Asian Culture

(Asian-Pacific Culture)
Quarterly

亞洲文化

Vol. XXV, No. 2
Summer, 1997
(ISSN 0378-8911)

Published by
Asian-Pacific Cultural Center
Asian-Pacific Parliamentarians' Union
Taipei
Republic of China
Achieving Person Through Ritual

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In the Fall of 1996, I attended an academic delegation to the PRC. At a round table discussion at one of the leading universities and research institutes, I posed the following dilemma to the professors. A family has a limited amount of extra money after buying food; the father wants to go drinking, and the mother wants to take the children to a temple and make offerings. I asked, if these are the only two options, then what should the family do? One of the social scientists replied that neither option was acceptable. I pushed the issue, asking if he did not think that there was some moral value or personal development in the practice of ritual actions. He replied that no, he did not think that ritual was important for moral or personal development. This paper argues that ritual action is of the utmost importance for human moral and personal development.

Traditionally ritual went hand in hand with religion, but with the secularization of modern society, ritual has not left us. The secularizing experience freed ritual of its strict religious context and made it a basic aspect of human cultural life. The value of ritual, however, has been played down. It has been analyzed as a remnant instinct, or some gross expression of emotion, or a form of neurosis. In this paper, I reevaluate the role ritual plays in human life.

I argue that the performance of ritual acts is a means to transmit key cultural paradigms, developing "skill in action," and thereby achieving a form of consummate person-making. It has been well documented that rituals, known as rites of passage, play an important role in person-making. Rites of passage are exemplary cases which support the general point of my thesis that ritual sets a context for person-making. I focus on the performance of ritual acts, in general, not any one particular ritual or type of ritual. First, I discuss the concept of "person-making" to clarify that term. Then, I review different definitions of "ritual" to show that a broad definition captures the crucial elements for person-making. Finally, I expand upon Eliot Deutsch's argument, that acting freely is an expression of achieved personhood, by arguing that ritual provides a context for acting freely, and thus it accommodates the process of person-making.1

I

In contemporary social and moral philosophy, it is popular to distinguish
between the concept of "human being" by its genetic makeup versus "human being" as a member of the social moral community. In other words, we distinguish between the genetic "human being" and "person." The genetic human is a "given;" the raw material of the individual is there. On the other hand, a human being must strive to actualize oneself as a person — a participating member of the social moral tradition. The way in which I use the term "person" is not synonymous with terms like "mind," "rationality," "self," or "individual human being." Not every human being is a person; one must achieve the status of becoming a person. To achieve this status is not to arrive at a final goal or stage of development; the process is on-going. The process of becoming a person continues after the individual's death. As an on-going process achieving personhood should not be thought of in substantialistic terms; thus, I prefer the expression "person-making" to "personhood" because "person-making" denotes a dynamic/continuing aspect of developing or actualizing the achievement of one's person. The standards or criteria of "person-making," which are generally ideals, are organized by one's culture, and they are traditionally founded on the exemplary models of culture heroes expressed in myth and history, e.g. chiefs, warriors, sages, saints, gurus, medicine person, and so forth. As Deutsch argues: As an achievement term, then, 'person' necessarily involves a sense of ideality; which is to say, the explication of what it means to be a person will involve a mapping out of ideal possibilities that are realizable along a continuum of achievement.

Those who achieve person-making exhibit a rich articulation of the potentialities of their nature within the confines established by their culture. To the extent that one achieves person-making, then, one also contributes to the process of culture-making, one extends or contributes to one's own culture. I would add that as one develops along the cultural ideal patterns of person-making, one begins to participate in a deeper level of humanity — in which one begins to experience a transcultural dimension of what it means to be a person. Achieving culture-making by acting creatively, one actualizes person-making.

Person-making is the process of appropriating one's biological, environmental and cultural givens in an articulated or artful manner such that one manifests personal and cultural potentials, ultimately participating in the depths of humanity. I argue that ritual acts provide a traditional cultural paradigm for person-making.

There are two basic stances concerning the definition of ritual and ceremony — the specific narrow definition, and the general broad definition. The narrow definition seeks to distinguish ritual from ceremony; while the broad definition sees little need to distinguish between the two. In the broadest sense all human actions may be seen as ritual, or at least as ritualistic. Both definitions have their shortcomings which are fairly clear: the one is too restrictive, the other overgeneralized. Etymologically "ritual" and "ceremony" are Latin synonyms for a "reverent rite." The broader definition is more efficacious in discussing the role of ritual in person-making. Before examining the commonality of ceremony and ritual, let us look at some of their differences.

It is an orthodox convention in
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anthropology to distinguish between (a) an Englishman swearing an oath, and (b) an Englishman shaking hands; where the former is a ritual and the latter a ceremony. Although some scholars would not sharply distinguish ritual from ceremony, they propose a narrow definition of ritual. For example, two opposing positions are that either ritual is symbolic and expresses the beliefs of a society (E. Durkheim), or it is not symbolic (F. Staal) or is pre-symbolic (A.N. Whitehead) and belief is derived from it. The functionalist definition is also a narrow one; for B. Malinowski, ritual relieves anxiety and maintains social solidarity. Turner has done the most work to distinguish between ritual and ceremony by arguing at length that "ritual transforms, ceremony indicates." In other words, ritual expresses personal and social change; it focuses on the seasonal and life cycles. Ritual can provide models for social change. It is an antistructure in that the common social structure is dismantled, roles reversed, etc. In personal transformation, it provides a format for voluntary self-dismemberment. On the other hand, ceremony indicates the status quo; it justifies the social structure. "Ceremony is a declaration against indeterminacy." Turner's analysis is insightful and warrants further discussion later.

Another penetrating distinction between ritual and ceremony, based on ontological grounds, is offered by Deutsch. His analysis is derived from the noticeable difference between Vedic ritual and Chinese ceremony (Li). Ritual is seen as ritual sacrifice which opens up contact with and offers sacrificial payment to the cosmic forces or gods of nature to maintain world order. Ritual has cosmic ground in which the universe is at stake; ritual has cosmic efficacy. Ritual is a symbolic reenactment of "creation," or some other major cosmic event, or a maintenance service which keeps the world turning green. Ritual, at least phenomenologically, has an effect on the world; whereas ceremony focuses on maintaining social harmony. In another context Deutsch argues that "Ceremonial actions, then, unlike practical ones, are usually not performed for a specifiable purpose other than what is simply expected of them with respect to their performance." Ritual would be a form of practical human action; ceremony a form of non-practical action.

The specific definition is insightful for analysis, but it has a tendency to be too constrictive. There is a tendency in common speech to use the two terms, ritual and ceremony, synonymously as they were used in Latin. Edmund Leach argues for a broad definition of ritual to include ceremony and other areas of human action. For Leach, rituals are "information bearing procedures" such that "... speech itself is a form of ritual." Rituals, then, can be understood as information storage systems. Confucius would also argue for a broad definition of ritual to include ceremony, or vice versa.

For Confucius "Li" covers a wide range or spectrum of culturally sanctioned human actions from the emperor's seasonal sacrifices (chi) to yielding (jiang) to an elder. "Li" is ritual-ceremony or ceremony-ritual; under li the two are one. It may appear that there is a ground for a ritual/ceremony distinction in Chinese by appealing to the ritual-sacrifice / ritual-ceremony (chi/li) distinction. This appeal will not hold
because the literature demands that ritual-sacrifice (chi) be performed with ritual-ceremony (li). Confucius made this point in the following:

While one's parents are alive, serve them with ritual-ceremony (li). When they die, bury them according to li, and sacrifice (chi) to them according to li (Lun Yu, 2/5)

Because of the lack of an early "creation" mythology in Chinese thought, the Chinese ritual does not recapitulate the "creation" of the world. The Chinese seasonal rites, however, fulfill a function similar to re-creation rites in that they display the emperor's role in maintaining the cosmic and social structure. But the concept "li" is not limited to these rituals. Furthermore, the three major ritual texts of the Confucian Thirteen Classics, the Li-chi, i-ji, and Chou-li, cover a wide range of material from ritual-ceremony music, to rites of passage, and official banquets. Confucius would not want to accept Turner's distinction between ritual representing change and ceremony for maintaining order, either. For Confucians, some li display transformation and other li promote conformity to social structure. Moreover, Confucius would point out that even the rites of transformation add to and expand the cultural tradition — at the depth of the separation stage ritual expresses an anistucture, but incorporation reaffirms the social structure. As Confucius said:

It is people who are able to extend the tradition (tao); it is not the tradition(tao) which extends people (15/29).

In this sense the tao or cultural-tradition is a process of tradition-making or way-making. For Confucius, the cultural tradition is not a stagnant structure, nor is it an ideal form. To carry on the tradition, one must blaze new trails; Confucius was doing that at the brink of the Warring States Period.

Those arguing for a narrow definition of ritual might contend that li either refers to some process beyond ritual and ceremony but is somehow related to them, or the Chinese use of li, like the synonyms use of ritual and ceremony in Latin and English, is not technical, and it teaches us little. Both Turner and Deutsch could maintain that Confucius did not have a clear concept of ritual, especially in their respective senses, and that his li is basically what they mean by ceremony. This view could easily be defended by appeal to the traditional conservatism of the Confucian school; where li focused on ceremony at court and maintaining the status quo. One could also appeal to those passages in the Confucian classics where "li" means "courtesy," "reverence," "ceremonies," "the correct form of social ceremony," or "the religious and moral way of life." One could go on to cite passages where "li" is rendered as "a rational social order," and interpreted as the set of practices which regulate harmonious social order. At this end of the ritual spectrum "li" apparently has little to do with rites of cosmic renewal, liminality, or transformation.

This criticism only touches the surface of "li". Let us take the problem of li back to the time of Confucius. He lived in an age of social and political breakdown. Although he died (ca. 479 B.C.E.) before the Warring
States Period began (403-221 B.C.E.), nevertheless the social political order had never fully recovered after the Chou capital was moved east, in 771 B.C.E. — the vassal lords began to act without imperial authority, political power was decentralized, and the throne lost power. Given these social political conditions, it was only natural for Confucius to emphasize maintaining 《禮》 which would contribute to social harmony and structure. He naturally stressed social order or harmonious arrangement, being plagued with social breakdown and chaos. Historically the Confucian school was never really relieved of Confucius' problem of impending social breakdown because change (《禮》) is an ontological given in the Confucian cosmology and rebellion was an historical fact.

I argue that when we examine 《禮》 from this historical problem oriented approach, we discover that 《禮》 does have a world-making function and a liminality all its own.

1. 《禮》 as world-making

Early Chinese mythology and cosmology is lacking in creation concepts and cosmogonic beginning. The world is in processes of realization; it is an unfolding of nonbeing/being, yin/yang. Speaking from the narrow definition, China's true rituals are those performed in accordance with the natural seasonal cycles. Man is always the measure for Confucius, and so the unfolding of the world is primarily realized through human persons. In this sense the "world" or "nature" is not an objective reality; rather it is one's very subjective ground. In this cosmology the part and whole are interpenetrating and co-disclosing; the focus and field are mutually disclosing. In disclosing oneself, the world is opened up, horizons expand — person-making and world-making occur simultaneously. Both the Confucians and Taoists, i.e. Mencius and Chuang Tzu, agree that the myriad things and oneself are one. To the extent, then, that 《禮》 is an expression of one's humanity, one's particularity, it is a mode of world-making. 《禮》 is certainly one's expression of humanity (《仁》). It is a "form" for person-making. 《禮》 is one's self expression of the 《天道》. For example, wearing a certain countenance, or yielding in a certain manner performed with reverence as 《禮》 would in its own way contribute to a certain atmosphere, supporting social harmony, creating that world, extending the 《天道》.

2. 《禮》 as liminality

《禮》 was one of Confucius' many attempts to re-establish social harmony. Generally speaking, "《禮》" taken as a whole was Confucius' attempt to move or transform each and everyone and the society at large from complete antistructure and chaos back to the envisioned Golden Age. The liminality in Confucian 《禮》 is the reverse of Turner's; it is not the liminality of "between one order and another," rather it is a liminality between chaos and order — without 《禮》 there would be little or no manifestation of one's humanity, no person-making, and thus, no world-making. Confucius would not like to stress the antistructure of ritual, and I feel that if he were pressed to accept Turner's analysis, then Confucius would want to stress that Turner's "liminality" is just part of the transition from one social order to another. However, many of the characteristics which
Turner describes as part of ritual transformation, such as the qualities of *communitas* and the correlations with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's notion of "flow," are either assumed or explicitly discussed by Confucius. For example, that quality of *communitas* which Turner describes as "...a bond uniting...people over and above any formal social bonds..." is a basic aspect of the Confucian virtue of humanity (*jen*) which is expressed in and through ritual action (*li*).

*Li* is not easily categorized narrowly as ritual or ceremony. If pressured, Confucius might accept a distinction between ritual ceremony (*li*) and mere formality, where formality would be thoughtless unreflected habitual activity done out of mere imitation without one's own creative participation. Here the telling character of *li* would be the creative participatory performance of the actor expressing and performing the *li*. Actions are judged to be *li*-actions when performed with the *li*-attitude of sincerity and reverence (*li* as *ch'eng* and *ching*). Any apparent *li*-action performed without the *li*-attitude is a mere formality. It is not just the skill with which the ritual is performed, but the intentionality of the performer adds to or detracts from the efficaciousness of the rite. It is the *li*-attitude which spans the spectrum of *li* from pure ritual to pure ceremony. We can conceptualize ritual as a spectrum from pure ritual to pure ceremony:

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Formality is off the spectrum because it does not display the quality of the *li*-attitude. For the pure ritual end of the spectrum, one need not examine the rite too deeply to discover its intended effect on the world or person; these are the rites of renewal and reenactments of creation, or rites of passage with their liminality for personal transformation. On the pure ceremony end, the intentional attitude is buried deep within the person-culture matrix; its efficaciousness and liminality are not so readily apparent. I am arguing that the *perception* of the performers is crucial to the fulfillment of any ritual-ceremony. The performers of an action executed with the *li*-attitude perceive its transformative effect; they experience their freedom in it. The *li*-attitude is *not* just an intellectual construct. It is embodied, discerned, and believed to be actual. Any *li*-action, or any human action at all, which is performed with the appropriate *li*-attitude could be perceived as a form of ritual-ceremony, or any ceremony performed with a ritualistic attitude could be seen as a ritual. Confucius is not so much concerned with the kinds of action performed as he was concerned with the quality of those actions. When I speak of "ritual," I mean *any* human action performed with the attitude of sincerity and reverence; where sincerity and reverence display a deep, honest and open concern and caring for persons and their achievement of person-making. Ritual, here, is not only those culturally sanctioned patterns of human action, though they are the exemplary models, but any human act can be performed as if it were a ritual. When the latter is taking place, the performer is actively creating culture, especially to the extent that those actions become culturally sanctioned rites.
II

I argue that the performance of ritual-ceremony, when enacted appropriately, become "transformances" (that is performances which transform the actor), and thereby, they play a crucial role in person-making. When the term "person" or "individual" is not defined but accepted as a logical primitive or ontological given, there is a deep metaphysics at work which assumes that the individual is in a sense indivisible, that is a unique simple atomic-like substance. This deep metaphysics often implies a transcendent or eternal aspect, and it also harbors dualism: mind/body or self/body, self/other, self/society, etc. Modern attempts to define "person" by appeal to a list of characteristics like self-awareness, self-motivated, planning for the future, ability to communicate, and so on fall prey to this deep metaphysics. I propose that "person" is an achievement concept. "Person" is not something one is; rather it is what one becomes, a quality of life achieved by appropriating one's culture. For the most part, person is culture bound without one's cultural context one could not even begin to express the qualities of humanity. Every cultural tradition displays consummate models of person-making, for example saints, sages, yogins, heros, as examples of human life and personhood. It is often pointed out that the term "person" is derived from the word "persona" or theatrical mask — just as the theatrical character is developed by playing/acting appropriately so one's social character is developed by similar actions. There is a deep connection here in that ritual laid the foundation for theater such that the persona is originally the ritual mask — thus ritual provides the "script" for acting which should (but may not) provide a context for person-making. Historically ritual action laid the ground for theater, but it continues to provide a model for acting freely or acting in a consummate manner. Thereby one achieves one's social persona.

The Chinese language contains a paradigm for the ritual/person-making relationship. Roger T. Ames has already fleshed out this relationship in his paper "The Meaning of Body in Classical Chinese Thought." First, Ames makes it clear that the Chinese concept of "body" differs from the Western "container" images. "By contrast, the notion of body in the Chinese tradition tends to be couched in process rather than substance language. The human body is frequently discussed as the shape or disposition of the human process." For the Chinese, the body is an important concept in the person-making process. The correlative function between body (rì) and ritual (li) is fully drawn out in Ames' analysis of the character rì. Following Peter Boodberg, Ames contends that the two characters li and rì overlap in the connotation of "organic form." This commonality of organic form or variable "shape" leaves both body and ritual action appropriating their respective definitions from their contexts. Ames gives the following definition of ritual action and then draws out its correlation with the body (rì).

If we examine the notion of ritual in the classical literature in a way sensitive to the intimate relationship between this kind of action and the concept of "rightness/significance" (yì),
we find that these rituals can be more elaborately described as an inherited tradition of formalized human actions that evidence both a cumulative investment of meaning by one's precursors in a cultural tradition, and an openness to reformulation and innovation within the framework of the tradition.

The notion of formal li action overlaps with rì, body, in that a li action is an *embodiment* or *formalization* of meaning and value that accumulates to constitute a cultural tradition.

Both body and ritual are symbols of the cultural tradition—bearers of cultural form. The following paradigm begins to emerge: The body or one's person is not one's personal possession; it is the body transmitted by one's parents, and the full *discovery* of that person is made and experienced through the performance of ritual actions. Ritual actions are partly formalized by the tradition, and partly stylized by the performer. As Ames goes on to describe ritual action:

"...invested with the accumulated meaning of the tradition, is a formalized structure on which the continuity of the tradition depends and through which the person in the tradition pursues cultural refinement.... A person engaged in the performance of a particular formal action, appropriating meaning from it while seeking himself to be appropriate to it, derives meaning and value from this embodiment, and further strengthens it by his contribution of novel meaning and value. He pursues "rightness" and "significance" both in an imitative and a creative sense. The Chinese characters for "body" and "ritual action" reveal a paradigm, similar to the model of ritual and persona, in which the performance of rituals is linked with the process of person-making.

How is it that the performance of ritual-ceremonial action generates or conditions one's achievement of personhood? In *Personhood, Creativity, and Freedom*, Deutsch argues that "freedom" is a quality of human action which is achieved by acting in certain ways, especially in a creative manner, with a fitting attitude such that the process of consummate personhood is achieved. For example, he states: In creativity the creative agent does not simply remain untouched by his act, as we tend to believe an efficient cause is by its effect; rather creativity, perhaps more than any other activity, is self-formative as well as formative of an object. One is changed in the process of making; one discovers oneself (more actually than one expresses oneself) in the creative act; one achieves what Albert Hofstadter calls an articulation of self as well as of work, by and through the work itself.

Anthropologists have noted that "ritual" is often referred to as "work" in many cultures; the Hindu term *karma* captures this cluster of concepts, for it can mean, "ritual action," "work," and the moral law of conditioning oneself through these actions. However, as Turner is quick to point out, in pre-industrial societies the notion of work has an element of "play" to it. Through this element of "play" and through the Confucian appropriation of ritual action, there is *creativity* in ritual which allows for
the achievement of person-making.

Deutsch develops this achievement concept of freedom, as a quality of human consciousness which discloses one’s personhood, in the following:34

...freedom need not be based on ideas of having a free will in relation to casually ordered ('determined') events. Especially since the social sciences have increasingly shown how our behavior and attitudes, beliefs and values are conditioned by (and subject to manipulation through) social as well as strictly environmental factors, it is imperative that we frame a richer sense of 'freedom' which is related to the achievement of personhood.... A more significant freedom...would have to do, then, initially with freedom of consciousness, rather than of will, and would have its locus in the person. I am free when I am able to attend to reality, and from that attendance to achieve rightness of action. I am free when I am able to realize the self and become the person I ought to be. I am free in my actions (and choices), then, only when I am not bound in consciousness to a static, conditioned structure of habits and dispositions.

The crucial question is: Does ritual action afford one this freedom of person-making; is ritual action a model for acting freely? In dealing with a more general question of how an action can be performed such that the action and the actor realize their highest potential, Deutsch gives the following definition of acting freely:35

To act freely means to act skillfully in fulfillment of the natural grace manifest in every action-related process and thereby to attain an effortless power. To act freely is to express the achievement of personhood; it is to be self-expressive in action.

Deutsch goes on to give a careful analysis of the terms "skillful," "natural grace," and "effortless power." It is no mere coincidence that Deutsch's analysis of "freedom" parallels and has similar phrasing to that of Turner's analysis of Csikszentmihalyi's and MacAloon's coinage "flowing" which Turner likens to his own description of "communitas." we discover an important link between comparative philosophy and anthroplogy when Turner compares communitas with D.T. Suzuki's discussion of wisdom (prajñā).36 Freedom, flowing, communitas, prajñā, satori, nirvāna, moksha, ritual, play, acting-as-if, these terms describe some of the respective processes in the achievement of person-making.

Ritual action qualifies as a form of acting freely. First, ritual action is predominately dependent on "skill in action." "Skill in action means having a mastery of the appropriate technique associated with a particular kind of doing — from walking to painting a picture — in such a way that one is able to carry out the action without concerned awareness of its being carried out as such."37 In ritual, this skill in action takes up much of the apparent behavior of the ritual performer. It is a fairly common cross cultural belief that the greater the skill and achievement of the performer, the greater the efficacy of the rite. There is a hint of "truth" here in that the
greater the skill of the performers of a ritual, the more they will act with a high quality of freedom, disclosing, an achievement of person-making.

Allow me to compare Turner’s six elements of commonality between his concept “communitas” and Csikszentmihalyi’s and MacAlloon’s “flowing” to Deutsch’s analysis of “achieving freedom.” Turner’s first two elements of “flowing” correlate with Deutsch’s notion of skillfulness; they are 1) a merging of action and awareness which is made possible by 2) a centering of attention. It is interesting to note that since much of the ritual performance is taken up with this skillful action, it has the appearance of being a mere habit or a form of instinctual ritualization which the ethologists study. This is a necessary condition for acting freely. If we stop our investigation at the level of apparent behavior, then there are no truly free acts and all ritual becomes a mere behavioral event.

This skill in action requires a spontaneity that is causally efficacious; this frees human action from being a mere behavioral event. “The actor must be a master of the conditions of his action and not as with behavioral events, their victim,” and this spontaneity “... is grounded in the deepest structures of one’s being and is a nonegoistic expression of one’s spiritual potentiality.” This description correlates with the next two elements of the flow experience, viz. 3) loss of ego, and 4) control of one’s actions and of the environment. Turner draws this out in the following comment about the performer: “He may not know this at the time of “flow,” but reflecting on it he may realize that his skills were matched to the demands made on him by ritual, art, or sport.” This spontaneity is expressed symbolically by the rituals of creation or renewal through the enactment of cosmic creativity; it can be observed in rites of passage where the initiate in the liminality of betwixt and between is free to act without the constraint of social status or taboo. The performance of the ritual act itself requires spontaneity as part and parcel of its skillfulness. The performance of ritual acts also provide a context in which there is an overwhelming emphasis placed on the proper and fitting performance of the acts themselves. This care and concern for the appropriate performance of the ritual act is a recognition of the “natural grace,” inherent order, “natural rhythm,” law, tao, or way of performing the act in its fitting manner. Ritual acts come culture laden with concrete form and inherent order, and each ritual performer must appropriate that inherited system to her or his own sense of how to do it properly. This loving care and concern that actions be performed rightly parallels the li-attitude of reverence and sincerity. All ritual actions require an appropriation of the natural grace of each respective rite.

To further clarify “natural grace” by discussing it in terms of artistic creativity, two points become clear. These acts have an... autochthonous ordering of elements under a controlling sense of rightness which results in the achievement of what, when the work is successful, appears to be inevitable.” This concept of “autochthonous ordering” clears up a problem concerning the meaning of “rules” in the “flow” model. The last two elements of “flow” are: 5) flow contains coherent, non-contradictory demands for action, and
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provides clear, unambiguous feedback for a person's actions, and this element also requires the actor to believe or, at least, suspend disbelief in the rules which govern the culturally designed game, art, or ritual. Finally, 6) flow is autotelic, an end in itself, it has no goal or reward outside of itself. Turner simply holds that what he "...calls communitas has something of a 'flow' quality, but it may arise, and often does arise spontaneously and unanticipated — it does not need rules to trigger it off." Here the concept of "autochthonous order" captures both the meaning of "rule" in the flow experience, and the spontaneity of communitas. Turner notes that the flow experience is individual; whereas communitas is a social group experience. I argue that the personal and social dimensions are fused in non-duality.

Free actions, like works of art, "involve a timing that is right for them." The timely performance of ritual acts is an integral aspect of most rites. If the timing is violated, then the sincerity and reverence are not authentic. The winter solstice rite will not be efficacious, if performed in the spring; to say "hello" upon departing would violate the rite of parting. The timely performance of ritual acts as free acts further reflects one's achievement of personhood.

It (a properly timed free act) will thus be obedient to what is called for by the situation and it will reflect wholly the rhythm of the actor's own achieved persona.

In addition to the loving care and concern which is needed to embody natural grace; it also requires a kind of "wonderment." This wonderment is no absent-minded gaping at the world; "...rather it is a kind of joyful harmony. Wonder involves...an awareness of belonging to a spiritual domain of being; it involves a sense of shared participation." Wonderment as a "joyous accompaniment" dissolves Turner's distinction between flow as individual experience and communitas as group experience; because within the context of acting freely, the person, group, and environment are all harmoniously interpenetrating such that even the observing audience achieves person. In my mind this sense of wonderment as a joyous accompaniment is a fundamental aspect of the ritual experience. First, in rituals, taken in the narrow sense, which recreate or renew the cosmos, it is commonly held that the ritual performer participates in a deeper spiritual domain — the ritual performer enters the realm of the gods, or acts with divine authority, or unites with the gods or goddess, or becomes one with the tao, achieves enlightenment, receives grace, and so on. In the rites of passage, this wonderment is expressed in the group experience of communitas. Second, in ritual taken in the broader sense, this wonderment is experienced in the li-attitude; where the performance of any common social ceremony can propel one into the joyous accompaniment of fully expressed social and cosmic harmony. The efficacious performance of a hand shake could be a full expression of one's humanity such that the reverential and sincere attitude expresses human belongingness and interpenetration as persons. In this sense, ritual action is a cultural archetype for acting freely.

Finally, the actor achieves and
experiences a power in action through skillfulness, spontaneity, and wonder-filled action. This power of effortless action is a "...natural expression of that harmony and accord between actor and act..." This effortless power is promoted by ritual action in its highest degree. In rituals of renewal or those reenacting creation, this effortless power is expressed in the unity of rite and cosmos, that is when the ritual performer, one's act, and the cosmic operations are integrated as one, the actor acts effortlessly. In the rituals of social ceremony, this effortless power of fully integrated actor and action is easy to detect — the handshake and the actor are inseparable. The degree of one's effortless power in ritual displays one's achievement of person-making; the more contrived one's actions are the less authentic and sincere one is.

Any action, no matter how humble or mundane, "...can be an occasion for acting skillfully," and thereby is conducive to acting freely. I have been arguing that ritual provides some of the culturally sanctioned modes of behavior which provide contexts for acting skillfully and freely. Practical action also fits this model of acting freely. Sports and ceremonial actions can be discussed in the same light.

A master athlete or accomplished ceremonialist does indeed act in accord with the natural grace present in his action-related process and, with wonderment, may realize a self-sufficient effortless power. From disciplined knowledge and loving care that harmony between actor and action is realized. Sportive and ceremonial actions are such that they strive inherently to achieve freedom. Acting freely is the very character of their own intentionality (italics added).

To the extent that ritual action requires ceremonial action, and to the extent that ceremonial action is at heart ritual action, it would appear that acting freely is an inherent character and the very intentionality of ritual action too. Creative play and freedom, then, are integral aspects of ritual action, and as such the performance of ritual acts is an expression of one's achieved person-making. It is a continuous process of self-discovery as the performance of ritual actions, or any form of acting freely for that matter, is an on-going process of person-making. Personhood is an achievement in process; it is never a finalized or finished product. Ritual action provides the context for one's full disclosure in the process of one's becoming. The very performance of the ritual act, ideally speaking for it often is not, should be a "transformation" — it is a performance which transforms the actor. Turner points this out in the following passage:

...When a ritual does work, for whatever reason, the exchange of qualities between the semantic poles seems, to my observation, to achieve genuinely cathartic effects, causing in some cases real transformations.

Ideally every ritual act which is performed as a form of acting freely would be a "transformation." It is however, difficult to judge the effectiveness of any particular "transformation" because it affects the
quality of one's person-making, and its full effect may not be recognizable for years since the person-making process is a long and arduous one.

It might be objected that there is an incompatibility between being a person quo ritual-persona, and acting freely. In fact there is no incompatibility at all:53

On the contrary, it is only when the mask fits rightly — with that detachment and creativity essential for the formation of genuine personas — that the quality of freedom as a quality of being and acting is realizable.

...With creative play, the actor is owner of himself, being aware of the very ground of its formation, and is thereby expressive of his own-being.

The ritual act and ritual persona provide culturally tested patterns for the disclosure of one's acting freely and discovering and expressing oneself. With the appropriation of one's culture, one develops skill in action such that any action could be performed as if it were a ritual action, that is the li-attitude could be manifested in most human action. These consummate actions, then, in turn become culturally sanctioned rites, that is one's person-making becomes culture-making, and ultimately the performer experiences the depths of humanity.

We know that theatre developed out of ritual; the theatrical mask (persona) was originally the ritual-mask. We saw that the Chinese characters for "ritual-action" (lì) and "body" (rì) are closely related. The Sanskrit language provides a third example with the term "karma." Kr, the root of karma, means "making," "doing," "action." Every action has its residual conditioning influence. Linking this concept up with the ancient "rta" — absolute and immanent cosmic order, karma became the personal and natural moral law that one's thoughts, words, and deeds, that is (ritual-) actions, condition one's lot in future "lives." In the Bhagavad-Gita, Dharma — personal, social and cosmic order and duty — is closely linked to karma; in the Gita, karma primarily means ritual-action in its full and complex meaning in the religio-philosophy of Karma Yoga (the Way of Ritual-Action) where any action, no matter how humble, is performed with ritual devotion. The Gita is unique in Indian wisdom literature in that it does not focus on the highest stage of emancipation; rather it attempts to convince Arjuna to fulfill his Dharma. This Dharma is fulfilled by karma — ritual-action performed without ego-attachments for the fruit of one's labor (karma yoga). This reinforces the trans-ego-centric quality of the spontaneous ritual-action. By performing ritual-action appropriately (karma) one fulfills Dharma and achieves person-making.

There are two possible objections to the general project of this paper. First, one might contend that using "person" as an achievement concept could result in not including certain genetic human beings under the definition of "person," and this could lead to the practice of grading society into unequal castes. Social inequalities are not always un-justifiable, but more importantly whether or not the concept is applied for social distortion is not so much a philosophical problem but a socio-political one. Second, what about ritual-actions which
involve human sacrifice? Although the practice actually began before Confucius, Chinese legend says that Confucius started the tradition of burying clay figures with the dead, rather than live servants. It would appear that Confucius did not feel that the servants were being given full human respect, sincerity and reverence by being buried alive. The Japanese samurai warrior felt differently about human self-sacrifice, and *seppuku*, self disembowelment, was taken to be the only means of regaining personhood when disgraced. In other cultures human sacrifice is perceived as raising the sacrificial victims personhood. For example, during famine the ancient Maya would sacrifice their children to the gods where the children could live as fuller persons in heaven rather than starving on earth. In other words if the human sacrifice is performed with the *li*-attitude of sincerity and respect, and the person to be sacrificed is willing, he along with the society perceives the sacrifice as contributing to one's own and to other's person-making, something like the institution of martyrdom, then even the ritual of human sacrifice could provide a context for person-making. I am not condoning human sacrifice as an intrinsically valuable means for person-making; I am only pointing out that it cannot be readily excluded, and some cultures have sanctioned it. This might apply to our own (ritual) practice of capital punishment where the capital crime is so heinous that the criminal's loss of personhood can only be regained through execution. One important thing to keep in mind is that the *li*-attitude must be maintained and fully embodied by the ritual performers. If it is not embodied in action and belief, if it is only understood as an intellectual construct, then one is not performing a consummate ritual-action—one is not acting creatively or freely, achieving person-making.

Endnotes


Achieving Person Through Ritual


9 Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 82.


13 For example, Vedic rites reenact the creation of the world; Taoist rituals renew the cosmos; the Christian Eucharist reenacts the Last Supper which is both a personal and a cosmic event.


15 Edmund Leach, "Ritualization in Man.....," p. 231.


18 Roger Ames, "On the Contingency of Confucius’ Emergent Tao," *Philosophical Review*, (Taipei: Department of Philosophy National Taiwan University, 1984), pp. 118-123.


20 A paradigm shift occurs during the late Chou and early Han dynasties such that cosmogonies develop, see the Hsi-shih ch’un-ch’iu, "You Shih Lan," and the Huai nan tsu, "Shy Chen Hsün."

21 *Chuang tsu*, Harvard-Yenching Index Series, 5/2/53; and *Meng tsu*, Harvard-Yenching Index Series, 51/7A/4.


23 Roman Catholic theology distinguishes the proper execution of a ritual *(ex opere operato)* from the spiritual development of the performer *(ex opere opantis)*; other traditions make similar distinctions.


28 Note that the characters li and ri share the phonetic li meaning "ritual vessel," or "to arrange ritual vessels," yielding "to arrange."
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28 Ibid., p. 49.
29 Ibid., p. 49.
30 Ibid., p. 49; and see my "The Lü-Shih ch'un-ch'iu's Proposal of Governing by Filial Piety," Asian Culture Quarterly, 13/1, Spring, 1985, 43-61.
32 Eliot Deutsch, Personhood, Creativity, and Freedom, p. 73-74.
33 Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, pp. 30-33.
38 Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, p. 56.
42 Ibid., p. 118.
44 Ibid., p. 58.
46 Ibid., p. 118.
47 Ibid., p. 118.
48 Ibid., p. 119.
49 Ibid., p. 119.
50 Ibid., p. 119.
51 Ibid., p. 119.
53 Eliot Deutsch, Op. Cit., p. 120.