳夢雷 and Jiang Tingxi 蔣廷錫, eds., *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (Shanghai, Yuanshu jicheng yinshuju, 1884) 709, p. 20.

⁸⁶ Sima, “Zanglun,” in *Sima Wengong wenji* 13, p. 300. Wang Yucheng’s 王禹偁 essay “Wufu xianhou lun” 五富先後論 also presented the same idea; in *Xiaoxu ji* 小畜集 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1963) 9, p. 61.

ish interests? This is the worst case of violating ritual and being harmful to moral principle.⁸⁷ (*italics added*)

The above statements cover many issues. First, the belief that one can alter one's fate is at odds with the fundamental concept of Confucianism, namely, the commandment of Heaven (*tianming* 天命). The semantics of *ming* incorporate both fate and commandment. By this double meaning, the concept of *tianming* invites individuals to accept their life-situations, and yet to fulfill their mission by using one's talents and morality endowed by Heaven.⁸⁸ However, the concept of fate in geomancy does not include a sense of fulfilling one's mission by positing that people are able to control fate, to some extent, by acting upon the spirit world or cosmic flow. This belief is diametrically opposed to Sima's notion that ritual has an end in itself and the spirit world has, as mentioned, the syntactic value of organizing ritual and grounding morality. In addition, geomancy inverts the relation between the descendants and the deceased. In Confucian thought it was the descendants' moral obligation to help the deceased transit to the realm of the spirit world through the proper treatment of his or her remains. As Sima sees it, geomancy is performed for the benefit of descendants, often at the cost of mistreatment of the deceased's remains, a wholly undesirable outcome from the standpoint of filial piety.

Although Sima Guang condemned geomancy, he faced difficulty in abolishing divination, the techniques of which were given a place in *Kaiyuan li*. Because divination had been an enduring practice within the Confucian burial tradition, having been endorsed in the text of *Yili*, Sima Guang's strategy was to allow it partially. He said that there was no need to undertake divination for selecting the year, month, day, and time for burial, yet he did permit divining for the burial place.⁸⁹ In so doing, he removed the possibility of violating the ritual regulations relating to the mourning period as well as other negative impacts on the corpse. In keeping this stance, Sima was very caustic towards a plan to use geomancy to select a spot for an imperial mausoleum, because

⁸⁷ *Shuyi* 7, p. 75.

⁸⁸ Ding Weixiang, "Destiny and Heavenly Ordinances: Two Perspectives on the Relationship between Heaven and Human Beings," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 4.1 (2009), pp. 13-37.

⁸⁹ However, in the case of divination for the small and grand sacrifices for auspiciousness (*xiaoxiang* 小祥 and *daxiang* 大祥), it was used to select a day within the regulated month: "If the first ten days' period turns out to be inauspiciousness, try the second ten days' period; if it is inauspiciousness as well, select one auspicious day among the last ten days' period." *Shuyi* 9, p. 99.

it delayed the burial.⁹⁰ Though he did eventually endorse divination for determining the burial spot by adopting a pragmatic viewpoint, he disapproved the notion that burial siting would influence the lives of descendants:

The *Classic of Filial Piety* says, “Conduct divination in order to select the grave plot, and lay the dead body there in peace.” As the text specifies, the purpose of divination for the grave plot is to distinguish its auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. *It is not like current geomancers’* inspecting of hillocks, and wind and water terrain... Naturally, the heart of the filial son is worried about the grave’s depth and distance: if it is shallow, then it might be dug up by people; if it is deep, then it is moist and the corpse will decay quickly. Therefore, [one should] certainly select the place where soil is abundant and the water table is low, and bury the corpse.⁹¹ (italics added)

Sima here states that the purpose of divination for selecting burial plots differs from that of the contemporary practices in geomancy. His cursory justification of burial site divination, without any further clarification of what the spirits do during the selection process, resonates with the Confucian silence about the world of spirits. In expressing his approval of divination, Sima merely attempts to invert the notion of geomancy by saying that the purpose of selecting a good burial place was derived from filial piety. In this case a person is concerned with the state of the corpse, not with his or her own well-being.⁹²

Sima Guang hewed closely to the Confucian prescript of not speaking about the affairs of the spirit world and world-beyond even in his criticism of noncanonical rituals. While there was a fine line between geomancy and divination in terms of their ideas and practices, there was a huge difference in their status of canonical warrant. The use of geomancy that lacked canonical grounding he saw as a moral failing, in that descendants sought blessings for themselves through burial practice. However, Sima reluctantly endorsed divination as having originated in the customs of the past and become a part of canonical ritual. He reinterpreted their meanings by his divesting the magical effects from such customs and invested them with Confucian values.

⁹⁰ Sima, “Yan shanleng zedi zhazi” 言山陵擇地劄子, in *Sima Wengong wenji*, 4, p. 78.

⁹¹ *Shuyi* 7, p. 75.

⁹² He makes a similar argument in his explanation of soul calling, commenting that it was practiced out of the filial son’s wish that the soul would come back. He dismisses the possibility that this ritual could result in the deceased’s actual resuscitation.

CONCLUSION

Sima Guang believed in the moral reformation of society through the dissemination of Confucian ritual norms. In writing *Shuyi*, he endeavored to simultaneously revive the ideas of the Confucian ritual canons and adjust their requirements in order to meet contemporary needs. Sima maintained that rituals were the locus in which the hierarchical social order should be manifested according to official rank. He condemned non-Confucian and noncanonical ritual practices, such as various Buddhist death rituals, lavish burials, and geomancy. He especially objected to the extravagant burials performed by wealthy people because he believed that the wealthy imagined a world-beyond where the status of the deceased could be improved by their material investments in ritual performance. From a rigorous Confucian point of view, these practices dismissed moral aspects from transcendence and from ritual, and made ritual primarily a means to wish fulfillment. His conception of ritual testifies to his vision of a fundamentally hierarchical society in which official rank is (and must be) the basis. It was one element of his effort to remind people of their place in the hierarchy, a place built on official rank, not wealth.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CB</i>	Li Tao 李燾, <i>Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian</i> 續資治通鑑長編
<i>Shuyi</i>	Sima Guang 司馬光, <i>Sima shi shuyi</i> 司馬氏書儀
<i>SS</i>	Tuo Tuo 脫脫, <i>Song shi</i> 宋史
<i>WLCJ</i>	Wang Anshi 王安石, <i>Wang Linchuan ji</i> 王臨川集