

Perceptions of
Antiquity in
Chinese Civilization

Würzburger Sinologische Schriften
herausgegeben von
Dieter Kuhn

Das Siegel *Weiercibao Hanxue congkan* wurde von Herrn Wang Yugong in
Beijing geschnitten.

Würzburger Sinologische Schriften
Institut für Kulturwissenschaften Ost- und Südasiens – Sinologie
Universität Würzburg, Am Hubland, Philosophiegebäude, D-97074 Würzburg
<http://www.sinologie.uni-wuerzburg.de>

Bibliografische Information Der Deutschen Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über
<http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the Internet at
<http://dnb.ddb.de>.

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Printed on acid-free paper, 90g Munken Premium Cream 1.5 vol.

Printed in Germany

ISBN 978-3-927943-29-2
ISSN 0938-6416

Perceptions of
Antiquity in
Chinese Civilization

edited by
Dieter Kuhn & Helga Stahl

edition forum Heidelberg 2008

Dedicated
to the memory of

Michael Lenz
19.12.1923 – 29.7.2007

a most successful market gardener, a true
gentleman with a great love of music, a
generous benefactor, and a wonderful friend

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NOTE ON CONVENTIONS

In order to keep the footnotes as short as possible, bibliographic information has been reduced wherever that was feasible without affecting precision.

As a rule, citations are given in the form chapter or *juan* number.page number.

All *zhengshi* 正史 (Standard Histories) are quoted according to the Zhonghua shuju edition, if not stated otherwise, giving the *juan* and the page number.

Translations from the Classics by James Legge are given as Legge, p., i.e. without full bibliographic treatment of the books and their various reprints and without indicating the book title, wherever the context already provides this information.

If not stated otherwise, the *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 ed. refers to the Yiwen yinshuguan reprint of Ruan Yuan's 阮元 1815 Jiangxi edition of the Song print in 8 vols.

Abbreviations used in the notes:

CSJCCB	<i>Congshu jicheng chubian</i>	叢書集成初編
GXJBCS	<i>Guoxue jiben congshu</i>	國學基本叢書
QSW	<i>Quan Song wen</i>	全宋文
SBBY	<i>Sibu beiyao</i>	四部備要
SBCK	<i>Sibu congkan</i>	四部叢刊
SKQS	<i>Siku quanshu</i>	四庫全書
ZZJC	<i>Zhuzi jicheng</i>	諸子集成

ICS series D.C. Lau, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies, ed., *The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1993-)

CHACH *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, ed. Michael Loewe and

Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

<i>SS</i>	<i>Songshi</i>	宋史
<i>DNWH</i>	<i>Dongnan wenhua</i>	東南文化
<i>HJAS</i>	<i>Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies</i>	
<i>JAS</i>	<i>The Journal of Asian Studies</i>	
<i>JHKG</i>	<i>Jiang Han kaogu</i>	江漢考古
<i>JSYS</i>	<i>Journal of Sung-Yüan Studies</i>	
<i>KG</i>	<i>Kaogu</i>	考古
<i>KGXB</i>	<i>Kaogu xuebao</i>	考古學報
<i>KGyWW</i>	<i>Kaogu yu wenwu</i>	考古與文物
<i>LSYJ</i>	<i>Lishi yanjiu</i>	歷史研究
<i>MS</i>	<i>Monumenta Serica</i>	
<i>TP</i>	<i>T'oung Pao</i>	
<i>WW</i>	<i>Wenwu</i>	文物
<i>WWB</i>	<i>Zhongguo wenwubao</i>	中國文物報
<i>ZYWW</i>	<i>Zhongyuan wenwu</i>	中原文物

The index prefers the Chinese terms to avoid numerous entries due to different possibilities to translate them. However, we refrained from changing the essays accordingly. This means that in looking up the entries of the index in the essays, the Chinese term may not be found but a translation be given instead, e.g. the index has *tianzi* 天子, while the text uses “Son of Heaven.” The footnotes are not indexed.

THE CONCEPT OF RITUAL IN THE THOUGHT OF SIMA GUANG (1019–1086)

PHILIP CLART

University of Missouri – Columbia

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Prefatory Remarks

In writing this paper about Sima Guang 司馬光, I am coming full circle in my academic career. In 1989 I earned a Master's degree in Chinese Studies from the University of Bonn with a thesis that I had composed under the direction of Prof. Rolf Trauzettel, a specialist in the intellectual history of the Song dynasty. Entitled "Ritual und Familie bei Sima Guang (1019–1086)" (Ritual and Family in the Thought of Sima Guang), the thesis dealt with Sima Guang's efforts to reform the family rituals of his class and time by means of a new ritual manual, the *Shuyi* 書儀 (Letters and Ceremonies). I translated chapter five of this work into German and analyzed the strategies Sima employed in adapting the mourning rites of antiquity to the conditions of the eleventh century. Furthermore I attempted to place this particular project of Sima in the wider context of his ideas concerning philosophy, historiography, and government. After receiving my Master's degree I turned my attention to other subject matters, in particular Chinese popular religion and Daoism. These have now been at the centre of my research efforts for the last twelve years. During these years I did not forget my earlier work on Sima Guang, but neither did I publish any of it. However, I always intended to get back to it one day and in the meantime collected new publications on Sima Guang whenever I came across them.

With the demands placed on my time by teaching and my current research, I don't know whether I would ever have taken up again the threads

of my earlier studies of Sima Guang if it had not been for Prof. Dieter Kuhn of Würzburg University. I first met Prof. Kuhn on the occasion of a lecture I gave at Würzburg in 2001. During our conversation, he expressed interest in my M.A. thesis and I later sent him a copy. When he first made plans for the conference at which this paper was presented, he asked me whether I might be willing to revisit my old topic and present a paper on it. I immediately accepted, but it soon became apparent that I could not simply present my findings of 1989. They had been reached before a number of important studies of Sima Guang specifically and the intellectual and social history of the Song dynasty more generally had appeared. Of particular significance here are of course the well-known contributions of Patricia Ebrey and Peter Bol,¹ but in addition a number of articles and dissertations have improved our overall knowledge of Sima Guang and various aspects of his thought, including his ideas concerning ritual (*li* 禮).²

Eventually I decided to cover only briefly those areas of my original study that have been addressed elsewhere in the intervening years (such as the place of *li* in his political and historiographical thought and the exegetical strategies employed in his *Shuyi*), and focus instead on one area that has not been studied in great detail so far: Sima Guang's general the-

¹ See for example the following: Patricia Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Patricia Ebrey, *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals: A Twelfth-Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Peter Bol, "This Culture of Ours": *Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

² Demerie Paula Faitler, "Confucian Historiography and the Thought of Ssu-ma Kuang" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1991); Ji Xiao-bin, "Conservatism and Court Politics in Northern Sung China: The Thought and Career of Ssu-ma Kuang (1019-1086)" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1998); Angela Schottenhammer, "Politics and Morality in Song China: Sima Guang as a Typical Example," in *New Developments in Asian Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Paul van der Velde, Alex McKay (London, New York: Kegan Paul International in association with the International Institute for Asian Studies, 1998), pp. 77-91; Christian de Pee, "The Ritual and Sexual Bodies of the Groom and the Bride in Ritual Manuals of the Sung Dynasty (Eleventh through Thirteenth Centuries)," in *Chinese Women in the Imperial Past: New Perspectives*, ed. Harriet T. Zurndorfer (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 53-100. In addition, a re-evaluation of Sima Guang began among scholars in the People's Republic of China in the 1980s and led to a considerable number of new biographies and studies that I am only beginning to assess. See for example Dong Genhong 董根洪, *Sima Guang zhexue sixiang shuping* 司馬光哲學思想述評 (Critical Evaluation of Sima Guang's Philosophical Thought) (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1993); Li Changxian 李昌憲, *Sima Guang pingzhuan* 司馬光評傳 (Critical Biography of Sima Guang) (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1998).

ory of ritual and his views on the role of the rites in the life of families and individuals. I shall try to demonstrate that the concept of *li* occupied a central position in Sima Guang's thought. It pervaded both public and private dimensions of his life, especially during his years of retirement in Luoyang (1071–1085).

Antiquity and the Public Dimensions of *li*

Li is a term of considerable breadth that in different contexts may refer to specific rites and ceremonies, to the courtesies of social interaction, to an aspect of personal cultivation, to political and social institutions, and even to “culture” in the most general sense. Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) took the inspiration for his “New Laws” (*xinfa* 新法) from the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Institutes of Zhou), an idealized account of the Zhou kingdom's ritual constitution. His main opponent in the political struggles of the second half of the eleventh century, Sima Guang, was by no means opposed to the restoration of the *li* of the ancients; quite the opposite, if anything he was even more enthusiastic about such a project than Wang, but disagreed with him bitterly on the proper approach to take.

Sima Guang³ looked to antiquity as a golden age that provided an ideal for people of the present to strive after: “The Way of the ancients was always wide and never narrow. They always concentrated on the profound and never the superficial. Their words were always high-minded and never low. [...] Even if they passed their days in bitter poverty, the customs and achievements they bequeathed still serve as examples after hundreds and thousands of years.”⁴ The basic framework of human existence has not changed since antiquity and therefore the “customs and achievements” of the ancients retain their normative value for the present: “Are there any differences between the Heaven and Earth of antiquity and those of today? Were the ten thousand things then different from today? Did people then have different natures and emotions than today? Heaven and Earth are unchanged, sun and moon are the same. The ten thousand things

³ There is no space in the present article for a detailed account of Sima Guang's life. The reader is directed to his biographies in the *Songshi* and in the *Dongdu shilüe*. See SS, 336.10757-10770; *Dongdu shilüe* 東都事略 (Résumé of Events in the Eastern Metropolis), by Wang Cheng 王偁, j. 87. For a biographical outline in English, see Ji Xiao-bin's “*Sung Biographies*, Supplementary Biography No. 3: Sima Guang (1019–1086),” *JSYS* 28 (1998): 201-211.

⁴ *Yushu* 迂書 (Impractical Writings), “Shi yu” 釋迂, in *Sima Wenzheng gong chuanjiaji* 司馬文正公傳家集 (Sima Guang's Collected Works as Transmitted in His Family) (GXJBCS ed.), 74.905.

are as always, and human nature and emotions have not been altered. Why should the Way alone have changed?”⁵

Further down in the same text, Sima Guang defines this Way as consisting of “filial piety, compassion, humanity, righteousness, loyalty, trustworthiness, ritual, and music.”⁶ These are the essentials of the Way and, Sima Guang argues, they are as relevant today as they were in ancient times. Obviously, Chinese civilization did not stand still in the intervening centuries and nobody knows this better than the historian Sima Guang, the author of that great history of China, the *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government). However, the changes that have occurred are regarded as either superficial ones that do not touch the essence of the Way, or as heterodox deviations from the Way. To give an example of superficial change, in his writings on ritual and music Sima Guang often refers to changes in material culture, which the reader must keep in mind as he engages the ancient texts. Thus, in a letter to his friend Fan Zhen 范鎮 (1008–1088), who was trying to reconstruct ancient music and musical instruments, Sima Guang warned that “... measurements of length and volume as well as weights have been much changed since the Qin and Han dynasties. How could the present measurements and weights still be the same as those used by the First Kings?”⁷

Such changes in material culture do not affect the essence of the Way, but heterodox ideas and customs do, and thus we see Sima Guang frequently denouncing Buddhism, Daoism, and “perverted practices” such as geomancy as violating the Way of the ancients. Such phenomena are not value-neutral and hence are to be attacked and removed rather than accommodated. In his active years as an official, Sima Guang submitted several memorials critical of heterodox customs and tried to make their suppression public policy. In 1063 he protested against the use of geomantic calculations in determining the time and place of Emperor Renzong’s burial and demanded that all geomantic manuals (*zangshu* 葬書) be pro-

⁵ *Yushu*, “Bian yong” 辨庸, in *Chuanjiaji*, 74.906.

⁶ *Yushu*, “Bian yong,” in *Chuanjiaji*, 74.906.

⁷ “Yu Fan Jingren shu” 與范景仁書, in *Chuanjiaji*, 62.758. Fan Zhen’s biography can be found in *SS*, 337.10783-10800. See also *Sung Biographies*, ed. Herbert Franke (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976), pp. 306-308. Sima Guang himself wrote a biography of Fan Zhen. See *Chuanjiaji*, 72.879-882. In the ritual manual he composed around 1081, the *Shuyi*, he sometimes justifies changes to canonically based rites by pointing out that clothing and architectural styles of the eleventh century differ from those of antiquity and that hence the ritual procedures needed to be adapted to the changed material conditions. See, for example, *Sima shi shuyi* 司馬氏書儀 (Mr. Sima’s Letters and Ceremonies) (*CSJCCB* ed.), 5.50.

scribed.⁸ In the following year, he railed against plans to establish a Buddhist monastery alongside Renzong's tomb, so that the monks might pray for the emperor's soul.⁹ In a memorial submitted in 1085 he criticized the fascination of high-ranking officials as well as students with the writings of Laozi and Zhuangzi, and recommended the enforcement of strict Confucian standards in the civil service examinations.¹⁰ When out of power, Sima Guang resorted to unofficial means to attack heterodoxy and promote what he saw as the Way of the ancients. He did so in letters, poems, essays, and books, many of which were written during his fourteen years of enforced political inactivity in Luoyang from 1071 until 1085, when he and most of his fellow conservatives had been marginalized at court by the followers of Wang Anshi's reform faction.¹¹ Two important works from those years that tried to constructively promote ritual as the core piece of the Way of the Ancients were the aforementioned *Zizhi tongjian* and the *Shuyi*.

Of the two, the *Zizhi tongjian* is by far the better known and more widely studied one. The first entry in its chronology deals with an event that for Sima Guang marked the transition from the ritually ordered society of the Zhou to a more unsettled age bereft of the stabilizing benefits of the rites: the illegitimate enfeoffment in 403 B.C. of three great officers of Jin 晉 by King Weilie of Zhou 周威烈王. In Sima's view this act undermined the king's authority and dealt a fatal blow to the ritual order of the Zhou, leading to their final downfall.¹² The up and down of dynasties ever since is a sign of the rulers' inability to recover what King Weilie had lost: a social order kept harmonious through the joint operation of *li* and

⁸ "Yan shanling zedi zhazi" 言山陵擇地札子, in *Chuanjiaji*, 27.380-382; *Sima Guang zouyi* 司馬光奏議 (Sima Guang's Memorials) (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1986), pp. 113-114.

⁹ "Yan Yongzhao ling si zhazi" 言永昭陵寺札子, in *Chuanjiaji*, 30.412-413; *Sima Guang zouyi*, p. 142.

¹⁰ "Lun fengsu zhazi" 論風俗札子, in *Chuanjiaji*, 42.538-539; *Sima Guang zouyi*, p. 329. The memorial is translated in Anthony William Sariti's "The Political Thought of Ssu-ma Kuang: Bureaucratic Absolutism in the Northern Sung" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 1970), pp. 104-105.

¹¹ Sima Guang's critiques of Buddhism, Daoism, geomancy, and "vulgar customs" are dealt with in detail in chapter six ("Heterodoxie im 11. Jahrhundert") of my M.A. thesis. See "Ritual und Familie bei Sima Guang" (M.A. thesis, University of Bonn, 1989), pp. 89-117. On his views of geomancy, see also Patricia Ebrey, "Sung Neo-Confucian Views on Geomancy," in *Meeting of Minds: Intellectual and Religious Interaction in East Asian Traditions of Thought*, ed. Irene Bloom and Joshua A. Fogel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 75-107.

¹² See Bol, "This Culture of Ours," pp. 238-246.

(*ming*)*fen* (名)分, i.e., an unambiguous system of social roles and identities defined by and operating through ritual. Sima believed that a dynasty that could recover the ancient rites might become exempt from the dynastic cycles of ascent and decline, because it would have attained a kind of political elixir of immortality: a perfect recipe for social stability and harmony. In the *Zizhi tongjian*, whether or not a particular ruler or minister was successful in recovering *li* became an important criterion for the assessment of his merits. Politically, this view of ritual as the source of all social order became a key political axiom of Sima Guang. For him indeed “among the Emperor’s duties there is none greater than [ritual].”¹³

Both the *Zizhi tongjian* and the *Shuyi* were written during a period of enforced political abstinence, when Sima Guang could not put his vision into practice at court. Both of these works can be regarded as indirect means to exert influence and point the way towards the recovery of the all-important rites – the *Zizhi tongjian* (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government!) at the level of national policy in historical perspective, the *Shuyi* at the level of the family life of the ruling class. While the *Shuyi* certainly had less of a direct impact than the *Zizhi tongjian*, it affords us a more focused view of the concrete application of Sima Guang’s ideas regarding ritual.

***Sima shi shuyi* 司馬氏書儀 (Mr. Sima’s Letters and Ceremonies):
A Manual for Ritual in Family Life**

Sima Guang composed his *Shuyi* probably around the year 1081 in Luoyang. The book consists of ten *juan*, of which *juan* 1 deals with form letters for various occasions, while the remaining nine chapters contain detailed instructions for major family rituals: capping and pinning, wedding, mourning, burial, and ancestral rites. The step by step instructions on the performance of these rites in the main text are based mainly on the canonical *Yili* 儀禮 (Ceremonies and Rites) and are accompanied by inter-linear annotations in smaller characters that explain details and justify the author’s exegetical choices.

One important function of the annotations is to give Sima Guang’s rationales for adopting a particular ritual procedure. This is particularly significant in cases where Sima deviates from the canonical model. In

¹³ *Zizhi tongjian*, 1.2-3. Translated in Sariti, “The Political Thought of Ssu-ma Kuang,” pp. 115-116. On the central place of *li* and (*ming*)*fen* in Sima’s politics and historiography see Bol, “*This Culture of Ours*”; Faitler, “Confucian Historiography,” pp. 56-97.

chapter five, he uses basically three criteria to assess the appropriateness of particular ceremonies and defend his choices:

(1) *Practicality and simplicity*. Where the canonical rite is impractical to perform (because of changes in material culture) or too elaborate, functional equivalents may be substituted.

(2) *Morality*. A ritual must give proper expression to moral feelings. If non-canonical customs give such proper expression to, say, the pain felt by the deceased's pious son, they are acceptable. If they violate moral sensitivity, they are to be rejected. The same standard is also used for the evaluation of canonical ritual, which however falls short in this respect only once in chapter five. The *Yili* prescribes that the cut hair and fingernails of the deceased are to be buried in front of the main hall. Sima Guang regards this as inappropriate as "the mind of the pious son does not endure seeing all day long [the location of] his parent's fingernails and hair as well as of the utensils used in washing the corpse. Therefore the hole is to be dug in a secluded spot."¹⁴

(3) *Precedent*. Precedents are derived from canonical works and their commentaries, other ritual compendia (private and official), and historical examples. In chapter five, we find forty-five references to the Classics (thirty-two from the *Liji* 禮記 [Record of Rites], eleven from the *Yili*, and one each from the *Chunqiu* 春秋 [Spring and Autumn Annals] and the *Shijing* 詩經 [Book of Songs]); nine references to the official ritual codex of the Tang dynasty, the *Kaiyuan li* 開元禮 (Rites of the *Kaiyuan* Era); two references to the "Sangzang ling 喪葬令" (Decree on Mourning and Burials) of the Song dynasty; one reference to the *Shuyi* of Liu Yue 劉岳 (early tenth century); and three references to historical exemplars. In addition to the references to the Classics themselves, Sima also refers to commentaries to the Classics. In chapter five, all except one of these references are to the Han period commentaries of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200).

There is no space to go into a deeper analysis of Sima's exegetical strategies. For this the reader may refer to chapter five of my thesis and to the excellent analysis provided by Christian de Pee of the *Shuyi*'s depiction of wedding ceremonies, which confirms and extends some of the conclusions I drew from Sima's patterning of mourning rites.¹⁵ For the purposes of the present paper, I will just summarize some of my conclusions as they are relevant for the following section.

¹⁴ *Shuyi*, 5.50.

¹⁵ De Pee, "The Ritual and Sexual Bodies."

Sima's approach to the recovery of the ancient rites is fairly conservative. He cleaves closely to the canonical texts and modifies them only very circumspectly, justifying each change according to the criteria outlined above. This fits well with his general sympathy for Xunzi's view of ritual as a civilizing instrument created by the sages. As carriers of the sages' wisdom, the rites cannot easily be modified without running the risk of losing the *dao* encoded in them. It is their rootedness in the classical civilization of the Zhou that makes the rites precious and enables them to bring the *dao* to bear on society. Thus, most changes Sima allows are minor adaptations to the material culture of the Song period or the acceptance of functionally equivalent elements of contemporary customs. Yet, chapter five contained one revealing instance in which Sima goes against his canonical source without being able to back this measure up by reference to another authoritative text or example. He changes the burial location for the hair and nail clippings of the deceased simply on the strength of his own sense of moral sensitivity. Here Sima comes close to a Mencian view of ritual as based in and justified by an innate sense of morality. Elsewhere, Sima is highly critical of Mencius, but in order to make a substantial change to classical ritual, Sima has no choice but to make a quasi-Mencian appeal to the human being's innate sense of morality which the rite is to give expression to.

This, however, is not as much of a stretch for Sima Guang as it might seem at first sight. Sima subscribed to Yang Xiong's 揚雄 (53 B.C.–A.D. 18) view of human nature as containing both good and evil elements¹⁶ – a position that allowed him to have his cake and eat it, too, so to say. He could insist overall on the integrity of the ritual canon, but was able to make occasional changes by invoking the innate goodness of human nature wherever its demands seemed to override canonical authority.

This example demonstrates that Sima's approach to ritual reform ultimately has to be analyzed in the light of his overall worldview. Thus, the following section will address his general views of ritual beyond the context of the *Shuyi* and of his political and historiographical writings.

The Harmony of Ritual

A rather unlikely text in Sima's collected writings provides a good entry point for a consideration of his views on ritual, as it combines both aspects that interest us here: reflection on the nature and functions of ritual and a concrete attempt at ritual reform. The text is entitled "Touhu xin'ge xu"

¹⁶ "Xing bian" 性辯, in *Chuanjiaji*, 66.821-822.

投壺新格序 (Preface to the New Rules for the Pitch-Pot Game) and was composed by Sima in 1071.¹⁷ It deals with an ancient game to which a whole chapter is devoted in the *Liji*.¹⁸ The game is played by a host and his guests; the objective is to pitch arrows into a pot. As the loser of each round has to drink a cup of wine, one might think that this is a trivial game designed to raise spirits at a party. However, its detailed discussion in the *Liji* indicates that it is more than just a party game: it is played within a ritual framework where proper behavior gains the player more points than simply a successful pitch. And this aspect is stressed by Sima in his preface:

Even a frivolity such as the pitch-pot game was taken as a ritual by the Sages and employed in the districts and feudal domains. What is the reason for this? Zheng Kangcheng 鄭康成 said, “The pitch-pot game is of the same kind as archery.”¹⁹ In ancient times, the noble person expressed his virtue through archery (*junzi she yi guan de* 君子射以觀德). Only if his mind was calm, his body straight, his limbs coordinated, and his judgment sure, would he be able to hit the target.

It is just so in the pitch-pot game. To measure the distance from here and hit the target over there – that is the way of humanity. If one is filled with doubts or fear, he will miss. If one is negligent and slow, he will miss. This symbolizes righteousness. If one throws too far to the left or right, to the front or the back, he will miss. This shows the value of the Mean (*zhongyong* 中庸). If one hits the pot ten times, but misses twice, he has lost the game. This illustrates the need for circumspection. Thus by means of this game, one may order his mind, cultivate himself, be of benefit to the nation, and judge people’s character. How so? If one does not throw the arrow too far or too near, one takes this as hitting the centre [*zhong* 中, “the middle” and “to hit the target”]. If one places the arrows in such a way that they are neither at an angle nor dispersed, one regards this as straight (*zheng* 正). And centrality and straightness are the roots of the Way.

The Sages created rites and music, they refined punishments and government, they established the teachings and transmitted their admonitions. Among the great variety of human activity it is the most important to guide the people’s minds towards centrality and straightness. Yet among

¹⁷ *Chuanjiaji*, 75.917-919.

¹⁸ *Liji*, trans. Legge, vol. 2, pp. 397-401. Cf. also *Li Ki, ou mémoires sur les bienséances et cérémonies*, trans. Séraphin Couvreur (Ho Kien Fu: Imprimerie de la mission catholique, 1913), pp. 591-599. The game is described in Gösta Montell’s “T’ou-hu – the Ancient Chinese Pitch-pot Game,” *Ethnos* 5 (1940) 1-2: 70-83.

¹⁹ *Liji Zheng zhu* 禮記鄭注 (Record of Rites, with the commentary by Zheng Xuan) (SBBY ed.), 19.1a.4.

all the things difficult to attain and to put in order, none is as difficult as the human mind. Unless it is the mind of a worthy who preserves the Way and appreciates steadfastness, it will wander onto crooked paths and there will be no place where it does not go. It is not easily grasped. Therefore the Sages invented many methods to get hold of the human mind. The pitch-pot game is one of these. As one faces the pot and holds the arrow, in his nature there is no distinction between coarse and fine, there is nothing that is not sublime. Respect, attentiveness, and will power all rest in centrality and straightness. Though this state may not last long, one can use it to practice these qualities. Surely this is the way to order the mind! To be careful and diligent, to be as circumspect in the end as in the beginning – surely this is the way to benefit the nation! When the noble person plays this game, he is firm and will not allow his mind to be moved. He is solemn and does not change the expression of his face. He is not nervous before he hits the target; he is not haughty after he has done so. When the unworthy person plays this game, he bends his body, stretches out his arms, and uses tricks and artful devices. If he does not hit the target, he is not ashamed. Surely this is the way to recognize people's character! Viewed in this manner, the Sages were right to use it as a ritual. Just compare it to those chess players who pretend to honor each other, while attempting to defeat each other insidiously! And yet Confucius said, "Hard it is to deal with him who will stuff himself with food the whole day, without applying his mind to anything good."²⁰ How much less then should one despise the pitch-pot game? Although at present the rules of the game and its respectful expression are incomplete, overall it still resembles the classical form. However, the rules now current place too much value on difficult throws, just as in a game of chance such as throwing dice. This does not accord with the original intention of the ancient rite.

I have now determined new rules and adjusted the old ones in such a way that I put high value on care and skill and less value on lucky hits. In this way, those who use tricks and just rely on luck will not get anywhere. [...]²¹

What do we learn from this little text? First of all, pitch-pot is not an ordinary game. Its inclusion in the *Liji* indicates that the sages have endowed it with a deeper meaning. Since the game is thereby regarded as a form of *li*, Sima's analysis of its functions can apply to *li* in general. What, then, are these functions?

²⁰ *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects), 17.12, trans. Legge, p. 329. Sima Guang assumes that his reader will know the remainder of the passage: "Are there not gamesters and chess-players? To be one of those would still be better than doing nothing at all."

²¹ "Touhu xin'ge xu," in *Chuanjiaji*, 75.917-918. I omit the revised rules of the game, which are translated in Montell, "T'ou-hu," pp. 76-79.

The first function is *symbolic*. Each move in the game symbolizes (*xiang* 象) a specific virtue; the individual virtues merge into two central concepts: *zhong* 中 and *zheng* 正, which are said to be “the roots of the Way.” Hitting (*zhòng*) the pot represents the importance and efficacy of keeping to the center and the middle, while the straightness (*zheng*) of one’s pitch stands for straightness of character. From this symbolic function immediately arises the rite’s *expressive* function: the way one pitches the arrow is an expression of one’s inner grasp of centrality and straightness, i.e., of one’s virtue (*yi guan de* 以觀德). Thus this game as any ritual can serve as a gauge for the evaluation of a person’s moral fiber. The noble man demonstrates his virtue through an upright posture, his moderation and concentration, the straightness of his pitch, and the smoothness of his movements, while the inferior person betrays himself by his twisting and turning and trickery.

In addition to these two passive functions (symbolic and expressive), pitch-pot has an active dimension: its *educative* function which allows it to be used for the learning of virtue. Concentration on the target leads to an inner state of attentiveness that helps “bring order to the mind” (*zhixin* 治心). Even though this state only lasts a short time during the game, it can be practiced in this way (*keyi xi yan* 可以習焉). This inner state probably approximates what Neo-Confucians would call a state of “respectful serenity” (*jing* 敬), which is both the basis and outcome of moral cultivation.

These functions make pitch-pot a ritual rather than just a simple game. Unlike pitch-pot, games such as chess or throwing dice do not express or train in virtue: chess requires the use of cunning and deceit, while dice rely on luck alone. For his new pitch-pot rules Sima de-emphasized the place of luck and tricks in the game so as to enhance the chances of winning through virtue – and thereby strengthen its functions as ritual.

The concept of “centrality” that he addressed in his essay on pitch-pot plays an important role in his thinking. It usually comes paired with the term harmony (*he* 和), a combination that occurs in the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean) as “equilibrium and harmony” (*zhonghe*). In his “*Zhonghe lun*” 中和論 (Essay on Equilibrium and Harmony) Sima discusses the *locus classicus* of his terminology as follows: “Equilibrium is the world’s great root, harmony its accomplished path.”²² Wisdom lets us know this, highest virtue preserves it, ritual propriety carries it out, and music enjoys it. Government is to guide those who can follow it, while

²² *Zhongyong*, 1.4. Cf. Legge, p. 384.

punishments are to warn those who will not otherwise follow it. All of this taken together is called the Way. The Way is that which the sages and worthies employ.”²³ Thus, the rites are the enactment of wisdom and virtue, in other words, moral action. The common denominator of all virtues, that which merges them in the one *dao*, is equilibrium and harmony.

But just as in the pitch-pot game, the rites are not to be thought of as merely passive expressions of virtue, but play an instrumental role in reaching equilibrium and harmony. Sima Guang uses the mourning rites as an example to show how the rites serve to unify emotions (*qing* 情) and the Way:

When Ying Ji 應幾 lost his ten year old son, he was very sad, but then admonished himself, “What use is it? I heard that one who had the Way once said, ‘It is a natural emotion to mourn the death of someone. Yet death and life have their time, length and shortness of one’s life span are determined by fate. To know the regularity of the principle of these matters and not to mourn them, that is the Way. Hence, in the beginning one loses self-control due to the pain and the emotions win out over the Way. However, in the long term mourning decreases day by day and the Way comes back into play: eventually it will win out over the emotions.’ I always thought these to be wise words.”

I, Guang, refute this as follows: These are not the words of one who has the Way, because the emotions and the Way are one. How could they be separated? In the beginning to mourn a death is the Way; when mourning decreases over time, this also is in accord with the Way. Therefore it would be to act like jackals and wolves not to mourn a death in the beginning, but to mourn to such an extreme that one harms oneself – that in turn would be tantamount to neglecting the duties to one’s parents. One should neither act like a jackal or wolf, nor neglect the duties to one’s parents. That is why the sages have established the mourning regulations: the more time passes since the day of the death, the lighter the mourning becomes, and after a certain time one leaves mourning completely. In this way one always acts in accordance with human emotions.

The emotions, then, are a river and the Way is the dyke.²⁴ The emotions are a horse and the Way its tamer. If the river is not dammed, it will flood and destroy everything. If the horse is not tamed, it will gallop off in all directions. But if the river is dammed, it flows far and empties into the ocean. And if the horse is tamed, it runs fast and keeps to the way. Viewed in this manner, how could emotions and the Way overcome each other?²⁵

²³ “Zhonghe lun,” in *Chuanjiaji*, 64.794.

²⁴ This metaphor of the rites as a dyke may have its origin in the “Fangji” 坊記 chapter of the *Liji*. See Legge, *Li Ki*, vol. 2, p. 284.

²⁵ “Qing bian” 情辨, in *Chuanjiaji*, 66.822.

So, the rites give expression to human emotions and at the same time regulate them to keep a person from going to extremes – an idea that Sima Guang probably adopted from the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Classic of Filial Piety). The passages in question, including Zheng Xuan’s commentary on them, were included in Sima’s *Jiafan* 家範 (Family Rules).²⁶ Sima Guang proposes here a solution to the problem of the relationship of rites and human moral sensitivity that I sketched above: as artificial creations of the sages the rites are not direct products of human feelings, but they do accord with those feelings and give them their proper expression by controlling and channeling them. The rites are the means by which humans’ emotional life is led towards equilibrium and harmony, and hence to the Way.

With the double concept of “equilibrium and harmony,” Sima Guang believed to have discovered the key characteristic of the Way that is applicable to all realms of existence, including government, society, the emotional and moral life of individuals – and even their physical and mental health. In the same essay “*Zhonghe lun*,” Sima writes:

Confucius said, “The wise are joyful, the virtuous long-lived.”²⁷ This means: He who understands equilibrium and harmony will always be sure of himself. How could he then not be joyful? He who maintains equilibrium and harmony is “pure and clear, his spirit and mind like those of a deity.”²⁸ How could he then not be long-lived?

In the “*Xiaoya*” 小雅 [chapter of the *Shijing*], it is said, “Joyful are you, you noble ones, foundations of the state. Joyful are you, may you live for ten thousand years without end.” It further says, “Joyful are you, you noble ones, light of the state. Joyful are you, may you live for ten thousand years without end.”²⁹ Which means: If the noble man possesses the virtues of equilibrium and harmony, the state has peace and prosperity; the noble man himself enjoys joy and a long life.³⁰

²⁶ See *Jiafan*, 4.549 (*Zhongguo zixue mingzhu jicheng* 中國子學名著集成 ed.). The *Xiaojing* was a favourite text of Sima Guang, for which he composed a commentary in one *juan*. See Su Shi 蘇軾, “Sima Wengong xingzhuang” 司馬溫公行狀 in *Su Dongpo quanji* 蘇東坡全集 (Collected Works of Su Shi), vol. 1 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1964). Only the commentary’s preface survives. See “Guwen Xiaojing zhijie xu” 古文孝經指解序, in *Chuanjiaji*, 68.847-848. After his return to power, Sima made the *Xiaojing* a required text for the civil service examinations.

²⁷ *Lunyu*, 6.21.

²⁸ “Kongzi xianju” 孔子閒居, in *Liji*. See Legge, vol. 2, p. 282.

²⁹ Cf. Legge, p. 272.

³⁰ “*Zhonghe lun*,” in *Chuanjiaji*, 64.794.

Thus, the noble man is in a state of perfect harmony that produces beneficial effects both mentally (joy) and physically (long life). How is this state to be reached? Through the rites.

“Confucius said, ‘To overcome the self and return to the rites – this is highest virtue.’³¹ Thus, the rites are the method of equilibrium and harmony; highest virtue is the enactment of equilibrium and harmony. Therefore, whoever attains the rites, attains highest virtue.”³² Just as earlier the rites were shown to control the emotions and guide them towards equilibrium and harmony, here they are declared to be a “method” (*fa* 法) for the attainment of equilibrium and harmony in all spheres of life. Therefore the virtuous man will never fall into extremes: “In the *Zhongyong* it is said, ‘He who has virtue will obtain long life.’³³ Thus, the noble man limits his activities with equilibrium and harmony. His eating and drinking he adjusts appropriately. Therefore no imbalance of *yin* and *yang* can occur that could cause illness, and no imbalance of Heaven and Earth that could cause early death. Even without calisthenics and elixirs he will not lose his longevity.”³⁴

The last sentence indicates Sima’s belief that equilibrium and harmony would even make the traditional methods used to “nourish life” (*yangsheng* 養生) superfluous – a point that is stated even more forcefully in the following letter to his friend Fan Zhen:

Duke Kang of Liu said, “The people’s life is based in the equilibrium of Heaven and Earth – that is what is called its endowment (*ming* 命). The rules of action, rites, righteousness, and demeanor serve to maintain this endowment. Men of ability nourish these rules and receive blessings, while those devoid of ability violate them to bring calamities on themselves. [...]”³⁵ “Life” here means “existence” (*shengcun* 生存), not “birth” (*shisheng* 始生). “Equilibrium” is that by which Heaven and Earth are established. In the *Yi* 易 [Book of Changes] it is called the Supreme Ultimate (*taiji* 太極), in the *Shu* 書 [Book of Documents] the August Ultimate (*huangji* 皇極), and in the *Li* 禮 [Record of Rites] the Mean (*zhongyong*). Its power (*de* 德) is great and complete! In its smallest aspects, even the “nourishing of life” (*yangsheng*) is a part of it. How do we know this? Well, human diseases arise if something is either present in excess or is lacking. They are based on a surfeit of *yin* or *yang*,

³¹ *Lunyu*, 12.1. Cf. Legge, p. 250.

³² “Zhonghe lun,” in *Chuanjiaji*, 64.794.

³³ A paraphrase of *Zhongyong*, 17.2. See Legge, p. 399.

³⁴ “Zhonghe lun,” in *Chuanjiaji*, 64.795.

³⁵ *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Chronicle), 13th year of Duke Cheng. Cf. Legge, p. 381.

wind or rain, darkness or light. They result from imbalances of hunger and satiation, cold and heat, work and leisure, joy and anger. If both sides are balanced, there is no disease. *Yin* and *yang*, wind and rain, darkness and light all derive from Heaven. Hunger and satiation, cold and heat, work and leisure, joy and anger – these are effected by humans. If humans do not lose equilibrium in what they do, how could then anything derived from Heaven do harm, even if it were out of balance?

Insects nest in rotting wood, maggots gather in decaying flesh. If humans do not maintain equilibrium in their actions, they are invaded by diseases. Thus it is said, “When nourishment is complete and actions are timely, Heaven cannot cause diseases.”³⁶ Therefore the sages established the rules of action, rites, righteousness, and demeanor to teach the people never to lose their equilibrium. By not losing it the endowment [of life-force] is preserved. Men of ability nourish these rules and receive blessings, while those devoid of ability violate them to bring calamities on themselves. All of this depends on oneself and nobody else. The *Shi* 詩 [Book of Songs] says, “If a man have no dignity of demeanour, what should he do but die?”³⁷ The *Ji* 記 [Record (of Rites)] says, “With propriety a man lives, without it, he dies.”³⁸ Without rites a man loses his equilibrium and abandons his endowment. Thus the Duke of Liu was able to know that Duke Su of Cheng would soon pass away.

The theories of [famous medical texts such as] the *Suwen* 素問 [Pure Questions] and the *Bingyuan* 病原 [Origins of Diseases] may be good, but they are also hazy and abstract and by far not as clear as this argument. [...]

The function of music is nothing but harmony; the function of ritual is nothing but adaptation. These two do not just serve to govern the people, but also to nourish one’s life. As far as I am concerned, I know this, but have suffered from my inability to put it into practice. Although now I am already old, I still hope to gather the energy to study these matters so as to nourish my remaining life force. I would also like you, Jingren, to make this effort together with me, so that we may discover the origin and source of these issues, perfect music so as to harmonize ourselves inside, and perfect the rites to adapt our external actions. If one is harmonious inside, no illnesses appear. If one is adapted outside, no calamities happen. Without illness one is joyful, without calamities peaceful. Being joyful and at peace, your mind attains supreme tranquility and your spirit will be pure and bright. This state will permeate your four limbs and fill your whole

³⁶ *Xunzi* 荀子, “Tian lun” 天論.

³⁷ *Shijing*, “Xiangshu” 相鼠. Legge, p. 84.

³⁸ The exact reference of this quote is not clear, but a very similar passage can be found in the “Quli shang” 曲禮上 chapter of the *Liji*: “*you li ze an, wu li ze wei* 有禮則安無禮則危.” See Legge, vol. 1, p. 65.

body. If we succeed, surely our merit will equal that of Ling Lun 伶倫 and Shi Kuang 師曠, and our longevity that of Duke Kang of Shao 召康公 and of Duke Wu of Wei 衛武公!³⁹ We can burn the *Yijing* 醫經 [Classic of Medicine] and the *Bingyuan*, we can melt down the measuring containers of the Zhou and Han dynasties! [...]⁴⁰

The enthusiastic tone of this letter shows how convinced Sima Guang was that rites and music were not just the most appropriate instruments for ordering society, but were rooted in the ultimate principle of the cosmos. The equilibrium and harmony symbolized, expressed, and produced by rites and music fulfilled the basic yearnings of humans as Sima Guang saw them: happiness and longevity.

Conclusions

The present paper tried to show that the concept of ritual (*li*) is central to the whole framework of Sima Guang's thought. While its importance in his political thinking has been known for a long time, I have tried to show that it permeates all spheres of his intellectual life and that it became for him, especially during his years in Luoyang, a key to the secrets of the cosmos. Rites and music produce equilibrium and harmony on all levels of human existence: physical health and mental peace for the individual, stability in the family, orderliness in society. The sages of antiquity created the rites to help humanity take its proper place between Heaven and Earth – if only people were to study and practice them, disorder would vanish from all spheres of human life – individual, familial, societal. By bringing humans back in line with the fundamental cosmic principle they express, the rites are a panacea for all ills of the human condition. If there is one thread that unites all of Sima Guang's efforts and writings, this may well be it.

³⁹ Ling Lun and Shi Kuang were two famous musicians, the first a contemporary of the mythical Yellow Emperor, while the second lived during the Spring and Autumn period. The two dukes were rulers who lived and reigned for exceptionally long periods.

⁴⁰ “Da Jingren shu” 答景仁書, in *Chuanjiaji*, 62.753-755.