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Address/275 Ta Lung Street, Taipei, Taiwan R.O.C.

Author/Tung Chin-yue

Translated by/David Boersma, Andrew Morton

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A Guide to the Confucius Ceremony

Author
Tung Chin-yue



三
Sunshade
(shan).

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建鼓

繖

Umbrella (san), also used as a parasol.



鼗

Drum (t'ao), a small hand-held drum with beads on strings that strike the membranes when the handle is spun.



Drum (chien-ku), mounted on an upright post with an X-shaped base ornamented with four carved lions.



麾

Banner (hui) of light red silk, used to direct the music and songs.



節

Tasseled Staff (chieh), a banner with tassels of silken cord hung at varying levels, used to direct movement.



斧

Halberd (fu), a type of weapon with a handle and a honed, gourd-shaped edge.



鉞

Halberd (yüeh), similar to the "fu" halberd, but slightly larger.





晉鼓

Drum (chin-ku), a large drum mounted on a wooden frame.



應鼓

Drum (ying-ku), a drum mounted on an upright post with an X-shaped base.

搏拊

Drum (po-fu), a small drum that is hung round the neck. It has rice husks in its cavity, and is used to set tempo.



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I. Terminology of the Confucius Ceremony

Sacrificial rites to Confucius, China's supremely esteemed and revered Sage, are known in Chinese as the "display-presentation ceremony," denoting the displays of music and dance, and the presentations of food and wine, that are made in veneration of Confucius during the ceremony.

According to the ancient Book of Rites, as early as the Chou dynasty (1122-255 B.C.) it was customary for schools to hold quarterly sacrifices to demonstrate respect for deceased teachers and their teachings. At that time, however, such ceremonies were not devoted to anyone in particular, but were intended for all deceased persons who had made worthy contributions to knowledge and education.

During his lifetime, Confucius laid considerable emphasis on education and it was in this field that he had extremely high attainments. As his influence spread far and wide, he gradually became the object of these quarterly sacrifices. In A.D. 581 Confucius became "Grand Master" by imperial decree, while at the same time becoming the primary focus of these ceremonies. These ceremonies thus became specifically "Confucian".

II. The Evolution of Confucian Sacrificial Rites

Confucius lived for 73 years from 551-479 B.C., during the Chou dynasty. Two years after his death, the ruler of the State of Lu decreed that Confucius' former residence at Chüeh Li, Chufu (in modern Shantung province) be established as a temple. He also decreed that his robes, headgear, books, chariot and lute be safeguarded and worshipped on a regular basis in accordance with the rites. It was at this stage that lesser noblemen began sacrificing to Confucius.

The Han emperor Kao-tzu was the first of a number of kings and emperors to offer sacrifices to Confucius. In 195 B.C. he sacrificed a bull, a ram and a boar to Confucius while journeying through the state of Lu.

The practice of ennobling Confucius' descendants out of reverence for the sage began when Emperor Yuan-ti (r. 48-33 B.C.) enlisted the services of a 13th-generation descendant of Confucius, K'ung Pa, as his imperial teacher. The emperor brought him into the inner court, gave him a title, bestowed upon him a fiefdom of 800 households and also made seasonal sacrifices to Confucius out of tax revenues.

In A.D. 29, Emperor Kuang-wu began sending high-ranking officials to offer sacrifices at the Confucian temple at Chüeh Li, Chufu.

Until A.D. 59, all Confucian sacrificial ceremonies were held at the Confucian temple in Chufu. In that year, Emperor Ming-ti initiated the practice of sacrificing to the Duke of Chou and Confucius at schools throughout the land. Since that time, the central and provincial governments have maintained the Confucian ceremonies in all schools, thus making them an important national activity.

To be enshrined in a Confucian temple has been regarded as a high honor by courtiers and scholars ever since A.D. 72, the year in which Emperor Ming-ti went in person to sacrifice at Chufu.

III. Establishment of the Modern Confucius Ceremony

Confucian sacrifices have been regularly carried out since the Han dynasty (206 B.C. — A.D. 220) with rites that have gained in solemnity. This has been so regardless of where the sacrifices have taken place, whether in Chufu, the imperial capital or regional centers. The titles attributed to Confucius have also advanced with the times. Posthumously awarded the title "Supreme Teacher" in A.D. 1, he gained increasing recognition throughout the ages, and in A.D. 739 received the title "Prince of Culture".

Confucian rites also developed over time to embrace sacrifices to Confucius' disciples and other Confucian worthies. The sacrifice to Confucius himself is known as the "Principal Consecration", while that to the others is termed the "Secondary Consecration".

In contrast to earlier periods when Confucian sacrifices were held with absolute regularity in strict conformity with the rites, the unstable conditions which prevailed at the end of the imperial era at the turn of the twentieth century and which persisted into the Republican era resulted in sacrificial ceremonies being held less frequently. However, in 1968, at the direction of President Chiang Kai-shek, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior formed a commission of scholars and experts, which was divided into four units. Under the supervision of Yu Fang-hao, Wang Yü-ch'ing, Chuang Pen-li and K'ung Te-ch'eng, these were responsible for conducting research into the ceremony's ritual procedure, costumes, ritual utensils, and music and dance. With the re-establishment of proper ceremonial rites, a trial ceremony was held at the Confucius temple in Taipei and, finally, in 1970, after two further years of investigations and improvements, the official rites were formally implemented by the Ministry of the Interior.

Since the full ceremony took 90 minutes to perform, the council of the Confucius Temple in Taipei, with the approval of the Ministry of the Interior, decided to make the ceremony more appropriate to the times. After making changes over a two-year period, a ceremony lasting only 60 minutes was decided upon. This shortened version has been used ever since.

IV. Sequence of Events in the Modern Confucius Ceremony

(1) The Ceremony Begins

Once the preliminary ceremonies have been attended to, the main sacrificial ceremony to Confucius begins.

(2) First Drum Roll

The drummer positioned before the Chin drum at the west end of the Yi Gates (the "Rites" Gates, located in the wall between the Ta Ching Hall and the Central Courtyard) strikes the drum frame once before sounding a continuous roll of alternate heavy and light beats, which build up to a crescendo and gradually fade until a final beat is struck on the drum's center. At this point, the musician positioned by the Yung bell, located at the east end of the Yi Gates, strikes the bell once to mark the end of the first movement.

Due to the bell's resonance, this single beat is clear and prolonged. The purpose of the drum and the bell is to stir up emotions of piety and reverence in the worshippers in admiration of Confucius.

(3) Second Drum Roll

This resembles the first drum roll, except that the initial beat on the drum frame and the final beats on the drum and bell are all doubled.

During this stage, musicians, dancers and deacons enter the Main Courtyard in orderly procession and line up alongside the steps on either side of the Ta Ching Hall, the main hall of the temple.

(4) Third Drum Roll

This also resembles the first drum roll, except that the initial and final beats are each played three times.

During this stage, the deacons call out as they lead the Principal Presentation Officer and the Collateral Presentation Officers to positions leading to the steps on either side of Ta Ching Hall.

The drum and bell are sounded in these three opening movements. The number three is representative of multiplicity and indicative of solemnity. The Principal and Collateral Presentations that follow are also completed in three movements.

(5) Ceremonial Attendants Take Their Designated Positions

Musicians carrying banners lead processions of musicians up the eastern and western steps, before taking their designated positions. Dancers carrying tasselled staves lead the dancers from the east and west, converging in the Main Courtyard, from where they diverge and climb the eastern and western steps to take up their positions.

The deacons also separate and march to their proper positions, from which they can perform their duties.

All these musicians, dancers and deacons (consisting of junior or senior high-school students, elementary school students and college students, respectively), advance to the beat of the Chin drum, making five steps and one kowtow in between beats.

(6) The Ceremonial Supervisor Takes His Designated Position

The Ceremonial Supervisor is led by the deacons to his position on the eastern front edge of the Red Stage, where he faces southwest.

Most Ceremonial Supervisors hold the position of Chief of Civil Affairs (or its equivalent) in the local government. They are responsible for rectifying any mistakes which may occur as the ceremony proceeds.

(7) The Assistant Sacrifice Officers Take Their Designated Positions

The Assistant Sacrifice Officers are led by deacons to their positions

on the south side of the Main Courtyard between the Ta Ching Hall and the Yi Gates, facing the Ta Ching Hall.

Most Assistant Sacrifice Officers hold responsible positions within local government or the education system.

(8) The Collateral Presentation Officers Take Their Designated Positions

There are eight officers responsible for making sacrificial presentations to Confucius' disciples, comprising the Philosophers of the east and west, the Assistants of the east and west, the Ancient Sages of the eastern and western corridors, and the Scholars of the eastern and western corridors (hereafter collectively referred to as the Sages and Scholars of the Eastern and Western Corridors). These eight officers are led by deacons to hand-washing stations on either side of the Ta Ching Hall and, after the washing has taken place, they are led to their positions in front of the Assistant Sacrifice Officers, facing the Ta Ching Hall.

Most of the Collateral Presentation Officers are either elected representatives or else hold positions of responsibility within local government or the education system.

(9) The Principal Presentation Officer Takes His Designated Position

The Principal Presentation Officer is led by deacons to first wash his hands before taking his position in front of the Collateral Presentation Officers, facing the Ta Ching Hall.

The Principal Presentation Officer is the head of the local municipal government (the city mayor or equivalent).

(10) Opening the Gates

The deacons pair off in order to open the five Yi (or "Rites") Gates and, beyond them on the south side of the Central Courtyard, the five Ling Hsing (or "Constellar") Gates.

In Confucian temples, the Yi Gates and the Ling Hsing Gates are only opened for the Confucian sacrificial services, being securely barred once the services are concluded. At all other times, except in the case of certain privileged persons, side doors are used for entering or leaving the temple, out of deference to Confucius.

(11) Burying the Sacrificial Remnants

A deacon reverentially carries with both hands the vessels containing the remnants (hair and blood) of the sacrificial animals, from the Ta Ching Hall, across the Main Courtyard, through the Yi Gates, across the Central Courtyard and through the Ling Hsing Gates, before burying them in the grounds on the west side of the central Ling Hsing Gate. The animals sacrificed include a bull, a ram and a boar, which are slaughtered prior to the service.

Traditional custom dictates the use of livestock as the main sacrificial items. Livestock are nourished by the Earth, and so the burial of the remnants after the slaughter serves to compensate the Earth for that which was taken from it. Burial is thus a means of indemnifying the Earth for its continual efforts to nourish the myriads of creatures, so that they may constantly proliferate. The remnants are buried on the western side of the grounds. According to the Theory of the Five Elements, the west is the direction ruled by metal, the element associated with sacrificial slaughter.

(12) Welcoming the Spirit

A drummer sounds three beats on his drum, then the conductor sings out the command for the first rendition of "Perfect Harmony" to be played and sung. The banner-holders raise their banners, the Chu sounding-box (for all musical instruments, see illustrations) is sounded three times, and the T'ao drum is spun round three times. The entire orchestra then plays in harmony as the choir sings in unison. The rhythm is maintained in 4/4 time, the Po bell being sounded at the beginning of each phrase.

The Po-fu drum is sounded once on each beat, the Pien bells and the wooden clappers are sounded on each first beat, and the sonorous stones are sounded on each third beat.

The end of each phrase is marked by three soundings on the T'e Ch'ing (a large sonorous stone), the Po bell and the Chin drum, and by two beats on the Ying drum. This format is repeated for each phrase until the entire song has been sung.

After the music commences, two processions proceed from the east and the west, led by deacons. At the head of the procession, two deacons carry a pair of lanterns and a further two carry a pair of censers. At the rear, two deacons carry Fu halberds, two carry Yüeh halberds, and the last pair carry a fan and a parasol. After passing through the side Yi Gates and Ling Hsing Gates, the processions converge to greet Confucius. They then reform their lines before re-entering the Ta Ching Hall via the central Ling Hsing Gates and Yi Gates. As the deacons pass through the Yi Gates on their way to welcome the spirit, the Master of Ceremonies sings out an order that all should stand in respectful attention facing the Ta Ching Gate (also known as the Yi Gate). This is in order to reverentially welcome the descent of Confucius' spirit.

Shortly after welcoming Confucius' spirit in the Ta Ching Hall, the music ceases on a command sung by the conductor. The keeper of the Yü (wooden tiger) thereupon rasps the 27 teeth on the tiger's back three times with a slat baton. This denotes the cessation of the music, at which point the banner-bearers lower their banners.

(Note: It is not really believed that the spirit actually descends during the ceremony. The ceremony is regarded as a means by which the living can fulfil their desire to express reverence for the deceased.)

(13) First Ceremony of the Three Bows

When the Spirit Welcoming Procession returns to the center of the Heavenly Well (also known as the Main Courtyard) in front of the Ta Ching Hall, the Master of Ceremonies sings out the calls for "first bow", "second bow" and "third bow". All participants bow out of reverence for Confucius.

(14) Presenting the Sacrificial Feast

Sacrifices of various foodstuffs are presented in order to please the spirits. Since these foodstuffs have been prepared and pre-arranged on the altar tables, the deacons merely move and replace the three-legged metal cauldrons to symbolize the preparation of the food.

Ancient sacrificial concepts accord with the principle of "in death as in life," whereby items offered in sacrifice are the same delicacies that the object of sacrifice would have enjoyed while still on this earth. Such a practice helps those still living to entertain thoughts of the deceased, as if he were still alive.

(15) Offering Incense

The conductor sings out the call for a rendition of Ning Ho ("Tranquil Harmony") to be played. The banner-bearers then raise their banners, and the conductor sounds the wooden clappers three times. On this cue the orchestra begins to play with the same 4/4 tempo. The wooden clapper is sounded on each first beat and the Po-fu drum is sounded on all beats. However, neither the Chin drum nor the Po bell is sounded, nor is there any singing.

Once the music commences, the deacons lead the Principal Presentation Officer to wash his hands before leading him to his position in front of the main altar table in the Ta Ching Hall where he offers incense and bows three times. Other deacons simultaneously lead the Collateral Presentation Officers to wash their hands before guiding them to their positions before the altar tables to the Sages and Scholars of the Eastern and Western Corridors in the Ta Ching Hall. Here they also offer incense and bow three times.

(16) Initial Principal Presentation

Musicians begin this presentation by beating the Chin drum and sounding the Yung bell, as in the first drum roll. The conductor then sings out the command for Ning Ho ("Tranquil Harmony"), the banner-bearers raise their banners, and the staffboys raise their tasselled staffs. Then the sounding box, T'ao drum and bell are sounded, whereupon the orchestra and choir begin in unison. Holding short flutes in their left hands and three pheasant tail feathers in their right hands, dancers perform the "eight-fold formation" dance. (Traditionally this consisted of eight rows of eight dancers each. In Taipei, however, owing to limitations of space, the dance is performed in a "six-fold formation" with six rows of six dancers each). The dancers move slowly and gracefully in harmony with the music.

After the music and dance commence, the Principal Presentation Officer is led by deacons to a position in front of Confucius' spirit-tablet in the Ta Ching Hall. From here he makes an offering of silk spirit-money, as well as a libation. He follows this by bowing three times.

The dancers are young boys of elementary school age. In ancient times, there were three types of dances: civil dances, martial dances and dances that blended the two. In civil dances, young boys held feathers and flutes. Martial dances, however, were performed by adolescents of at least fifteen years old, each holding a shield and a spear. The civil/martial dances were performed by adults holding feathers, flutes, shields and spears at the same time.

(17) Initial Collateral Presentation

The Collateral Presentation Officers are led by deacons to positions in front of the spirits of the Sages and Scholars of the Eastern and Western Corridors to offer libations and to bow three times.

(18) Chanting the Blessing

With the completion of the fourth phase of Ning Ho ("Tranquil Harmony"), the conductor sings out the command to cease playing music. At this point, the music and dance temporarily cease and the banner-bearers and staffboys lower their banners and staffs. The Master of Ceremonies sings out the call to stand in respectful attention while deacons chant the blessing.

(19) Second Ceremony of Three Bows

Following the completion of the blessing recitation, the Master of Ceremonies sings out the call for "first bow", "second bow" and "third bow", as all ceremonial participants respectfully perform this ceremony in unison. Upon the completion of the ceremony, the conductor sings out the command to "resume music". The wooden clappers are then sounded three times, the Po bell is sounded once, the banner-bearers and staffboys raise their banners and staffs, the music to Ning Ho ("Tranquil Harmony") is resumed at its fifth phase, and the dancers continue to perform their dance. When this piece of music is completed, the conductor sings out the command to "cease music", the wooden tiger is rasped, the music ceases, and the banner-bearers and staffboys lower their banners and staffs.

(20) Second Principal Presentation

This next presentation commences with the sounding of the Chin drum and the Yung bell, as in the second drum roll. The conductor then sings

out the command for An Ho ("Serene Harmony"), which is to be played as the banner-bearers and staffboys raise their banners and staffs, and the sounding box, the T'ao drum and the bell are sounded one by one. Following this, the music, song and dance begin simultaneously. Since the music has been changed, the positions of the dancers are changed accordingly, and both continue without interruption. As the music and dance commence, the Principal Presentation Officer is once again led by deacons to his position in the Ta Ching Hall before Confucius' spirit-tablet to offer libations and bow three times.

(21) Second Collateral Presentation

The Collateral Presentation Officers are again led by deacons to their positions in front of the spirit of Sages and Scholars of the Eastern and Western Corridors to offer libations and bow three times.

(22) Final Principal Presentation

To commence this presentation, the Chin drum and the Yung bell are sounded as in the third drum roll. The conductor sings the command for Ching Ho ("Luminous Harmony"), and then the banner-bearers and staffboys raise their banners and staffs, and the sounding box is sounded, the T'ao drum is spun and the bell is rung. The music, song and dance then begin simultaneously. The positions of the dancers have again been changed to accompany the change in music. Altogether there are three different presentation dances and the "eight-fold formation" dance consists of a total of 96 postures.

After the music commences, the Principal Presentation Officer is led by deacons to a position in front of Confucius' spirit to offer the final libation and to bow three more times.

(23) Final Collateral Presentation

Deacons lead the Collateral Presentation Officers to positions before the spirits of the Sages and Scholars of the Eastern and Western Corridors to offer their last libations and to bow three more times.

(Note: Since Taipei is the seat of the central government, after the final collateral presentation there are three additional presentations. These are entitled "The President Offers Incense" (the Minister of the Interior usually performs this rite on behalf of the President); "The Recitation of the President's Blessing" (this is normally performed by a deacon while those in attendance continue to stand respectfully); and "The Officer of the Sacrifice Offers Incense" (the present Officer of the Sacrifice is Confucius' 77th lineal descendant, Mr. K'ung Te-ch'eng).

(24) The Drink of Good Fortune and Receipt of Sacrificial Meat

The Principal Presentation Officer is led by deacons to a position before the Ta Ching Hall incense table to imbibe of a drink of sacrificial wine and to receive some sacrificial meat. All of the ceremonial participants face the Ta Ching Hall while bowing courteously three times. In ancient times, it was believed that when prayers were offered to the gods during sacrifices, the gods responded by bestowing blessings on the sacrificial items (i.e. the meat and wine). Partaking of the wine and taking home the meat for later consumption represents the receiving of such blessings.

(25) Removing the Remnants of the Sacrificial Feast

The conductor then sings out the command for the second rendition of Hsien Ho ("Perfect Harmony"), a musician sounds the wooden clappers three times, and the music begins. The second rendition is played without the Chin

drum or the Yung bell, and the time is kept by the wooden clappers and the Po-fu drum.

After the music commences, deacons move the sacrificial utensils, i.e. the bamboo baskets and wooden serving bowls, to symbolize the removal of these objects.

(26) Escorting the Spirit

A drummer sounds one of the drums three times and the conductor sings the call for the third rendition of Hsien Ho ("Perfect Harmony"). The banner-bearers then raise their banners, the keeper of the sounding box sounds his instrument three times and the T'ao drum is spun three times. After this, the orchestra plays in harmony to the accompaniment of the singing of the choir.

Those deacons responsible for welcoming the spirit at this point reorganize themselves into two matching processions as they hold their lanterns, censers, halberds and parasols on either side of the Ta Ching Hall. As they proceed, the Master of Ceremonies sings out the order to "stand in reverential attention" and all the participants face the Spirit Escorting Procession as it prepares to send off Confucius' spirit.

(27) Final Ceremony of Three Bows

As the Spirit Escorting Procession proceeds across the Main Courtyard in the direction of the Yi Gates, the Master of Ceremonies sings out the call for "first bow", "second bow" and "third bow". A respectful posture is maintained by all the participants as Confucius' spirit is escorted back through the Yi Gates and Ling Hsing Gates.

(28) Sending the Silk Spirit-Money and Prayer Inscription

Deacons respectfully carry the prayer inscription and the silk spirit-money from the Ta Ching Hall, through the Yi Gates and Ling Hsing Gates, to

the incineration site, which is located in the center of the grounds beyond the central Ling Hsing Gate, where these items are reverentially incinerated.

The ancients believed that when items offered to the gods were burnt, the gods could then absorb their essence.

(29) Observing the Incineration

The conductor then sings the command for the final rendition of Hsien Ho ("Perfect Harmony") to be performed. A drum and bell are sounded together. Thereafter, the Chin drum is sounded on every first beat and the Yung bell on every third beat.

After the music commences, the Principal Presentation Officer is led by deacons to the incineration site to observe the complete burning of the prayer inscription and the silk spirit-money. The Collateral Presentation Officers and the Assistant Sacrifice Officers position themselves on the southern end of the Ta Ching Hall in front of the Yi Gates, facing the incineration site. The purpose behind "Observing the Incineration" is to express the utmost sincerity during this final stage of the ceremony.

(30) Resuming Positions

The Principal Presentation Officer is led by the deacons back to his position on the southern end of the Ta Ching Hall, facing the hall. The Collateral Presentation Officers and the Assistant Sacrifice Officers also turn around to face the Ta Ching Hall.

(31) Closing the Gates

Deacons simultaneously close and bolt the Yi Gates and Ling Hsing Gates, which will remain securely bolted until the next Confucius ceremony.

(32) Withdrawing Positions

The Principal Presentation Officer, the Collateral Presentation Officers, the Assistant Sacrifice Officers and the Ceremonial Supervisor are all led from their positions in turn by various deacons. The deacons, musicians and dancers divide into two groups to withdraw down the east and west passages to the beat of the Chin drum at a pace of five steps per kowtow.

(33) The Ceremony Concludes

編鐘



Set of Bells (pien-chung), consisting of 24, 16 or 14 bells suspended on a large wooden frame.



"Po" Bell, a large bell, also called the "special bell"

鐃鐘



"Yung" Bell, the largest bell in Confucian temples.

鐃鐘

銅



Cauldron (hsing), a three-legged, double-handled metal cauldron with a lid, used as a food container.

豆



Serving Bowl (tou), a food vessel carved out of wood.

籩



Bamboo Basket (pien), a woven bamboo container for grain, fruit, or other dry food products.

祝文



Prayer Inscription, containing a form of prayer used in sacrificial worship praising divine virtues and beseeching blessings.

祝

Sounding Box (chu), a wooden box-shaped musical instrument painted red, used to initiate music.



帛

Silk Spirit-money, made of plain white silk.

簫

Flute (yüeh), a woodwind instrument made of bamboo.



拍板

Clappers (p'ai-pan), a musical instrument made of nine or six wooden slats strung together at one end and slapped together to beat time.



Sonorous Stone (t'e-ch'ing), a large stone musical instrument suspended on a wooden frame.

特磬



Wooden Tiger (yü), a wooden musical instrument in the shape of a tiger with 27 fin-like projections along its back. These are rasped with a slat baton as a conclusion to music.

敵



Chalice (chüeh), an ancient wine vessel, now used in ritual worship.

爵



Slat Baton (chen), made of 12 slats of bamboo or wood bound in a bundle, used to sound the Wooden Tiger to conclude music.

箠