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## Some Reflections on Family and Religion in East Asia

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## Some Reflections on Family and Religion in East Asia

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### INTRODUCTION

The theme of this volume is especially congenial to an anthropologist because the family and religion were among the core interests of anthropological inquiry from its very inception, and they have remained among its most perduring subjects of investigation. There are, I believe, at least two reasons why this should have been so.

In the first place, although like the family and religion, other sociocultural systems are also universal, none is as easily recognizable across all the ethnic types which are employed by anthropologists to classify the wide array of sociocultural systems as are family and religious systems. In the case of economic and political systems, for example, those which fall at the polar extremes of any of the recognized typologies by which they are classified are often identifiable as members of the same series only because of their similarities to the intermediate types comprising the typologies. We need only remind ourselves of the differences between nomadic-gathering economies and industrial-bureaucratic economies, or between small, acephalous band organizations and large-scale centralized empires in order to grasp this rather simple point. For both comparisons it is difficult to identify an invariant sociocultural core that cuts across all the types comprising a formal typology, or that persists from the earliest manifestation of an evolutionary typology to the most recent of its manifestations.

The contrary, however, is the case in regard to the family or religion, or so it would seem, if I am correct in claiming that the nuclear family is the invariant core of every family system, and that the worship of superhuman beings comprises the invariant core of every religious system. Indeed, the founders of nineteenth century evolutionary thought in Europe were as perplexed by the similarities between their own (Victorian) family and religious systems and those of the non-European societies that they studied as they were intrigued by (and sometimes contemptuous of) the differences.

The second reason, I believe, for the perduring anthropological interest in the family and religion is that these two systems are related to one another in a systematic relationship which holds for no two other sociocultural systems. At first blush, this statement seems paradoxical because while the human family marks man's affinity with the rest of the animal kingdom—especially the class of mammals—religion marks his uniqueness. That is, the family (whether uniparental or biparental) is a generic mammalian institution, and since man evolved from a mammalian (more

particularly a primate) species, it is hard to escape the assumption that the human family is phylogenetically rooted in the family system of our pre-hominid ancestors.

Since religion, however, is found (as far as we can tell) in our species alone, if religious systems are also universal it is because (as Robertson Smith and Freud pointed out a long time ago) they are rooted in, and may be viewed as metaphorical expressions of family (including kinship) relations. If that is so, then religion and the family (in contrast, say, to religion and economics or religion and politics) sustain a special relationship with each other, the existence of religion being in large part a function of the existence of the family.

To say that religious systems may be viewed as a metaphorical expression of family relations is to say that while the existence of the family may be explicable in terms of biological characteristics and needs which we share with other mammals, religion is explicable only in terms of the uniquely human capacity for symbolization, for it is in the symbolic process that the privately-constituted world of fantasy, the well-spring of religious belief, is transformed into the culturally-constituted world of religion. That is so because the symbol creates Being (spirits and gods) out of non-Being, and it invests words and gestures with the instrumental power that is imputed to religious ritual. In short, religious symbols often represent the transformation and elaboration, at the *cultural* level, of fantasies and cognitions that are found at the *psychological* level, which in turn, are produced by family relations at the *social* level.

Although there is nothing new in this, its implications for the universal dimensions of the family and religion have not always been spelled out by anthropologists who, in their special concern with variation, have more often concentrated on the cross-cultural differences in family and religious systems than in their regularities. Although there can be no denying the importance of these differences, their regularities are equally important, and it is the recognition of the cross-cultural regularities in the family, viewed as a system of social relationships, that enables us to understand its connection with religion, viewed as a system of symbolic relationships.

### **CROSS-CULTURAL REGULARITIES IN HUMAN FAMILY SYSTEMS**

The pan-human roots of the regularities in human family systems are not hard to discover, for however much these systems must adapt to and are conditioned by variations in ecology, economy, demography, the polity, and the like, every family (and kinship) system is a response to certain irreducible biological characteristics of human existence, among which I would stress the following.

- (1) Human reproduction is bisexual, and conception is effected by means of sexual intercourse.
- (2) Human beings are born helpless, and they remain dependent, both physically and emotionally for a prolonged period on their caretakers.
- (3) Human beings are also born instinctless, so that their caretakers attend not

only to their dependency needs but also to their need to acquire the cultural traditions of the group into which they are born.

(4) Since relatively permanent pair-bonding, brought about both by the absence of estrus and the need for economic cooperation, has been a human characteristic since at least the origin of hunting, the core caretakers are parents, together with whom children comprise a domestic group.

(5) Dependency being the child's prepotent need, he develops feelings of affectionate attachment toward his caretaking parents who, to a greater or lesser degree, gratify that need.

(6) Gratification, however, is always relative to frustration and caretakers not only gratify, but they also frustrate children's needs.

Caretakers are frustrators, willy-nilly, in a number of ways. First, since they are agents of socialization and enculturation, they impose restrictions, constraints, and prescriptions on their offspring which are almost always frustrating if not downright painful. Second, since there is no incompatibility between lactation and sex in human beings, as there is in infra-human mammals (in which the female does not enter estrus until her infant is weaned), caretakers are simultaneously both parent and spouse. Hence, since the mother, for example, is simultaneously mother and wife, the child must share her attention and love with a husband-father. Third, since humans are dependent for a highly prolonged period, their dependency does not cease with the birth of a sibling—as it does in infra-human mammals, who either leave or are driven from the domestic group by the time the new infant arrives—which means that the attention and love of the mother must be shared with siblings as well as father. The sharing of love and attention is frustrating enough for adults, as the ubiquity of jealousy and envy indicates; for children, however, the frustration is even stronger.

Given, then, that caretakers both gratify and frustrate children's dependency needs, parents are not only the first and most important objects of their children's affection, but they are also, together with siblings, the first and most important objects of their hostility.

In sum, so far as their emotional texture is concerned, we would expect that in any society the relationships among all of the dyads comprising the family would be characterized by strong ambivalence, and that children would develop both an Oedipus complex [SPIRO 1982] and sibling rivalry. That these expectations also hold for East Asian families is abundantly evidenced in the chapters of this volume—those at least that deal with the social relationships of the family. That these characteristics are symbolically expressed in the religious systems of East Asian cultures is no less evident from these reports. I shall return to these points later in my discussion.

These general observations concerning the cross-cultural regularities in the human family have important implications for our understanding of its variability. For if these observations are correct, the biological characteristics enumerated in the foregoing discussion comprise a set of parameters, or invariant conditions, which all societies have had to cope with in the historical development of their family systems.

On the one hand, therefore, these invariant conditions might be said to account for the cross-cultural regularities in human family systems. On the other hand, however, the variability that is found in these systems, variability, for example, in the principles of recruitment to the domestic group, the classification of kintypes, the norms which govern social relationships within the family, the rules which determine the distribution of inherited property, and so on—may be said to represent a limited range of institutionalized solutions to the problems, both sociological and psychological, created by those same invariant conditions. In sum, it might be argued that certain invariant biological conditions (bisexual reproduction and prolonged biological dependency) produce certain invariant sociological consequences, (the biparental family and its caretaking functions) from which there flow certain invariant psychological consequences, (such as ambivalence to parents and siblings), and that these consequences lead to variable cultural responses (norms and rules) which regulate the potentially disruptive effects of both dimensions—love and hate—of these ambivalent relationships.

I shall now argue that the invariant conditions that account for the cross-cultural regularities in family systems are no less important for the understanding of family behavior, than are the culturally variable rules and norms that govern family relationships. I am not arguing, I hasten to add, that these rules and norms are merely epiphenomena—superstructure, as Marxists say. I am arguing, rather, that the emotional and motivational dispositions of family actors that require the elaboration of cultural rules and norms for their regulation continue to operate in these actors even after they acquire those rules and norms, and that their behavior, therefore, is a product (in the algebraic sense) of the simultaneous influence of both of these determinants.

Take, for example, filial behavior. Whatever the cultural values regarding parents might be, children's sentiments and attitudes regarding their parents are not formed exclusively by these culturally variable values. They are formed as well by their invariant, albeit socially acquired emotions of the type discussed earlier; and their filial sentiments and attitudes represent an interaction of these two sets of determinants. To be sure, to the degree that filial emotions conflict with filial values we would expect filial *behavior* to comply not so much with the actors' emotions as with their cultural values which, expressed in rules and norms, govern their duties and obligations to parents. Since, in such a case, filial emotions conflict with filial values, the former must be repressed. Inasmuch, however, as the parents remain their unconscious targets, these emotions are as powerful as they ever were, but they are expressed in various disguises—some more, some less disruptive in their social consequences.

In conclusion, if social relationships are governed by the attitudes and sentiments an actor has toward some Alter, and if these attitudes and sentiments are produced not only by culturally acquired values, but also by emotional and motivational dispositions acquired by the actor in his social experience with Alter, it is as foolish to ignore the emotional as it is to ignore the cultural determinants of their relationship. This is

especially so in the case of family relationships, for many attitudes and sentiments which children hold toward parents and siblings are based on conceptions of them that are formed much before their acquisition of language—hence, before the acquisition of the cultural values which comprise the normatively expected conceptions of parents and siblings. That is, these attitudes and sentiments are formed on the basis of their personal experiences with their parents and siblings, experiences which, as was argued above, arouse conflicting emotions of love and hate, of attachment and resentment, and the like. Since, then, these emotions are usually reinforced by later experiences with parents and siblings, they inevitably play a significant role in the development of the attitudes and sentiments that inform their social relationships with them.

### RELIGION AND THE FAMILY

How, now, to turn to the second aspect of the theme of this volume, does the discussion of the family relate to religion? As students of religion we can never know the superhuman beings postulated by religious belief systems directly; we can only know them indirectly, i.e., by means of the conceptions that religious actors have of them. Indeed, with some few exceptions—for example, mystical experience and trance possession—the religious actors themselves do not claim to have direct knowledge of them. They, too, know them only indirectly—as they are represented in the collective representations of their culture, in their own mental representations of them, and in the rituals by which they attempt to relate to them.

If, then, we take these three sets of data as our evidence for the conceptions which religious actors have of superhuman beings, it seems safe to say on the basis of a great deal of comparative research that these conceptions are more or less isomorphic with the conceptions, unconscious as well as conscious, which, as family actors, they form of their family members, and more particularly the conceptions which as children they form of their caretakers, usually their parents, in their personal encounters with them. It also seems safe to say that the rituals by which they attempt to relate to these superhuman beings express, and sometimes gratify, the wishes that are instigated by the emotions which those caretakers arouse in them, most especially the emotions of dependency and love, of fear and hatred. Thus, if the child's dependency needs, for example, are gratified by a nurturant mother, it is not unlikely that as an adult he will worship a mother-like superhuman being(s) from whom he anticipates the gratification of his wish for continuing childlike dependency. Similarly, if certain of his childhood needs are frustrated, for example, by an authoritarian father, whom he consequently learns to fear or hate, it is not unlikely that as an adult he will propitiate a fatherlike superhuman being(s) so as to avoid his wrath which he fears, and/or to express his hostility to him, something he seldom does (not at least overtly) in his relationship with his father.

In short, I am suggesting, that whatever the "objective" characteristics of his parents might be when seen through the lens of a camera, the child forms various mental representations of them which, given the fact that the child's lens is neither

objective nor realistic, distort and exaggerate their characteristics. I am suggesting, further, that these parental representations, partly conscious, partly unconscious, constitute the *anlage* or conceptual schemata for the mental representations which he later forms of superhuman beings. I am suggesting, finally, that the psychological reality of superhuman beings, like that of the parents, is in no way affected by their physical reality. Thus, even if their parents have died and are no longer in the physical world, they continue to exist for their children in the latter's representational world—i.e., in their mental representations of them—and it is in the latter world that, even when they are alive, they have their important, i.e., their psychological reality. This condition also holds, *pari passu*, for gods, ghosts, and ancestors, to use Jordan's felicitous designation for the superhuman beings of East Asia [JORDAN 1972].

With this conceptual orientation to the relationship between the family and religion, we may now turn to the chapters of this volume in order to examine the extent to which this schema applies to the East Asia materials. If, in this examination, I emphasize some chapters more than others, it is not because the latter are any the less important or significant for the general theme of this volume, but because I was charged with examining the relationship between the family and religion in East Asia from a psychodynamic perspective. I should also note that if much of the focus of my discussion is on male actors, it is because the material herein has been typically presented from that perspective. It should finally be noted that some of the formulations in what follows were rather rigorously challenged during the discussion of the conference preceding this publication. Although I found many of the challenges both illuminating and provocative, I have nevertheless retained these formulations with only some few changes.

## FAMILY TENSIONS IN EAST ASIA

In order to confine my discussion to reasonable boundaries, I have decided to focus on lines of tension in the East Asian family. Since, however, filial piety and family solidarity have always received a great deal of attention in discussions of the East Asian family, such a focus may perhaps contribute some new dimensions to the subject.

From the material presented in the conference papers, one might expect the following lines of tension to be most salient in the families of East Asia. First, given the extraordinary relationship of nurturance and dependency characteristic of the mother and the son, most especially, so it seems, in Japan, I would expect considerable tension to develop between the father and the son: on the father's part because of the wife's obvious emotional preference for the son, on the son's part because his father is a most important competitor for his wish for the mother's exclusive attention. If nothing else, it is the father—not the son—who has a monopoly on the mother's sexuality. Moreover, since the father-husband is an especially important authority figure, both for the wife and the children, one whose jural, if not personal, authority

requires obedience and respect, one would expect that this would constitute an equally important source of tension in the father-son relationship.

It must be noted here that although the mother-son relationship is described in several chapters, none of them addresses the father-son, father-daughter, or mother-daughter relationships, nor, except in passing, the relationship among siblings. That this disregard of the latter relationships would not occur in a conference dealing, for example, with South Asia or the Middle East, only serves to underscore the pivotal emotional, though not jural, importance of the mother-son dyad in the East Asia family system. (It also means that my comments will be incomplete and somewhat distorted).

Given the subordination of children to both parents, as well as the duties and obligations that the former owe the latter (which are summed up in the key concept of filial piety) and which continue even after their death, I would also expect considerable tension to develop not only between father and son, but also between mother and son. But there is an additional—and more important—reason that I would expect tension to develop in the latter relationship. Although the mother is extraordinarily nurturant to the son and attentive to his needs—which, of course, leads to the loving and dependent attachment to her that is stressed in all the papers—that very attentiveness can be expected to lead to three types of tension.

First, the mother's devotion, conceived as a "perfect act of unchanging selfless sacrifice" to quote Tanaka (Chapter 15), may produce a "deep feeling of guilt and indebtedness in the son," and such a feeling can only lead to profound (though probably unconscious) resentment. Second, the young son's intimate and persistent physical contact with the mother—he sleeps with her, is bathed by her, and so on—most probably arouses erotic feelings for her which, however, are necessarily frustrated, and, I assume, ultimately repressed. It is for that reason, I would assume, that the mother-son relationship is characterized, to quote Tanaka again, by "the continuous presence of unresolved libidinality." Third, the dependent attachment to the mother, which she herself encourages, is in conflict with the child's need for autonomy, including psychological separation and individuation [MAHLER *et al.* 1975].

I would also expect considerable tension to develop in the husband-wife relationship: on the husband's part because of his subordinate place to the son in the wife's emotional life; and on the wife's part because, as Tanaka puts it, of the "unrecognition of sexuality in the marital relationship." Now if, as Tanaka also points out, the wife's relationship to her husband recapitulates that of the mother to her son, that is highly gratifying for the husband, especially since he can gratify his erotic needs outside of the marriage—hence, have his cake and eat it too—but it can only be frustrating to the wife whose erotic needs, however much she may sublimate them in her relationship with her son, are nevertheless frustrated in her marital relationship in which (to quote Tanaka again) "sexuality is very much downplayed." Indeed, I would argue that it is precisely because her sexual needs are frustrated in her role as wife that the woman invests such great affect in her role as mother, her nurturant relationship to her son being a sublimation of her frustrating erotic relationship with her husband.



I would argue, too, that the husband's relative disinterest in his wife as an erotic object is the last link in a feedback loop in which, having recoiled as a boy from the incestuous implications of his attachment to his highly affectionate mother, he marries a woman who in so many respects represents the mother. In Japan, for example, the husband not only calls his wife, "mother," following the birth of their first child, but since her relationship to him is, as Tanaka puts it, "not essentially different from her relationship to her young children"—implying that it is little different from his mother's relationship to him when he was a child—he comes to perceive her, so I would suggest, as a mother. In short, since the wife-husband relationship and the mother-son relationship are "dangerously similar" (to use Tanaka's words), it is hardly surprising that the wife becomes a non-erotic object for her husband.

The dynamics of that process are encapsulated in Freud's pithy comment concerning a class of males—the males of East Asia, of course, were far from his mind—concerning whom he writes, "Where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love. They seek objects which they do not need to love, in order to keep their sensuality away from the objects they love" [FREUD 1912: 183]. For such males, the wife is classified with the class of females who, like the mother, are viewed as asexual, and they are distinguished from the class of females (including prostitutes, concubines, and mistresses) who are viewed as sexual. The former class, being pure, are worthy of love; the latter, being impure, are worthy only of sex.

I would suggest, then, that the Neo-Confucianist view of marriage, according to which, to quote Tu (Chapter 7), "mutual responsibility rather than romantic love" ought to characterize the conjugal relationship, is more a reflection of than a model for the actual relationship between the spouses. In either event, for the wife to be treated by her husband, as Ch'eng I reports his father to have treated his mother, with "full respect" and "reverence," or for that same wife to live with her husband in "tranquility and correctness," and never to be the object of "indecent liberties and improper intimacies,"—all these quotations are taken from sources quoted by Tu—such a wife, I would suggest, is not only sexually frustrated, but in the context of East Asian society she is all the more resentful (perhaps unconsciously) because though *she* is not the object of her husband's "indecent liberties and improper intimacies," she knows that other women—concubines, mistresses, or whatever—are.

A fourth line of tension, as I see it, develops between siblings. Although the papers contributed to this volume stress the continuing involvement of the mother in her son, it seems reasonable to assume that the birth of a new child, especially a son, means that the elder child is, to some degree, displaced by the younger as the focal attention of the mother. In Korea this displacement is both symbolized and actualized in the sleeping arrangements in which, as Lee (Chapter 12) describes it, the elder sibling is extruded from his parents' bedroom following the birth of a younger sibling, and is sent to sleep in the room of his paternal grandmother. But even in Japan, where such extrusion does not occur, the rivalry between siblings for maternal love has its effects, so that it is little wonder that in the *Kojiki* myths analyzed by Sofue (Chapter 14), 12 of the 15 myths which deal with the relationship between brothers

entail competition and rivalry, and that in 8 of these 12 the rivalry culminates in fratricide.

Given such strong indications of sibling rivalry, it is little wonder, too, that both in Japan and Korea the domestic unit comprises a stem, rather than extended family. Moreover, although Lee contrasts the Japanese and Korean stem family households with the extended family household in China, in fact the situation in China [Hsu 1971; YANG 1969] is very little different from that in Japan and Korea, and for the same reason: following the death of the father, friction between married siblings leads to the segmentation of the extended family and their formation of independent households.

## FAMILY TENSIONS AND RELIGION IN EAST ASIA

In the following sections I wish to examine some possible links between the putative tensions in the East Asian family discussed in the previous section and certain aspects of East Asian religion. Before examining these links it is important to emphasize two points. First, I am not suggesting that religious beliefs and rituals can be "reduced" to sociological or psychological variables. I am suggesting, rather, that social relationships, cognitive orientations and motivational dispositions both inform and are reflected in belief and ritual system, whether sacred or secular. Second, in focusing on the relationship between family tensions and religion, I am not suggesting that the solidarious dimension of the family is not reflected in religion. Rather, that dimension is not the subject of my inquiry.

### Ancestor Worship and the Father

Although ancestors are most often viewed as benign, it is also the case that sometimes they may be punitive. Although Fortes may have somewhat overstated his case in claiming that in East Asia, as well as West Africa, "the feature that stands out most conspicuously in all varieties of ancestor worship...is their punitive character" [FORTES 1977: 145], some of the chapters in this volume also noted (without emphasizing) their punitive dimension. Thus, in Korea, the dead (including the ancestors and ghosts) are dangerous, so Kendall (Chapter 3) remarks, "simply because they are dead...and their touch brings illness or affliction." This is especially true in the case of ancestors who died with "unfulfilled desires." Restless ancestors, as well as ghosts and angry household gods, cause not only illness, but financial loss and domestic strife, as well. Similarly, Lee observes that if the ritual service for an ancestor is not performed, the ancestor spirit becomes a wandering ghost; and although, he further observes, ghosts have no power to punish their descendents directly, this implies, I would assume, that they do have power to punish them indirectly.

In his treatment of ancestor worship in China (Taiwan) Suenari (Chapter 11) does not deal with the punitive dimension of ancestors, but it is implicit in his emphasis on (what he calls) the "economic reciprocity" characteristic of family relationships, including that with ancestors. Like their relationship with the gods, the

Chinese relationship with their ancestors is “contractual,” which implies that the latter’s punitive or non-punitive action is contingent upon the offering or withholding of gifts by their descendents. This implication is explicit in the work of Emily Ahern on ancestor worship in Taiwan. According to Ahern’s findings ancestors are not infrequently blamed for such serious misfortunes as insanity, serious infirmity and death [AHERN 1973: Chapter 12].

The situation in Japan is no different. Thus, Morioka (Chapter 13) observes that for the lower class, at least, the function of ancestor worship is to “avert disaster” which would be caused by ancestors if their worship were neglected. Carmen Blacker makes the same point, restricting it however, to the lower class. Thus, if “the ancestral dead are not correctly treated by their descendants, if the offerings or the obsequies necessary to their nourishment are neglected, then with frightening suddenness their nature will change. The kindly old grandfather, the sympathetic father, the loving mother will turn in an instant into a vicious and capricious tyrant, punishing the neglectful family with curses.” [BLACKER 1975: 47–48].

In order to understand these findings, it is important to consider some other data offered in the accompanying chapters. First, approximately 50 percent of Japanese families, according to Morioka, continue to practice ancestor worship even when the *ie* system has collapsed. Second, in Korea, according to Lee, the ancestor tablet is kept in the ancestral shrine only until the fourth ascending generation, following which it is buried in the grave, which implies that the ancestor remains individuated only for a relatively short time, after which he is assimilated to the generic class of “ancestor.”

Now although in ancestor worship, rites are performed for all one’s ancestors, these findings suggest that the *cognitively salient* ancestors are not the genealogically remote ancestors, but rather the genealogically close and immediately dead ancestors—i.e. the parents and grandparents. The remote ancestors, of course, are important both jurally, (to establish claims on property, to enhance the prestige of a clan line or to legitimize its rights) and politically (to inculcate respect for authority, beginning with the family and ending with the centralized state). But for the average individual, I would suggest, these corporate functions are second in importance to their “religious” functions. In the latter regard, an ancestor (like anyone else) is cognitively salient for a religious actor only to the degree that he has a clear and vivid mental representation of him, and the ancestors concerning whom he has the clearest and most vivid mental representations are his deceased parents and grandparents—those whom he himself has personally encountered. Hence, even though in ancestor worship the actor in principle attends to all of his ancestors, it is his immediate ancestors, especially his parents, who, so I would suggest, he has most in mind, or whose mental representation forms the template for his conception of the other ancestors. Fortes [1961: 187] put it most succinctly in his remark that “ancestor worship is primarily the religious cult of deceased parents.”

These claims are supported by Morioka’s findings that (a) although traditionally a Japanese “ancestor” is the ancestor of the *ie*, with the collapse of the *ie* in urban

families, "ancestor" has increasingly come to designate the "deceased bilateral kindred" (which most importantly means, I would suggest, the ascendance of the mother to the status of a cognitively salient ancestor), and (b) the "private" meanings of ancestor worship have superceded its "public" meanings. Consistent with my previous hypothesis, however, I would suggest that these private meanings were always foremost in the worshipper's mind (although the public meanings were, no doubt, the important formal meanings), and that the collapse of the *ie* merely permits their centrality to be acknowledged.

Even more important, however, is Morioka's finding that although many urban families do not own a *butsudan*, the rate of ownership dramatically increases with the death of a parent, and that even in extended family households (in which, presumably, the *ie* is still somewhat important) it increases significantly in households with widows. These two findings suggest once again that the cognitively and emotionally salient ancestors are the immediate dead. Moreover, taking Morioka's findings concerning widows into account, the ancestors need not even be linear ancestors so long as they had been household members with whom the actor had sustained important social relationships.

If this is so, then inasmuch as ancestors are not only revered—an extension of filial piety—but also feared, I would suggest that both attitudes are a function of the mental representations that, as children, the actors had formed of their immediately deceased ancestors, most especially, but not exclusively, the father. The latter attitude, which is the one we are concerned with here, might be explained in the first instance by Fortes' hypothesis that it is the "authority component" of the father that is elevated to ancestorship. If, then, in addition to his positive feelings toward the father, one would expect—given the over-arching value of filial piety—that he would probably repress these feelings, or at least not exhibit them in overt behavior. That upon his death the father—now an ancestor—is viewed as a potentially dangerous figure, capable of inflicting harm on his descendants, is then susceptible of two, complementary interpretations.

First, the repressed hostility which was felt for the father when he was alive can now find an outlet in the culturally-constituted belief that ancestors are potentially dangerous. Specifically, that belief allows the child to project his erstwhile hostility toward the living father onto the dead ancestor, thereby transforming him from an ordinarily oppressive authority figure into a potentially dangerous one. The second interpretation is more complex. Clinical evidence indicates that hostility toward some person may generate death wishes (if only as an unconscious fantasy) toward him, and should that person die, the actor, given that the "omnipotence of thoughts" is one of the characteristics of unconscious mentation, may unconsciously experience his death as resulting from his death wishes toward him. Given, then, that the principle of *lex talionis* informs not only many legal systems, but unconscious mentation as well, the belief that the deceased father is potentially dangerous might be explained by the unconscious conviction of the child that the former might harm him in retaliation for the 'harm' that he (the child) had inflicted on the father.

### Goddesses, Religious Specialists and the Mother

Since the most notable feature of the mother-son relationship in East Asia is the mother's nurturance and the son's dependence, we would expect that dimension of the mother-son relationship to be reflected in East Asian religion. The extraordinary nurturant-dependent nature of the mother-son relationship in East Asia, at least in Japan, is stressed in the chapters by Tanaka and Sofue. A "good mother," Tanaka observes, "is believed to care for any worry about her son eternally." Hence, the son's dependency (*amae*) on the mother persists not only over her lifetime, but even after her death when, as an ancestress, she is still "supposed to be watching over him." As a measure of what he characterizes as the son's "very strong dependency need" in regard to the mother, Sofue points to the fact that it is the favorite theme of Japanese popular culture. For him, therefore, this need comprises a "mother-complex." Whatever that expression may denote, it certainly connotes the formation by the son of a mental representation of the mother as extraordinarily loving and nurturant, one who can be expected to do anything in her power in the service of his welfare.

Such a maternal representation is too good to give up. Hence, it is little wonder that when the mother becomes an ancestor the son continues to expect that he can rely on her assistance. It is little wonder, too—though I would not have predicted it—that with the introduction of Buddhism to China, and thence to Japan, the infinitely compassionate Hindu god, Avalokitesvara, was transformed into the goddess, Kuanyin (China) or Kannon (Japan). That the *amae* relationship with the mother is transferred to Kannon—probably the most popular deity (actually Bodhisattva) in Japan—and that the benevolent dimension of the maternal representation is reflected in the collective representation of Kannon (just as the authority dimension of the paternal representation is reflected in the collective representation of the male ancestor) can be seen in the following statement of Teruko Furuya. (The translation is by Yohko Tsuji)

"Kannon's concern is not directed toward heaven or a utopia, but toward this world" (in which many people still suffer). Kannon is benevolent and omnipotent. She never punishes us, nor gets angry with us. On the contrary, consistently and promptly she answers our selfish prayers, such as a desire to have an attractive child, a desire to pass an entrance examination for a prestigious school, a desire to get promoted at work, and so on. She is just like an *amai* mother who always listens to the desires of an indulged child..."

Like the mother, Kannon is not only infinitely compassionate, but she has another quality that the mother does not have: she is also all-powerful, as the following quotation from Blacker [1975: 94] indicates. "A man only has to think of the Bodhisattva Kannon to be saved from every conceivable calamity. A man hurled into a fiery pit has but to think of the Kannon for the fire to be quenched. A man floundering in an ocean of sea monsters has but to think of Kannon and he will neither sink nor drown. A man bombarded with thunderbolts has but to think of Kannon

and not a hair of his head will be hurt. A man beset by goblins, demons, ghosts, giants, wild beasts or fearful fiery serpents has but to think of Kannon for these creatures to vanish." Power of this magnitude, of course, is never found in any human being but it *is* found in the mental representations that a young child forms of his parents. In the child's eyes the parent, who literally has the power of life or death over him, is indeed omnipotent. Hence, when the omnipotence of the maternal representation of the Japanese child is conjoined with its benevolence, the result—I would suggest—is a maternal representation that is projected in the adult's collective representation of Kannon.

But the relationship between the religious devotee and Kannon is not the only manifestation of the child's *amae* relationship with the mother on the religious plane. It is also manifested, as Tsuji [1980] has suggested, both in the relationship between client and shaman (*miko*)—and here, I would include Korea as well as Japan—and in that between the members and founders (*kyoso*) of the new religions.

In Japan and Korea, though not in China, shamans are almost exclusively female, and the rare male shaman performs his role as a transvestite. In Korea, according to Kendall, the shaman (*mansin*) is used to help the household overcome the afflictions—illness, financial loss, domestic strife—that are brought about by restless ancestors, ghosts, and angry household gods, as well as to help young women overcome infertility. According to Blacker, similar functions are served by the Japanese *miko*, as well as by her modern counterpart, the *kyoso*, most of whom are also female. So far as the latter are concerned, Davis observes that the "great majority" of those who join a new religion hope "to receive some practical benefit—cure of disease, solution to some personal problem, support for some psychological difficulty, etc—from their affiliation" [TSUJI 1980: ms]. In short, in both cases when faced with adversity, the adult re-establishes a dependency relationship with a *female* religious specialist that as a child he had experienced with his mother.

I might add that just as the devotees' relationship with these female religious specialists is best understood by reference to the family—as a recapitulation of their early experience with the mother—the recruitment of these women to their religious vocations is also best understood by reference to the family—to their experience as wives in a sexually frustrating marital relationship. Thus, in Korea, Kendall tells us, shamans are usually recruited to their calling in middle age, after suffering a "run of ill luck" as a result of possession by some god who claims them. In Japan, Sasaki (Chapter 4) writes, there are two ways of becoming a shaman: "One is by divine calling and the other by self-searching for shamanship." In the former case, the woman suffers from some mental and physical abnormality, including visual and auditory hallucinations, trance, decrease in appetite, severe palpitations of the heart, sleeplessness and loss of weight. If her condition is not improved by resort to modern medical specialists, she will visit a shaman to discover the cause of her affliction. Should it be diagnosed as resulting from spirit possession, the most important means for overcoming her afflictions is for her to become a shaman herself, and to serve the spirit or god who has possessed her. (In Okinawa, this often means agreeing to marry

him). After agreeing to become a shaman, her "abnormality" gradually disappears.

These women, according to Blacker, exhibit in their personal histories a "curiously uniform pattern," "Nearly all of them in their early life betray symptoms of what could be called 'arctic hysteria'. They are sickly, neurotic, hysterical, odd, until a moment comes when exacerbated by suffering, these symptoms rise to a climactic interior experience of a mystical kind. A deity, by means of a dream or a possession, siezes them and claims them for his service. Thenceforward they are changed characters. Their former oddity and sickliness give way to a remarkable strength and magnetism of personality, which is conferred on them, together with various supernatural powers, by the deity who has possessed them" [BLACKER 1975: 129].

The characteristics of these women—which are almost identical with the characteristics and mode of recruitment of Burmese shamans whom I investigated in the 1960's [SPIRO 1978]—are the classical symptoms of conversion hysteria, a condition that is typically brought on by the repression of frustrated sexual needs. In this case, I would suggest, these frustrated needs are symbolically gratified by means of trance possession—i.e. by a hallucinatory experience—in which they are finally claimed by the most potent male of all, a god. If, then, the East Asian woman, like her counterpart in South and Southeast Asia, is often frustrated by her unfulfilled libidinal attachment to her father, as Roy [1975] observes in the case of India; if moreover, her unfulfilled desires continue to be frustrated in her sexually unsatisfactory relationship with her husband as occurs, so Tanaka suggests in Chapter 15 and Koh suggests in Chapter 16; and if, finally, the sublimation of her repressed libidinal desires in her relationship with her son is not entirely effective; if all this is true, then it is hardly surprising, as Blacker observes, that the women who become shamans or founders of new religions represent merely the tip of an iceberg. Nor is it surprising that some of the women—usually lower class and not highly educated—should find an outlet in these religious callings, especially since possession by a god serves not only to gratify their frustrated libidinal needs, but their status needs as well. From a position of subordination and relative powerlessness in the formal social structure, they suddenly become the medium for the gods themselves, so that their personality undergoes a transformation of corresponding magnitude [BLACKER 1975].

### **Buddhist Monasticism and the Parents**

As a final example of the relationship between tensions in the parent-child relationship and religion in East Asia, I wish to turn to Buddhist monasticism. From the perspective of this paper and from that of Lancaster's too (Chapter 9), the crucial feature of Buddhist monastic recruitment is found in the carrying out of the Buddha's injunction that in order to achieve the Supreme Goal of Buddhism it is necessary—in the words of the *Mahavagga Sutta*—that "family men go forth from home into homelessness."

Now what was peculiar to Indian civilization at the time of the Buddha, as Dutt [1962: 43] observes in his magisterial history of Buddhist monks and monasteries in ancient India, is not that India produced saints and ascetics who renounced family

and the world for a higher goal—religious manifestations of that type were also found in other civilizations as well—but that in India the “goers-forth” formed a community. Lancaster also stresses this point in regard to East Asia, but with an important twist that we shall note below. In ancient India, moreover, this community was “recognized as such not only by the people, but also by the State”—something which continues to be true of the Buddhist societies of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia [SPIRO 1982]—whereas in East Asia the Sangha has most frequently met strong opposition from the people and the State alike.

The State aside, opposition to the Sangha is entirely understandable in the case of East Asia where “leaving home” is the ultimate act of filial impiety because as Lancaster observes, it means giving up the family name, removing oneself from the ancestral lineage by not having children, producing no descendants for the continuation of ancestor worship, and—on a more mundane note—causing trouble after death because monks leave no descendants to worship them.

It may also be remarked that, beginning with the Buddha himself, “leaving home” has meant abandoning not only parents, but also—since some “goers-forth” have been married when embarking upon their quest for Enlightenment—wives and children as well. The *locus classicus* is the *Vessantara Jataka*, the most famous Buddhist myth in Theravada Buddhist societies (*The Jataka* 1957: vol. 6). The Prince Vessantara, an earlier incarnation of the Buddha, abandoned his beloved wife and children in order to seek Enlightenment. To attain his quest he even gave his children as servants to a cruel Brahmin, and his wife to yet another. When his children, beaten and oppressed by the Brahmin, managed to escape and find their way back to Vessantara, he was filled with “dire grief”—his heart palpitated, his mouth panted, blood fell from his eyes—until he arrived at the insight that “All this pain comes from affection and no other cause; I must quiet this affection, and be calm.” Having achieved that insight, he was able to abandon his children.

Such an attitude, as Ozaki reminds us (Chapter 6), was already found in East Asia prior to the arrival of Buddhism, being present in Taoism as well. The following story of Lu Hsiu Ching, which I quote from Ozaki’s chapter, indicates that very clearly. “Lu Hsiu Ching retired from the world to the mountains where he studied. He left the mountains for a while to look for some medicine. When he passed through his native place he stayed at his house for a few days. At that time his daughter began to run a fever all of a sudden and fell into a critical condition. The family pleaded with him to cure her. But Hsiu Ching left, saying: ‘Having abandoned my family, I am in the midst of training. The house I stopped by is no different from an inn to me.’”<sup>1)</sup>

In both cases, Buddhist and Taoist alike, the attitude of the perfect “goer-forth”

1) That the pursuit of the religious life requires the rejection of family ties is, of course, not restricted to the salvation religions of Asia. Early Christianity, (as the attitude of Jesus, both to his ties with his own family, as well as to family ties in general reveal) required an equally powerful rejection (cf. Mark 3: 31ff, Luke 9: 59ff, Luke 14: 26).



is best described in the famous injunction of the *Sutta Nipata*. "Having left son and wife, father and mother, wealth, and corn, and relatives, the different objects of desire, let one wander alone like a rhinoceros" (*Sutta-Nipata*, verse 26 of the *Khaggavisana Sutta*). But, of course, for the typical Buddhist monk, "leaving home" does not entail wandering alone like a rhinoceros; instead, everywhere he enters a community of like-minded "goers-forth," a monastery.

Unless, as Lancaster perceptively observes, we recognize the "appeal of the monastery life, it is difficult to account for the fact, that, despite the monks' violation of the sacred duty of filial piety, Buddhist monastic organizations thrived and became one of the most important features of the religious, economic and social life of China, Korea, and Japan." In his discussion of monastic recruitment, Lancaster is entirely correct in stressing the appeal of the "pull" factors, as migration theorists call them, that attract young men to the monastery—special dress, ritual, mystical practices, and the like; but for the purposes of this paper, I should like to stress the "push" factors that motivate them to "leave home."

In attempting to understand these "push" factors it is important to stress that when the young man "goes forth," he does more than leave home—that is much too passive a term to characterize this process, especially in the societies of East Asia in which filial piety is an overriding value. Rather, he *abandons* home, i.e. he actively severs his ties with his parents and siblings, and he refrains from forming normally expectable ties with a wife and children. It is the *wish* to sever the former ties and to refrain from forming the latter which constitutes, I am suggesting, the "push" factor in his "leaving home." This suggestion is supported by the fact that (as has already been noted) "going forth" does not mean wandering alone like a rhinoceros, but rather substituting a voluntary community, based on religio-mystical ties, for an involuntary one, based on biological-kinship ties. When it is considered, moreover, that the voluntary community, the monastery, has many of the characteristics of the family—indeed, in China, as Lancaster observes, the monastery became an actual family surrogate, even including fictive father-son relationships, fictive lineage formations and fictive ancestral tablets—it becomes all the more obvious that it is not living in a family-like structure as such that the "goer-forth" rejects in "leaving home," but rather living in his own biological family.

And make no mistake about it. "Leaving home" is a rejection of the latter family, despite the monks' attempts to rationalize it, and thereby cope with the guilt induced by this act of filial impiety, by claiming that by transferring merit to deceased parents, and thereby promoting their otherworldly welfare, the monastic vocation is in fact an expression of filial piety. This is tellingly demonstrated, for example, in Lancaster's data which show that 70 percent of the Korean monks he interviewed entered the monastery against the wishes of their parents, that they persist in their decision despite the fact that for many as ten years their parents begged them to return home, that the resentment of their siblings for having to assume the entire burden for caring for their aged parents is well-known to them, and that their lingering

guilt for having abandoned the parents is evidenced by their resistance to discuss this matter in their interviews.

The recognition that monastic recruitment violates the norm of filial piety—and the attendant psychological consequences of guilt, remorse, and rationalization attendant upon this violation—is clearly evident as well in the autobiographies of the five Korean nuns that Koh summarizes in her chapter (Chapter 16). To be sure, the “pull” factors in the nuns’ motivation to enter the monastery—the traumata attendant upon such experiences as the death of a lover, marriage failure, frustrated childlessness, the remarriage of a father, the death of a mother, etc.—were even stronger, it is safe to say, than the “push” factors. Nevertheless, their recognition of their violation of the duty of filial piety, more especially since they have been importantly influenced by the Confucian ethic, is equally evident. Thus, one nun characterized her decision as “this unfilial act,” but then immediately rationalized the decision by saying that as a Buddhist nun she could more effectively fulfill her filial duties. Another nun, though her father was a Christian minister, made the same claim. Their rejection of the family, their guilt, and their rationalizations are all evidenced in the fact that, as Koh observes, they all experienced “sorrow” about leaving home without their families’ permission, and yet they nevertheless carried out their decision over the strong opposition of their families, and in the full realization that the latter would suffer “tremendous social stigma.” Now, it may also be true, as Koh claims, that their decision, given their “sentimental and deep attachment” to their family members, is a measure of their self-reliance, but it is also a measure (I would argue) of their willingness, if not wish, to reject their families.

Since, however, the nuns’ decisions to enter the monastery were traumatically motivated, I shall return to the monks in order to address the problem that is by now rather obvious: what “push” factors could possibly account for the fact that a young man, reared in a culture which places such strong emphasis on filial piety, is nevertheless motivated to violate his filial duties in such an extreme fashion?

The answer—or at least one of the answers—is to be found, I would suggest, in the wish to escape the tensions that, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, are endemic in East Asia (but not only East Asia) in the relationship between the boy and the other members of his family. These tensions include the fear and resentment engendered by the father, the incestuous and dependency anxiety aroused by the mother, and the rivalry induced by male siblings in his family of origin. They also include the Oedipally-induced fears concerning the formation of a sexual relationship with a woman other than the mother, as well as the anxiety about giving up his dependency orientation, both of which are aroused in anticipation of establishing a family of procreation. All of these tensions, I would submit, are experienced in some sense by most young men in East Asia. (For a Southeast Asia parallel example, cf. [SPIRO 1977].

In most cases these tensions are of a magnitude that can be handled and overcome. In some few cases, however, they are too powerful to sustain in continuous and ongoing relationships with members of the family—especially since most of these

tensions continue to be experienced interminably because of the stem and extended family households in East Asian societies. For such men the monastery is a marvelously contrived institution which, inasmuch as it is religiously sanctioned, permits them to avoid family relationships while at the same time providing cultural legitimacy for their violating the duty of filial piety by interpreting the seeming violation as motivated by a higher duty. Indeed, I would suggest that the resort to such an extreme solution, in spite of the sacred duty of filial piety, is convincing demonstration of how painful those family tensions are experienced by them.

But we don't have to turn to those few who seek a solution in monasticism to assess their strength even for the majority that are able to cope with them. Thus, it is not accidental, I believe, that when they have the chance, even those who continue to recognize the duty of filial piety seize the opportunity to leave their homes, not for the monastery, but for the city. And once there, rather than forming stem or extended family households, most of them establish nuclear family households, as Tanaka and Lee have shown for Japan and Korea respectively. It is for that reason that I disagree with Lee's interpretation of the "modernization of the Korean family and religion as an extension of traditional familism." The traditional sentiment may still remain—after all we are still witnessing the first generation of this phenomenon—but the difference between the persistence of the sentiment of familism and its expression in the formation of a stem household is a difference that, as William James puts it, makes a difference.

I wish now to conclude this chapter with the mother-son relationship, the theme with which it began. I want to suggest that of all the tensions that motivate home-leaving, whether it be for a celibate life in the monastery or a married life in the city, the most important is the tension the son experiences in his relationship with the mother. Let us consider the choice of the monastery—because we can learn most from the more extreme case.

Since the monastery can be viewed, as we have already seen, as a kind of non-biological family, it is not inaccurate to say about Buddhist monasticism everywhere—as Lancaster says about Buddhist monasticism in China—that the monk can "join the new group (the monastery) and break the binds of the family system and yet find within Buddhism a re-creation of the family." That is not, as I said, inaccurate, but it is not entirely accurate either, because although the monk can re-create in the monastery a relationship with a "father", "sons", and (male) "siblings," there is one relationship that he cannot re-create, that with a "mother"! And it is that pivotal relationship of the East Asian son, I would suggest, that the monk especially wishes to avoid by joining the monastery. For despite its highly pleasurable aspects, the young boy's relationship with the mother, as I have already stressed, has two potentially frightening dimensions, as well: a sexual dimension, on the one hand, and a symbiotic one [MAHLER *et al.* 1975] on the other.

Thus, if the highly attentive mother is "seductive" in her relationship with the son, the intensity of the libidinal dimension in their relationship can become frightening for him because of its incestuous implications. Similarly, if, rather than being

seductive, the mother is overprotective toward him, the exaggeration of his dependency on her can become frightening for the son because it signifies a regressive pull to the symbiotic state of early infancy in which the psychic differentiation between self and mother has not yet been achieved. If either alone can be frightening, the combination can be terrifying. In becoming a monk, then, the son not only escapes these frightening dimensions of his relationship with the mother, but he also—because of the monastic rule of celibacy—avoids their re-creation in a relationship with a wife. (For a more detailed analysis of these and other motives for monastic recruitment in Southeast Asia, see [SPIRO 1982]). I am suggesting, then, that the monastery is attractive to those few men for whom the relationships with mother and wife are too threatening to sustain because it allows them to escape the former and avoid the latter.

### A FINAL WORD

As indicated in my title, the above comments on the relationship between religion and the family in East Asia are “reflections” i.e. speculations. This is not only because I am an outsider to East Asia scholarship, but also because my comments are based almost exclusively on the 16 conference papers brought together in this volume. Although the authors are all experts, their broad knowledge of their respective fields could only be summarized in the limited space available to them. My comments are not only speculative, but they are also narrowly focused: they concentrate on the relationship between religion and the “strains” in the East Asian family. With these serious limitations in mind, I would nevertheless hope that some of these speculations might be subjected to serious investigation by specialists in East Asian scholarship.

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