

## Elite and Folk : Comments on the Two-Tiered Theory

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## Elite and Folk: Comments on the Two-Tiered Theory

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In the previous two chapters we have begun examining the interaction of family roles and functions with traditions. We must differentiate between performance of ritual by an elite or specialized professional group of elders or clerics as contrasted with what is done or believed by lay or folk practitioners. This distinction between two tiers of religious activity has long been a part of the study of Christianity. In recent years the attempt to sort out an abiding folk level of religious beliefs as distinct from the elite traditions has also become an important part of comparable research in East Asia. Earlier the study of Asian religions by Westerners, emphasized the philological analysis of the works which made up the classical canons of Buddhist and Confucian writings. The Taoists were studied primarily by reference to the philosophical treatises attributed to Lao Tzu and his successors. When the result of this type of historical study was applied to contemporary living practices found in Asia, it was apparent that the elite tradition as contained in accepted and recognized texts was not adequate for describing actual folk activities. Conversely, when ethnographic reports began to circulate in the literature of anthropology and sociology it was obvious that direct study of the folk level of religious performance did not produce sufficient information about the special beliefs and practices of the elite/literate group of professionals and clerics. These two tiers remain separate and require methods of study appropriate to each. In this general volume on family and religion in East Asia, we include examples of different approaches brought to view when we describe folk practice in the two previous chapters or the philosophical conceptions of literate elites as described in chapters which follow.

There are two major ways of studying a popular approach to the religious life as contrasted with the approach described in the textual sources of the classical canons: one is through field work and direct observation of current practice and the second is through the study of texts which may be excluded from the accepted canons due to their special content. These latter texts may have no place in the accepted canon or, even if included, may be suspect by virtue of containing "heterodox" material. Study which is open to data derived from observation or from texts not approved by the traditionalists gives an added depth to our understanding of the fullness of the religious life of people. Increasing attention to this approach has raised serious questions about limitations or deficiencies inherent in studying any culture, especially one in East Asia, using only texts which time and tradition have sanctified. A schol-

arly approach benefits by making use of so-called 'folk' material or suspect texts filled with the unorthodox. Their appropriate analysis can make a considerable contribution to a deeper understanding of the Asian religious life. Conversely, exhaustive studies of folk practices by themselves cannot arrive at an understanding of how or why a 'great' tradition continues to exert its influence. The failure of an exclusive approach of either 'folk' or 'great' to furnish convincing description of the other attests to an essentially irreducible disparity of content and approach. The division into the 'great' and 'folk' remains a real one. The religious life of East Asian societies cannot be described as any syncretic unitary entity.

The notion of a two-tiered system of religious life is not a new one in western scholarship. Hume [1875: 334] describes in his *Natural History of Religion* the difference existing between trained professionals and the lay community with its popular patterns of belief. The problem of the two systems goes back long before Hume; we see in the writings of Church fathers such as Jerome (1393) and Augustine of Hippo the concern over the fact that the influx of new converts was accompanied by practices which were considered to be "pagan." In a more current study, Peter Brown [1981] in the *Cult of Saints* points out that Latin Christianity was beset with this very problem of how to interpret and deal with two tiers of organization. Prof. Brown has some timely warnings for those who attempt the task of dealing with this duality. First, he reminds us forcefully that we cannot rely on any 'elite' description of the 'folk'. He further indicates a frequent misunderstanding held by some who deal with this issue, namely the idea that the 'folk' tradition represents an unchanging substratum of culture which emerges from time to time to challenge or impinge on 'elite' structure. It is important to keep in mind that the 'folk' side of the religious life of society is just as susceptible to change as any other part of the culture and must be viewed as a continuously dynamic element rather than a passive one resistive to change.

Buddhism is usually considered to be a 'great' tradition but this leads to some problems, especially if we fail to define what we mean by Buddhism. A tradition so complex and multi-faceted cannot be adequately described or studied as if it were a homogenous movement. It is, for example, essential to deal both with a monastic system as well as with lay activity, since the belief systems followed in the two are often quite divergent. And within the lay and monastic communities, we also find several problems of approach; depending on whether the 'folk' is taken in equal part with beliefs that have their origin within the Buddhist core of teachings or whether the balance is shifted either toward the Buddhist ideas or those of the 'folk'. Thus the investigation of the Buddhist lay community may require that local non-Buddhist elements be studied alongside Buddhist ones. If we consider the Korean case as an example, such issues are made more evident.

When Buddhism was introduced into the peninsula it came into contact with rich and varied religious life. Over the centuries, Buddhism with its firmly established monastery system has come to exist side by side with the mudangs, who are often referred to under the generic name of shamans. It is tempting to say that

Buddhism represents the 'great' and the mudang the 'folk', but such simple definitions must be avoided, since, as has been pointed out, Buddhism cannot be considered as a single system any more than the mudang tradition can be taken as a unitary entity. Most Korean scholars will argue that Buddhism is completely enmeshed with shamanism and that it is impossible to make a clear separation of 'great' and 'folk'. If we attempt to compare the mudang with the Buddhist community, then it is essential to be very specific about what elements are being compared. On the Buddhist side the Chogye Order monastery life may be considered one aspect of Buddhism and the non-professional lay life as another. Since the lay people are in close contact with the mudang, most comments about the relationship of Buddhism to shamanism deals only with that situation in which there are lay women who follow both the traditions of the mudang and Buddhism.

Having made the point that there are at least two-tiers within the Buddhist side of the equation, one can then make more specific comparisons, as for example comparing the Chogye Monastery activity, rather than lay life, with that of the mudang. At first glance a visitor to a Korean Chogye Monastery (the major organization in the country of Buddhist monks and nuns) will be tempted to agree with the appraisal which holds that Buddhism and shamanism have become intertwined not only at the lay level but in the monastery as well. There are to be found shrines dedicated to the Mountain Spirit and Constellation Deities. Further proof of the impact of shamanism is said to be seen in the paintings which decorate the walls and eaves of the buildings...paintings of tigers, roosters, etc., all of which play a role in the rituals of the mudang. In the storage rooms of the monasteries there are costumes worn by the monks when doing dances which have affinity to the gyrations of the mudang. No building is constructed without geomancy being performed to make certain the location is an auspicious one. Monks are involved with healing ceremonies and on occasion will perform the ritual to give aid to some ailing person; the ritual consisting of throwing red beans at the altar, signifying the burning up of the illness and the causes of it. While this is a telling array of practices all pointing to the encounter of the elite Buddhist tradition as found in the Chogye Monastery, with the folk system native to Korea, research which focuses on the life and training of the monks and nuns provides us with quite a different picture. It is a surprise to find how little the monastic dwellers have to do with the mudang. The lighting of incense in the shrine hall of the Mountain Spirit is an age old procedure which has a very small part to play in the daily life of the monastic community. The lack of interest in or the appropriation of mudang like factors within the monasteries of the Chogye Order raises a number of important issues. How is it possible for the Order to be so separated from the practices which surround it? It might be that appearances are misleading and that underneath all of the Buddhist distractions there is the hidden inclusion of the whole world of spirits which are shared with the mudang in her trances. From actual field experience, this mix of monastic life and the mudang cannot be documented, and it appears to be true that Chogye Order monks and nuns are virtually free of an interest in or participation in the rituals and procedures of the mudang. This is

difficult to reconcile with the fact that the mudang dominates much of the life of the lay-women, a group from which the Buddhists must secure recruits and support.

It is here that we must turn to the family to provide us with some reference for an understanding of how the 'elite' is separated from the 'folk.' In the work of Prof. Kendall [1981] we have a detailed account of the mudang's ceremony and there we find a combination of Buddhism and non-Buddhist elements. We can conclude that the Chogye Order monastery represents an aspect of Buddhism which is highly resistant to the inclusion of shamanic elements. While these monasteries may be free of the dances and rituals of the mudang, in those very rituals performed outside of the monastery, Buddhist notions abound. The amount of lore which has passed from Buddhism to the mudang is impressive, for the mudang in her performance of the trance ritual undergoes possession by a sequence of spirits and deities, — among these are a number that have been borrowed from Buddhism. The Buddhist Sage comes to her body and she dresses in white costume; alongside the Sage is the Buddhist Monk Sage who speaks when she is wearing gray. In addition to these Buddhist sages, Maitreya appears as does Avalokitesvara and Bhaisajyaguru, all possessing for a time the mudang as she placates and consults with the repertoire of spirits. During certain rituals, the mudang helps lead the dead through the agonies of the ten hells, the ten realms of the nether world, an idea brought into East Asia by the Buddhists. The King of the Hells comes to the mudang and gives information about the situation of the family members who are undergoing the judgments in the nether world and it is usually the King of Hells who informs the living that the dead have escaped finally from the torments there. As the released souls journey out of hell they are led by the mudang to the road which reaches the Lotus Land, a type of Buddhist paradise. The shrine used by the mudang for the rituals in her home is called the Poptang (Hall of the Dharma) and the ritual performed at the shrine is given the name of Pulgong (Buddhist Service).

The work of sorting out the Kut with its cast of characters has given us a new vision of the way in which Buddhism and shamanism as practiced by the mudang have interacted. The Chogye Order monastery community with its rules of conduct, intense training in meditation, a large canon of scripture, carefully preserved in written form, and a model for the role of the monks and nuns constitutes the 'great' tradition. It is in the monastery that we find the community which depends on the classical texts. This monastic community holds itself aloof from the mudang, but the same cannot be said of the lay women who consider themselves to be Buddhists. Hume's description of the two-tiered structure of religion based on the professional priests and the lay followers seems to have application in Korea. It is among the lay group that we find involvement with the mudang, the mudang who has no resistance to Buddhist ideas, personages or concepts of hells and paradises, indeed she welcomes such items into her system. With shrines that bear the name of Buddhism, possessed in her trances by Buddhist deities, the mudang appears as a pseudo-Buddhist. In the mudang we find the 'folk' element, followed by lay women who consider themselves to be Buddhists.

The distinctions are not limited to Buddhism, they exist for the Confucians as well. The male dominated Confucian rituals can be termed a 'great' tradition with a textual canon and clearly defined rules and regulations, but as noted in the Chapters by Kendall and Lee, the wife and mother of any Confucian may well be followers of the mudang and spend time and money in trying to find out the reasons for sickness, bad luck or conversely attempting to bring about prosperity and health. Here the division between the 'great' and 'folk' is related to sex, status, and training, the higher status male as representative of the 'great' and his female family members being involved with the 'folk'. Just as Jerome in European Christianity separated himself and his fellow clerics from the lay people, especially the lay women, who had hints of the pagan in their practices [BROWN 1981: 28], so Korean Buddhist and Confucians with their seniors and professionals are set apart from the 'folk' practices which are dominated by the women.

In this discussion of the relationship of the 'great' and the 'folk' religions, one cannot avoid including the integrative role of the family. While traditions such as the Buddhist monastery or the Confucian rituals may remain separated from other aspects of religion in the society, the family is related to both the 'great' and the 'folk' and the involvement of an individual in a religious activity may depend on the status of that individual within the family. The Korean model for the levels of religious life and the importance of family in determining the role of an individual is helpful in looking at the rest of East Asia, but it is not a model which can be applied indiscriminately to either China or Japan. In both of these other areas, the 'folk' and the 'great' interact in particular fashions which are culturally distinctive. Nevertheless, there do exist some similarities which can assist us in this search for an understanding of how the 'elite' and 'folk' relate to one another in a family context. In all three areas, we must be aware that the Buddhist tradition is not unitary, and that the difference between the lay community and those who live in the monastery are quite significant. This raises a question of whether monastic Buddhism can be termed an elite movement while the lay alone belong to the 'folk'. Caution must be advised for those who wish to make such a clean cut distinction; some monks are involved with elements which can only be termed 'folk' and some lay people are trained in the higher doctrines of the faith.

In a general sense there are non-Buddhist movements such as Taoism and shamanism which are more 'folk' in nature and tend to stand off against the Buddhist system which is, depending on the particular aspect being studied, both 'elite' and 'folk'. Ozaki in a following chapter documents how Taoist attitudes about family were at some historical periods from the Buddhist tradition.

When compared with non-Buddhist groups, Buddhist lay people are less distinctive than the monastic dwellers. Again, we can turn to the Korean model for an example. In Korean Buddhism there are devout women called Posals (Bodhisattvas), who are to be seen within the confines of the monasteries of the Chogye Order doing a number of tasks: cleaning, sewing, mending, assisting with the cooking, while taking time to do prostrations and lighting of incense in the halls. These women are

carefully distinguished from the nuns by dress, hair style, training and practice. The nuns carry on a life style which is nearly the duplicate of the monks and as such can be said to fully participate in the 'elite' aspect of Buddhism; the Posals live as lay women with family obligations and a complete life within secular society. While monks and nuns usually stay in the monastery and do not frequent the lay homes, the Posals often perform an important teaching function among other lay adherents. Some Posals dance in the same manner as the mudang and are capable of doing divination; they use a different shaped drum and wear different clothing but the activity is quite similar. It is the Posal who visits in the homes and many monks and nuns will say that their first lessons in Buddhism came from these women. Here, in the lay community we see an individual holding a place in the family as mother, wife and senior female, who plays an important role in the spread and teaching of Buddhism. She may not be deficient in some of the more abstract doctrines of the Buddhist 'elite' system and will teach the interested young about karma, rebirth, and even the notion of 'emptiness'. At the same time, as described later in Lee's chapter, she is, like the other women of her standing, involved with the world of the spirits and the welfare of the people around her as determined by the forces of those spirits. It is in the person of the Posal that we can find 'elite' and 'folk' in the activities of a single individual. Throughout East Asia, there are such examples of devout lay people who are versed in the textual aspects of Buddhism but who also teach and pursue non-Buddhist practices. Thus we have in the Buddhist lay group, tiers of teaching and comprehension which indicate that the lay people are not all equally ranked. A discussion of the 'elite' and 'folk' traditions among this segment of the population requires the scholar to construct some outline by which the relative weight given to either the classical 'elite' or the 'folk' material can be judged. Lay followers who do not know the two traditions as separate, but rely on the myriad teachings of both folk and elite as if they belong to a single cohesive entity, are in a different class from those who do recognize a difference. Lay followers who lack sophistication in these matters are the ones who shock and amaze scholars who attempt to define Buddhism strictly on the basis of the sutras and commentaries. These 'Buddhists' who profess to beliefs that are a mixture of 'folk' and 'elite', have a religious life that contains within it many contradictions of the 'classical' Buddhist teachings. At the same time, when we separate the professional monks from the lay community, it must be said that monks and nuns themselves come from the community and often the belief patterns of a life-time continue to be a part of their life. It is one of the recognized tasks of the monastery to train novices fresh from the homelife to accept a new structure and to internalize the teachings of the 'elite' texts. The results, while mixed, tend to move the monastic dweller into a lifestyle and a pattern of beliefs which are quite distinct from those of their home and the world of the lay believers. It is difficult to conceive of the 'elite' tier of Buddhism separated from the monastery and the controlled life which the monastery is able to maintain. The removal of the monk from the home is considered in the traditional Buddhist setting to be essential for the promulgation and continuation of practices held to be of primary importance in the religion. This

highlights the fact that the family is one of the primary centers for 'folk' and as such the monk and nun must be removed from that family unit in order to learn and live by a different code. As discussed by Koh in the final chapter of this volume, the competition of the monastery and the family for the allegiance of the monk and nun is not surprising under these circumstances.

In Japan, the matter is complicated since the family of the married priest looks to the temple as a source of support and the continuation of the tradition means much to that family not only in spiritual matters but in monetary ones as well. When the family and temple are partners, the situation is quite different from that found in either China or Korea where monastery and home were separated. Interestingly enough in Japan the 'elite' teachings are carefully maintained by the temple priests and it is only there that Buddhism in East Asia was able to bring about a reconciliation of doctrines derived from the Indian yogic system of meditation and the needs and interests of the homelife. The force of this tie between family and the temple is nowhere better seen than in the pressure placed on the eldest son to assume his place as the temporal and spiritual leader. No discussion of Japanese Buddhism is sufficient without reference to this unique combination of temple and home.

The family is a unit in which elite and folk come into contact with one another, and part of the reaction created by this encounter relates directly to religious matters. With their monastic institution in China and Korea, the Buddhists create a new community which separates the monks and nuns from the belief patterns of their childhood. This causes tensions between Buddhism and the family and these tensions are the subject of no small part of the 'elite' canons of the Buddhists and the Confucians.

The problems between religious activities and the home are not limited to the monastic situation of the Buddhists, as we have seen in the case of the Confucian male's response to the mudang. The followers of the classical tradition of this lineage of teaching give high praise to the values of the family and the necessity of following the regulations which govern human relationships. At the same time, as higher status males they express disdain for, or at the very least disinterest in, the mudang even though from an objective point of view the mudangs play a major role in family life, for it is among the women who follow this tradition that many family problems are handled, such as health and success of children. The Confucian tradition in this case is antagonistic to a 'folk' tradition which focuses its activities only on the home life and the welfare of those within the home. Here we have another example of the 'great' tradition that is resistant to being drawn into a close tie with a 'folk' practice, even when the two are attempting to provide for similar human needs. The discussion of the contact of 'elite' and 'folk' must take into account that this encounter does not occur in some vacuum, neither does it occur exclusively in a temple or in public rituals of the folk practitioners, rather it is within the family where many of the significant events are to be observed.

In other chapters on Confucianism which follow, an 'elite' description of the family is critically documented. The actual functioning of the family as a social unit, may not accord with the ideal description of the family in the 'elite' texts. Neverthe-

less, the 'elite', especially the Confucian tradition, bases a major part of its view of life and society on the image of the family as presented in its teachings. The family members in turn attempt to act in ways that can be considered appropriate when judged against the admonitions of the texts. We cannot understand the Confucians without some comprehension of this teaching any more than we can deal with Buddhism without giving careful consideration to the statements about the family which occur within its canons. The descriptions and the comments about the family in the 'elite' texts cannot be used to describe the family as found within a given situation; neither can a description of that family in turn be used to provide an account of the ideal orientation of behavior similar to the 'elite' text. We have here a major distinction between what is said about a social entity in idealized religious rules of conduct and what can be observed about that unit in a contemporary setting. The situation seems to be that neither the descriptions based on observing the family nor the picture of the ideal family of the texts is a sufficient one, both must be examined. The family as a unit is bound by kinship ties but those ties alone do not encompass the complete aspect of the family. The actions of people within society can be based on principles which are applied by only some individuals in their judgement of a proper way to act. It is one thing to observe the act but of equal importance to a full understanding of the events must be a comprehension of the internalized belief systems which influence the thinking and decision process of the members of the social unit. Just as religion must be studied on the basis of at least two-tiers, so the family can be viewed from the point of view of the 'folk' and the 'elite'. At the 'folk' level we find one side of the family involved in magic and dependence on divination and shamanic healing powers and at the elite level we see the senior male attempting to act in accordance with the teachings of his texts. The family can not adequately be studied by reference to only one of its facets, for while practice may not always be in accord with the regulations of the ideal, neither can it be said that the family is susceptible to study without reference to the elite canons of Buddhists and Confucians. The conclusion must be that the family and religious involvements can only be studied by looking at both daily life and elite idealized descriptions, for both give important dimensions to our study of human behavior which as Spiro suggests is inextricably familial and religious.

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