

## CHAPTER ONE

# Issues, Definitions, and a Hypothesis

### PRELUDE

Ritual and music are expressive, eliciting critical and emotional responses from participants and audiences. Current scholarship has clearly established that ritual and music of a particular people express who they are and how they live.<sup>1</sup> Such explanations of ritual and musical expressiveness are nevertheless general and synchronic. They seldom address the commonly observed but hardly explained fact that orthodox ritual and music, which have been standardized and practiced over a long period of time, appeal to individual participants and audiences in not only general but also specific terms.

This fact raises many questions, four of which are central to this study. How and why did Ming state sacrifices and music, which were orthodox, remain continuously and distinctively expressive? Did they ever change, and how? Did performances of Ming state sacrifices and music include personal and creative adjustments introduced by individual participants? Can the orthodox state ritual and music be simultaneously orthodox and creative?

There are many strategies to approach these questions, and there are many ways to answer them; ritual and music are too complex and diverse to be defined and analyzed by a single research methodology. I began by trying to understand Ming state sacrifices and music with general and synchronic theories of ritual and music. I soon found that no explanation of the state ritual and music is effective unless it comprehensively addresses the structural features, the participants, audiences, and performance contexts, and the issues of orthodoxy, creativity, and expressiveness.

Like other orthodox ritual and music, Ming state sacrifices and music were constructed and practiced purposefully, communicating, with an emotive force and through multimedia means, cultural, social, contextual, and personal meanings to participants and audiences.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of whether they are interpreted as artifacts, symbols, structure, and/or processes, the state ritual and music demonstrate not only a prominent orthodoxy (orthopraxy), but also a subtle and noticeable creativity in individual realizations (performances).<sup>3</sup> Operating within prescribed boundaries, the creativity produced features that rendered individual realizations distinctively expressive; the creativity, nevertheless, posed no challenge to the orthodoxy, and generated no abrupt or radical changes.

Such a nature of Ming state sacrifices and music pinpoints a dynamic relationship between orthodoxy and creativity, which in turn explains the continuous expressiveness of the state ritual and music. By appearing to have curbed creative efforts, Ming state sacrifices and music appear to be operating orthodoxly, projecting a sense of properness, timeless continuity, dominating authority, and other known and expected meanings. By exercising creativity within prescribed bounds, however, the state ritual and music manage to become distinctive every time they are performed. Thus, they can be, time and time again, identified, interpreted, manipulated, and appropriated as personal expressions by participants and audiences. In other words, the expressiveness of Ming state sacrifices and music is not only cultural and timeless, but also individualistic and historical.

Thus, to understand Ming state sacrifices and music, one needs to identify their ritual and musical structure as minutely as possible, examine responses of the participants and audiences, and understand the dynamic operation of orthodoxy, creativity, and expressiveness. Toward such an understanding, this chapter defines the state ritual and music, classifies the participants and audiences and their responses, theorizes about the operation of orthodoxy, creativity, and expressiveness, and proposes, in the form of a hypothesis, an analytical framework for examining the state ritual and music.

## **MING STATE SACRIFICES AND MUSIC AS LARGE-SCALE AND PRESENTATIONAL RITUAL AND MUSIC**

As large-scale and presentational ritual and music, Ming state sacrifices and music include many elements that can be affected by orthodox or creative forces. Officiated by emperors, imperial clansmen, and scholar-

officials, but participated in by a large number of ritual and musical staffs, and witnessed, directly and indirectly, by a much larger audience, each Ming state sacrifice is in fact an elaborate *ceremonial*—a scheduled and extensive sequence of court ceremonies and activities designed according to the ranking and purpose of the ceremonial being performed. Thus, a Ming state sacrifice would, for example, include: breeding of the required sacrificial animals; the court's abstention (*zhizhai*) from regular activities in the days (ranging from one to seven days) immediately preceding the *sacrificial ceremony* (discussed later in this chapter); inspection of the sacrificial animals; ritual notices to the imperial ancestors; arrangements to ensure the emperor's safety when he performs various ritual duties outside the palace; and preparation of the altar, the sacrificial ceremony, and the celebratory banquet that formally concludes the sequence of ceremonies and activities. The climax of a Ming state sacrifice is of course the sacrificial ceremony offered by the emperor, or his delegate(s), to a particular group of deities on a specified day and at a specified altar. In other words, a Ming state sacrifice is a complex and time-consuming process that entails many highly specialized and interrelated events and involves many variables. For example, the formal process of the Ming state sacrifice to Heaven spans a period of fifty days.<sup>4</sup> If one includes the informal activities, such as the scholar-officials' research on historical models of the ceremonial and discussions to solve various contextual and performance problems, a Ming state sacrifice is indeed an endless process.

Ming state sacrifices are labeled according to the deities they honor; thus, there were state sacrifices to Heaven and to the progenitor of agriculture. However, such labels are nothing more than convenient references, because a Ming state sacrifice would involve many more deities than its title could suggest. It not only worships a *host deity* (*zhengwei*) or group of deities, but also the host deity's *companion(s)* (*peiwei*) and *followers* (*congshi*). For example, the sacrificial ceremony honoring Heaven would worship, in addition to Heaven, the founder of the Ming empire and a pantheon of heavenly deities and natural forces. (See chapter 2 for further details.) The relationships among the host deity and his companions and followers are not unlike those among an emperor and his honorable guests and officials, a fact that underscores the cosmological and social underpinnings of Ming state sacrifices.

A full-blown sacrificial ceremony includes nine progressive ceremonial stages, which are by themselves complex programs of ritual activities. The nine stages are:

1. Welcoming the deities (*ying dishen*)
2. Offering of jade and silk (*dian yubo*)
3. Offering of sacrificial food (*jinzu*)
4. First offering of wine (*chuxian*)
5. Second offering of wine (*yaxian*)
6. Last offering of wine (*zhongxian*)
7. Removal of sacrificial food (*chezhuan*)
8. Farewell to deities (*song dishen*)
9. Burning of sacrificial articles (*wangliao*)

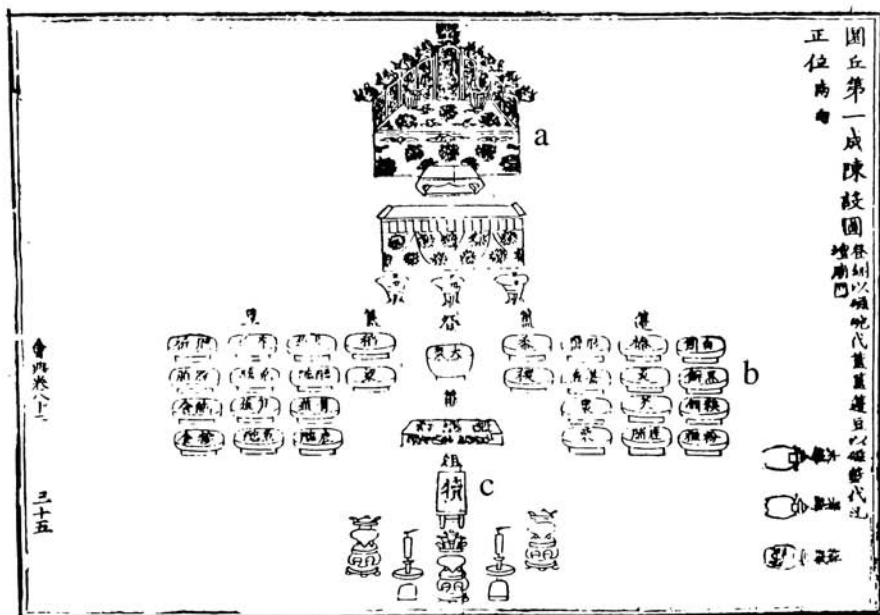
These stages are clearly marked during performances—as they are about to begin, they are announced by an intoner (*changzan*). During each of these nine stages, which are defined according to the main celebrant's actions, many ritual activities would occur simultaneously. For example, the secondary celebrants (*fenxian guan*) would present the supplementary offerings to the followers, while the main celebrant would offer the second and third offerings to the host deity and his companion.

A sacrificial ceremony takes place on an altar proper (or inside the formal hall of a temple), a ritual space that is defined by its particular architectural design and by the presence of one or more spirit-throne(s) (*shenzuo*), which are specifically set up for the occasion. Literally, a spirit-throne refers to a throne-like prop, on top of which stands a spirit-tablet, that is a name tablet that represents the presence of a deity. The area in front of the spirit-throne is the place where various sacrificial victims and offerings are displayed and where ceremonial gestures are performed. (See Figure 1.1.)

A sacrificial ceremony is officiated by a main celebrant who is either the emperor or his delegate, and by a number of secondary celebrants who are either scholar-officials or imperial clansmen appointed by the emperor. These celebrants perform all significant ceremonial gestures, such as drinking the blessed wine, kneeling (*gui*), paying obeisance (*bai*) and prostrating (*fufu*) in front of the spirit-thrones. Assisted by many ritual staffs, the celebrants solemnly execute their ceremonial duties and move around specified ritual positions, such as the obeisant-post (*baiwei* or *banwei*), on and off the altar proper.

It should be emphasized that the celebrants neither perform sacrificial music and dances nor engage in any menial tasks, such as moving ritual paraphernalia. Musicians, dancers, and ritual staffs would furnish those and anything else to help the celebrants perform their duties. The music per-

**Figure 1.1.**  
**An arrangement of a spirit-throne and sacrificial offerings**  
**in a late Ming state sacrifice to Heaven (MHD 82.35)**



a. spirit-throne; b. dishes of sacrificial foods; c. the sacrificial victim of a bull.

formed to accompany various ceremonial gestures of the celebrants and ritual staffs is the state sacrificial music discussed in this study.

A sacrificial ceremony is witnessed by an audience of court citizens, scholar-officials, and foreign dignitaries who are invited (ordered) to attend the ceremony. Occupying assigned positions on the south side of the altar proper, the audience remains stationary throughout the ceremony. Facing north and thus showing their subordinate status to the emperor and the deities, the audience passively observes and witnesses the ceremonial activities being performed on the altar proper. The performance of a sacrificial ceremony is indirectly witnessed by military escorts and soldiers who guard the altar compound or temple-compounds, and by commoners who would at least notice the celebrants' procession to the altars.

Complex as it is, a sacrificial ceremony is only the climax of a state sacrifice and should not be confused as the ceremonial itself. It is crucial to

examine and contextualize the many ceremonies and activities that happen before and after the sacrificial ceremony. The expressiveness of a Ming state sacrifice transcends ritual activities, large and small, which occur at any given point in the ritual process. In fact, the expressiveness of a Ming state ritual is negotiated before, during, and after individual performances. By the same token, much of the expressiveness of a sacrificial ceremony depends on what has happened before its performance, and what interpretations its preparations and performance would solicit subsequently. Essentializing a Ming state sacrifice and its music as clearly defined and independent units is only a theoretical convenience.

As described earlier, Ming state sacrifices and music are fundamentally different from those communal rituals that occur in a relatively short time span, and in which all (or most) members of a community actively participate on a more or less equal basis.<sup>5</sup> As large-scale and presentational ceremonials that once dominated the lives of emperors and scholar-officials, Ming state sacrifices and music are now historical, and their aural, visual, and psychological impacts can only be historically imagined with experiences learned from the Confucian Ceremonial performed in present-day Taipei, Qufu, and other Chinese cities. Among Chinese and current ceremonials that may tangentially serve as comparative references, the death ceremonials of Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, and Mao Zedong come to mind.<sup>6</sup> While the basic features of these death ceremonials are fundamentally different from those of Ming state ritual, which is sacrificial, the gargantuan scale of the three twentieth-century death ceremonials and their webs of cultural, social, political, and personal meanings are not incomparable to those of Ming state sacrifices and music. All reveal dynamic operation of orthodoxy, creativity, and expressiveness.

### **RESPONSES AND EXPRESSIVENESS OF MING STATE SACRIFICES AND MUSIC**

The expressiveness of ritual and music is well-known. Geertz, for example, has demonstrated that ritual are models of and for reality, communicating and affirming culturally important cosmological conceptions and values.<sup>7</sup> Other scholars have shown that ritual and music are multivalently expressive, appealing to individual participants and audiences in diverse but equally persuasive and emotive ways, and transforming the persons into members of real and/or imagined communities.<sup>8</sup> These studies have

successfully explained why ritual and music are expressive in general, but they have not yet comprehensively addressed the question of why orthodox ritual and music can remain expressive over a long period of time. To rephrase the question with reference to Ming state sacrifices and music, one asks why and how they continued to appeal to the emperors and scholar-officials who were expertly familiar with what the ritual and music could project, whether Confucian ideology, social values, and/or other elements of the Ming world.

Many issues are involved, and one begins by asking whether the Ming emperors and scholar-officials actually found their state ritual and music expressive. The answer is definitively affirmative. Nominally, the Ming emperors and scholar-officials performed their state sacrifices and music for the deities; and thus, theoretically speaking, only the deities' supernatural responses could demonstrate and validate the expressiveness of the performed state ritual and music. In terms of human reality, however, it is the Ming court citizens who decided for themselves whether their state ritual and music were expressive. They decided, and left a substantial body of public and private evidence.

Ming emperors and scholar-officials spent a tremendous amount of human and material resources to continuously maintain and practice their state ritual and music. The magnificent altars and temples, some of which still stand in Beijing, only give an architectural hint of what was involved. Such use of resources is one of the most eloquent statements that the Ming court citizens found their state ritual and music meaningful and indispensable. Otherwise, why would they build magnificent altars and write revealing essays and poems? Ming court citizens were practical; they did not perform state ritual and music because their culture and society required them to do so. They canceled state ritual and music as needed. They were no different from Song Chinese, who changed their gods, and from modern Chinese, who abolished and reconstructed sacrificial ceremonials as needed.<sup>9</sup>

If Ming emperors and scholar-officials found their state ritual and music expressive, then one can ask what that expressiveness was and how the court citizens identified it. As revealed in Ming documents, Ming court citizens responded to specific ritual and musical elements critically and emotionally. For example, the performance site of Shizong's sericultural ceremonials was a much debated point. (See chapter 4.)

A most vivid illustration of the court citizens' responses to ritual and musical features in actual performances is Liu Ji's (1311–1375) eulogy on



the performance of the state sacrifice to Earth in 1370.<sup>10</sup> First, Liu Ji, one of the influential scholar-officials who helped Taizu conquer the Ming empire, described how the emperor and his court observed abstention and prepared themselves for the sacrificial ceremony, and how the weather was undesirably rainy earlier in the night, but cleared up as the time of ceremony approached. Liu Ji then wrote:

When the emperor ascended to the altar proper in full ritual regalia, all was quiet. Then, the altar proper was illuminated brilliantly by the torches, and filled with the crystal clear tones of state sacrificial music. The incense offered to the deity rose up to the sky without a flutter. All the ceremonial gestures were performed smoothly, and the thousand officials inside the altar compound witnessed the ceremony solemnly and respectfully. What a spectacular sight . . .

Liu Ji's writing makes it clear that the expressiveness of state sacrifices and music elicits two fundamentally different but not unrelated types of responses. First, the court citizens find state sacrifices and music expressive of what they already know—in Liu Jiu's case, the legitimacy of Taizu and the Ming empire. Responding to something familiar and the status quo operative is a basic human reaction, and little explanation is needed here. Second, the Ming court citizens find, in performances of state sacrifices and music, distinctive and creative features that express something unique about the particular time, place, thought, and people.

This second type of response needs to be discussed here, and to illustrate its nature and significance one can examine the issues with the two scenarios that follow. When a state sacrifice to Heaven, an orthodox means of legitimizing a Chinese ruler, is performed in times of unrest, it is clear why and how different court citizens would respond. Those who support the ruler would understand the ritual as a reaffirmation of his mandate from Heaven, and as a demonstration of his power. In contrast, those who do not support the ruler would find the ritual sacrilegious and Machiavellian. The stakes and issues of a state sacrifice to Heaven performed during times of unrest are unmistakable.

When the same state ritual is performed during a time of peace and prosperity, the issues and stakes are ambiguous, however. What purpose does such a performance serve, besides showing the court's gratitude to the deities, reaffirming the emperor's unchallengeable power, and conforming



to orthodoxy (orthopraxy). These purposes are official, but they are not as compelling as they may seem—performances of state sacrifices to Heaven can be suspended or slighted. Shizong, for example, lost interest in the state ritual, even though he was most concerned about it in the first part of his long and relatively prosperous reign of forty-four years.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Shenzong, Shizong's grandson, ignored the practice; he performed the state sacrifice to Heaven only three times in his long reign of forty-eight years.<sup>12</sup> In other words, in peaceful times, court citizens' responses to state sacrifices and music are much more multivalent and personal.

If Ming emperors and scholar-officials do not find something in state sacrifices that appeal to them personally, they would not engage in ritual and musical matters. There is no denial that emperors and scholar-officials could play-act their roles and make "official" responses: in the Ming time, state sacrifices were obviously performed by and responded to with indifference by Wuzong and other emperors.<sup>13</sup> However, the bulk of historical records demonstrates that most Ming court citizens responded with an intellectual and emotional intensity that could not be sustained by expedient reasons or by play-acting. Thus, one has to presume that most court citizens responded sincerely.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, one has to presume that they found something distinctive and creative in individual performances that engaged their hearts and minds.

Such engagements are specific, not naive intuitions, casual impressions, and predictable reactions to orthodox messages. One should recall that during performances of sacrificial ceremonies, Ming emperors and scholar-officials performed only a limited number of ceremonial activities, such as offering wine, kneeling down, and prostration. They did not sing, dance, or engage in any vigorous and repetitive bodily movements that would induce a trance or alter their physical and mental perceptions.

Ming court citizens were sensitized by the ritual and musical stimuli, but they could not afford to lose control of themselves or their critical eyes and ears. Even an indulgence in coughing was not allowed, and officials who indulged were dutifully reported.<sup>15</sup> Ming emperors and official-scholars did not attend performances of state sacrifices unprepared: directly and indirectly, they were involved in every step in the formulation of the ceremonial programs. They also were familiar with all paraphernalia of the state ritual and music. Unlike the commoners or even scholar-officials at the bottom of the bureaucracy, Ming emperors and scholar-officials were not awed by the richness of the ritual objects. They were

ritual and musical experts who would identify creative and distinctive features in the performances, scrutinizing, manipulating, and appropriating them with personal perspectives.

### CONCERNED PARTICIPANTS AND CRITICAL AUDIENCES

The arguments previously discussed underscored a well-known fact of ritual and music: their expressiveness depends not only on ritual and musical features, but also on the persons who decode what and how the features express. In other words, the expressiveness of Ming state sacrifices and music has to be analyzed with respect to the participants and their perspectives. Here they are defined as *concerned participants* and *critical audiences*. Ming emperors, scholar-officials, and music masters who are knowledgeable about all aspects of Ming state sacrifices and music act as concerned participants when they actively and directly participate and control preparations and performances of the state ritual and music; however, they may or may not be the actual celebrants. Ming court citizens act as critical audiences when they have neither active nor direct control over preparations and performances of the state sacrifices. They may, however, publicly or privately criticize the events, and their critical comments may affect the concerned participants' ritual and musical views and activities. For example, Shizong and the scholar-officials who conceived and carried out the ritual and musical revisions of the 1530s are the concerned participants of state ritual and music performed at that time; the scholar-officials who, voluntarily or involuntarily, played no direct and active roles in the revision process are the critical audiences. (See chapters 6 and 8). The distinction between the concerned participants and the critical audiences is by no means rigid: Ming court citizens could and did change positions during ritual and musical processes.

This definition of concerned participants and critical audiences is selective, but it allows focused discussion on the responses of the court citizens who were representative of the Ming tradition of state sacrifices and music. This definition also suspends the need to examine, in this discussion, responses of ritual novices, disinterested participants, and passive audiences—that is, people whose responses to the expressiveness of state ritual and music are neither representative of the tradition nor relevant to the issues being discussed here. These responses can, however, be briefly discussed next.

A ritual novice, such as a young prince learning to perform a state sacrifice, may find the performance expressive. Nevertheless, the prince's responses reveal more of his unfamiliarity with the ritual and musical features and less of the ways experts understand and engage in the state ritual and music. Like the novice's responses, the understanding of disinterested participants is neither significant nor relevant. Shenzong's indifference to the state sacrifice to Heaven, for example, was a personal issue, which has little to do with the ritual and musical expressiveness of Ming state sacrifices and music.

Similarly, reactions of passive audiences are secondary to the discussion here. As minor officials, ritual staffs, and soldiers, they were drafted to perform various chores and forced to passively witness the ceremonial activities. They were there simply to serve and to be awed by the imperial ritual and music. Their responses had little influence on the emperors and scholar-officials who controlled the state ritual and music. By the same analysis, the reactions of Ming commoners are negligible: they could only accept (or ignore) the performed state ritual and music as expressions of imperial power and authority; they had no means to demand what should be ritually and musically performed and presented to them. Of course, there were occasions when commoners took actions to appropriate state sacrifices themselves. Such actions, however, demonstrate the commoners' challenge to the throne and are not representative of the ways in which state sacrifices and music normally functioned in Chinese courts.

As a contrast, responses of the concerned participants and critical audiences of Ming state sacrifices and music—Ming emperors, scholar-officials, and music masters—are representative, significant, and informative. They participated in all steps of the ritual and musical process, and they directly and indirectly controlled—researched, negotiated, designed, criticized, manipulated, and appropriated—all ritual and musical features. For these concerned participants and critical audiences, Ming state sacrifices and music constituted not only a means of governance but also one of living. By adjusting and interpreting the state ritual and music to match their own needs, the concerned participants display who they are, what they believe, and what they are doing in particular contexts. In other words, they appropriate the state ritual and music as individual expressions. Their acts of appropriation and expressions are of course clear to the critical audiences who are also ritual and musical experts, and who can immediately tell what is being adjusted. By making positive or negative comments, the critical audiences demonstrate what they have learned, and

what they would accept and reject. Through their comments that would eventually become publicly known, the critical audiences would leave their marks on subsequent understanding of the state ritual and music.

### **THE DYNAMICS OF ORTHODOXY, CREATIVITY, AND EXPRESSIVENESS IN MING STATE SACRIFICES AND MUSIC**

Ming court citizens live with state sacrifices and music, constantly manipulating and appropriating the state ritual and music to match their needs and express their ideas. Nevertheless, their acts of manipulation and appropriation have to be creative within bounds. If they ignore the perceived boundaries, they undermine the dynamics between orthodoxy and creativity on which the individualistic expressiveness of the state ritual and music depends.

If *orthodoxy* refers to beliefs and practices that adhere to authoritative and standardized parameters over a long period of time, the expressiveness of Ming state sacrifices and music depends on their being orthodox. To function as an imperial ritual and music that is distinct from those practiced by the commoners, Ming state sacrifices and music can only emulate practices of the past, eschewing fashionable and popular trends. To be intelligible, the state ritual and music must employ elements that are commonly accepted and known in the community of court citizens. To appear authentic and credible, the state ritual and music must appear accurate, which requires faithful application of authoritative and preexistent prescriptions. To be efficacious, the state ritual and music cannot appear compromised; the creative and adjusted features must not contradict or challenge the perceived orthodoxy.

If *creativity* refers to distinctive features that serve a unique purpose and exist in a form that symbolizes and perpetuates that distinctiveness and purpose, the expressiveness of Ming state sacrifices and music also depends on their being creative.<sup>16</sup> The state ritual and music can only be performed creatively: every realization (performance) of a state ritual involves numerous theoretical and practical problems that are unique to individualistic performance contexts and cannot be solved with general prescriptions described in classical documents and orthodox manuals. To become expressions of specific time, place, thought, and people, the state ritual and music must display more than what is orthodox and commonly known; they must show distinctive features as results of those contextual elements and as

evidence of interpretation, manipulation, and appropriation by those concerned participants and critical audiences. Furthermore, the distinctive features must be embodied in sensory (visual, aural, and others) stimuli that constitute the multimedia form of the state ritual and music.

However, the sensory stimuli must not render the state ritual and music unorthodox, and thus unacceptable. Only when the orthodoxy of the state ritual and music appears unchallenged, the expressiveness of distinctive and creative details becomes meaningful and relevant. For example, the empress's use of bamboo hooks in Shizong's sericultural ceremonials is meaningless unless the state ritual is considered proper and the orthodox use of gold hooks is known. (See chapter 4.)

Ming state sacrifices and music must be simultaneously orthodox and creative. If the state ritual and music are totally orthodox and without creative elements, Ming court citizens only needed to follow orthodox rules literally and routinely. They did not need to spend time and effort discussing and formulating ritual and musical details. Similarly, they did not need to be critical; they would have nothing to criticize—literal application of standardized prescriptions cannot produce anything that is unknown and open for criticism. Ming state sacrifices and music are, however, not only orthodox but also creative. Even with an abundance of documents, numerous discussions, and carefully guarded and maintained practices, Ming state sacrifices and music could not (and did not) operate with one ultimate and unambiguous set of prescriptions that could be literally and routinely applied over a long period of time and without regard to the people and contexts involved.

From conception to performance, Ming state sacrifices and music involve complex and lengthy activities, and there was a constant demand for and ample room for creativity. Particular contexts of time, place, thought, and people would generate specific demands and problems that could only be resolved creatively. Ming state sacrifices and music were creatively performed as realizations of orthodox prescriptions from the past and solutions of problems in the present.

### **A HYPOTHESIS TO ANALYZE EXPRESSIVENESS IN ORTHODOX RITUAL AND MUSIC**

Being creative within prescribed bounds, Ming state sacrifices and music continuously refresh their expressiveness that is on one hand general and

timeless and on the other hand personal and historical. Not only does every performance of a state ritual and music project something well-known and clearly defined, it also expresses something creative and distinctive. Such an expressiveness, which depends on the dynamic tensions between orthodoxy and creativity, is of course not unique to Ming state sacrifices and music, and it also can be found in other large-scale and presentational ritual and music. Toward understanding such ritual and music and their expressiveness, and toward comparison of Ming state sacrifices with other ritual and music, the following hypothesis is presented as an analytical framework.

Concerned participants and critical audiences always find orthodox ritual and music expressive. While they regularly and repeatedly perform these ritual and music according to well-known and clearly defined prescriptions, they also would subtly and creatively change detail features in individual performances, manipulating and appropriating the ritual and music as their personal expressions. The manipulated and personalized features in the adjusted ritual and music complement orthodox forms and contents, generating neither abrupt nor radical changes. At the same time, however, the same features render the adjusted ritual and music continuously expressive, refreshing them with something specific and not prescribed. Being ritual and music experts, concerned participants and critical audiences promptly identify the manipulated and personalized features, interpreting what creativity and purposes are being expressed. Such interpretations always involve the immediate needs of the concerned participants and critical audiences. Without that involvement, the interpretations as well as the creative features that are identified are abstract and ignorable.

Application of the aforementioned hypothesis depends on locating the traces of orthodoxy, creativity, and expressiveness. In this study, I have equated traces of orthodoxy with those inflexible features in Ming state sacrifices and music, which have remain unchanged throughout the Ming dynasty, are described in classical documents, and are usually found in the state ritual and music of the Tang and Song dynasties. Similarly, I have equated creative elements with unique features in individual Ming state sacrifices and music. To locate these traces of orthodoxy and creativity, I have compared corresponding state ritual and music from the Tang, Song, and Ming eras. To show how the Ming emperors and scholar-officials responded to the expressiveness of their state ritual and music, I have relied on what they said and did in their ritual and musical processes, many of which are extensively cited and described in the chapters that follow.



## CHAPTER TWO

# State Sacrifices in the Ming Court

### INTRODUCTION: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Since ancient times when virtuous rulers built their empires, [there was] nothing they rigorously practiced more than state sacrifices. When they performed the ceremonials, they sought for sincerity and respectfulness as internal [efforts] and prepared the ceremonials fully as external [efforts]. That is [the way] to communicate with the gods. [Now], when I have received the mandate from Heaven [to rule] and have unified the country, the first thing [I will do] is to build the suburban altars and the ancestral temple to advocate the practice of ritual. I realize that we are at an initial stage of the empire and the ceremonials are not completely instituted. [However, without the state sacrifices] how can I communicate with the gods and reach the deities? My ministers, you should select the appropriate [features] of ancient and current practices [to institute state sacrifices for our new empire]. Make sure that they are moderate and proper. Report to me with a proposal.<sup>1</sup>

With these words, Taizu, the founder of the Ming dynasty, formally initiated a unique system of state ritual and music for his empire. Taizu's action was not unexpected. State sacrifices and music, the most prominent and official manifestation of Chinese ritual and music, were not only established means of governance for Chinese emperors and scholar-officials, but also culturally sanctioned channels in which to express their religious, social, and personal concerns. Performed with a wealth of ritual paraphernalia that displayed governmental control of human and material



resources, state sacrifices were copiously described in classical documents and enthusiastically discussed and promoted by Confucian scholar-officials.<sup>2</sup> Projecting a representation of the natural and supernatural worlds of the emperors and scholar-officials, state sacrifices revealed the ways in which they understood, in abstract and specific terms, their existence and the roles they played.

As early as the Zhou dynasty, a complicated system of state sacrifices had evolved in which the state sacrifice to Heaven had already assumed a prominent status.<sup>3</sup> Heaven was perceived as a supernatural force that controlled human activities, and its mandate legitimized the power of human rulers. Thus, on one hand, Chinese rulers employed the state sacrifice to Heaven to demonstrate, to his people, his rights and authority bestowed by Heaven, and on the other hand performed the ceremonial to show respect and gratitude to Heaven, requesting continued protection and favor that would sustain his mandate.

For similar reasons, a collection of state sacrifices was offered to a pantheon of deities, such as those of the sun, moon, mountains, and seas, that were believed to be in charge of various operations of natural elements that affected the success of human endeavors. If such ceremonials were religious in nature and political in objective, they also were emotional in their aspiration, since they salved human feelings of vulnerability to unpredictable calamities, both natural and human.

A series of state sacrifices also was offered to imperial ancestors. Originated as expressions of filial piety, these ceremonials, like other state sacrifices, were imbued with supernatural and political attributes.<sup>4</sup> By honoring their ancestors and emphasizing the interrelationships among family members, the sovereigns employed the ceremonials to remind the commoners of their duties to their families, communities, and ultimately to the empire.<sup>5</sup> In other words, state sacrifices offered to imperial ancestors were ritual representations of the authoritarian and patrilineal structure of traditional Chinese society. By presenting the emperors as filial sons, the ceremonials became powerful projections of their legitimacy and political power: Their ancestors, who were virtuous and successful, politically and militarily, founded the empire and bequeathed the thrones to them; filial sons, that is, the sovereigns, were worthy of such legacies. By presenting the imperial ancestors as deified persons, the ceremonials provided a means for the emperors to seek and demonstrate the supernatural protection they would receive from the spirits of their ancestors.<sup>6</sup>

State sacrifices were based on the Confucian and classical ideology that ritual and music are a means through which people can cultivate themselves to become human and proper. Indeed, for traditional Chinese who understood Confucianism, ceremonials were not only expressions of their controlled emotions, but also efforts to sustain proper relationships with fellow human beings and with natural as well as supernatural things. Thus ritual realized and propagated ethical duties: a sovereign should rule like a sovereign; officials should show respect and fealty toward rulers; sons should respect their fathers and so forth. Such a philosophical stand did not disprove, however, the understanding that ceremonials were religious activities. Confucians did not exclude that aspect from their ritual. The Confucian philosopher Xun Zi succinctly described the dichotomy within sacrifices: the superior man looks upon the sacrifices as a fine gloss over matter, while the common people consider it supernatural.<sup>7</sup> Ching K'un Yang, in expanding upon this thought, asserts that the supernatural qualities could not be dismissed from the minds of most Confucians, who preferred to consider rituals as expressions of "human feelings."<sup>8</sup> Because of such ambiguity, Confucian ceremonials were never mere orthodox formalities or intellectual exercises, but essential activities in traditional China. State sacrifices constituted only an imperial and grandiose version of those ceremonials.

As state sacrifices became the ultimate representations of human propriety in traditional China, they also became models of human existence to which all should aspire. In other words, the ceremonials functioned as a means of governance that prescribed the behavior of those who ruled and those who were ruled. If state sacrifices led sovereigns and court officials to excel, performing their duties and becoming effective and respected rulers and officials, the ceremonials also guided the commoners to distinguish what was socially and politically acceptable and what was not. When a court practiced state sacrifices dutifully, it demonstrated its aspirations to emulate Confucian and classic standards of human behavior. Such demonstrations were powerful, as their messages were clear to all and their effects were much more long-lasting than the use of physical force.

State sacrifices were not only a means to rule the commoners, but were also measures to control the emperors. Theoretically, a Chinese emperor was endowed with absolute power, but this does not mean he was absolutely free. He had to behave (or appear to behave) according to the standards represented by the state sacrifices; if he ignored such standards,

his legitimacy and authority would diminish. By the same token, scholar-officials should always serve the emperors. However, as the official-scholars were obliged to guide their sovereigns in the practice of state sacrifices, they found an avenue to influence the behavior of their sovereigns.<sup>9</sup> When scholar-officials reproached their rulers for ignoring the state sacrifices, pointing out the occurrence of portents in the form of natural calamities, the scholar-officials struck where the emperors were vulnerable.<sup>10</sup>

The more meanings state sacrifices acquired, the more essential they became to the traditional Chinese court, a process that was further propelled by external forces. Since the Han dynasty, Confucianism became the official philosophy of China. Furthermore, efforts to teach and apply the philosophy were perpetuated by a system of civil examinations that tested Confucian subject matters and was controlled by Confucian bureaucrats. Thus anyone who aspired to become a scholar-official had to study the Confucian classics. In the process, they became Confucians, or at least persons knowledgeable about Confucianism, which emphasized ritual and music. Even imperial clansmen were obliged to learn the teachings of Confucius: although they could amass power through military operations, or inherit the thrones, they had to rule by means of a bureaucracy of scholar-officials. If the imperial clansmen were not Confucians at the time they came to power, they would be converted soon after. An exemplary instance is Taizu, who was born a poor commoner but who learned to manipulate the tenets of Confucianism as a ruler.<sup>11</sup>

The Chinese tradition of state sacrifices did not function in isolation. State sacrifices constituted only one of five categories of court ceremonials (*wuli*), which is outlined in the *Book of Ceremonial (Liji)* and other classical works. State sacrifices belonged to the category of auspicious ceremonials (*jili*). The remaining four categories include: celebratory ceremonials (*jiali*) for various secular and celebratory court functions, such as weddings and the crowning of princes; welcoming ceremonials (*binli*) for greeting state guests, especially those who come from foreign countries; military ceremonials (*junli*) for various military functions, such as the return of a victorious general; and death ceremonials (*xiongli*) for funerals and other related activities.

The five categories of court ceremonials complemented one another, but state sacrifices dominated. This fact is copiously described in historical records, vividly perpetuated by the splendid temples and altars created for the sacrificial performances and statistically attested to by the financial

expenses incurred.<sup>12</sup> By the time of the Ming dynasty, the Chinese tradition of state sacrifices had operated for more than three millennia and had accumulated many prescriptions for its practice. These prescriptions, which were well-known and well-studied by court citizens, constituted the orthodox boundaries for Ming state sacrifices and music. However, this does not mean that Ming state ritual and music were devoid of ambiguities and creativity. In fact, there were many ambiguous prescriptions, which were creatively manipulated by Ming emperors and scholar-officials.

### THE SYSTEM OF MING STATE SACRIFICES

As a system, Ming state sacrifices achieved its most elaborate stage during Shizong's reign (1522–1566) in the middle of the sixteenth century. As enumerated in the *Ming History (Mingshi)*, a total of forty-six state sacrifices were performed regularly within an annual cycle, which can be classified according to the deities they honored and the ranks they held.<sup>13</sup> The former classification reveals the formal intentions and functions of the state sacrifices, while the latter underscores the ways in which they were performed as great, middle, and small sacrifices.

The former classification divides the state sacrifices into three groups. The first group was performed to honor and express gratitude to a pantheon of deities of natural forces, which controlled (or assisted with) specific operations of the cosmos and/or basic needs of the empire and its people. Among these state sacrifices, those worshipping Heaven stood apart, because the deity was preeminent and because his companions were usually limited to Earth and selected imperial ancestors—the founder(s) of the empire and the father of the current emperor. The rationale for choosing such companions is associative: Earth is the cosmological counterpart of Heaven, while the founder built the empire and the father begot the current emperor. Thus, the ceremonials for worshipping Heaven constituted a distinctive subgroup of Ming state sacrifices, including:

1. The suburban sacrifices (*jiaoji*) offered, singularly or collectively, to Heaven and Earth (see chapter 3)
2. The sacrificial prayer offered to Heaven and the founder, requesting grain harvest (*qigu*)
3. The sacrificial prayer offered to Heaven requesting rain (*dayu*)
4. The great sacrifice to Heaven and the imperial father (*daxiang*)

In addition to the ceremonials associated with Heaven, the group of state sacrifices honoring natural forces also includes those that worshipped:

1. The deities of soil and grains (*sheji*)
2. The deities of imperial soil and grains (*disheji*)
3. The sun (*zhaori*)
4. The moon (*xiyue*)
5. Heavenly and earthly deities (*tianshen dizhi*)—the twelve celestial branches (*taisui*), the time divisions (*yuejiang*), the forces of wind, cloud, thunder, and rain (*fengyun leiyu*) and the spirits of mountains, plains, seas, and rivers (*yuezheng haidu*)
6. The city gods (*chenghuang*)
7. The deities in charge of doors, stoves, gutters, and wells (*wusi*)
8. The deities in charge of horses (*mashen*)
9. The deities in charge of banners and military affairs (*qidu*)

The second group of state sacrifices honored legendary and historical personages considered meritorious for their personification of virtues and/or teaching of the fundamental skills of living. This group includes state sacrifices offered to:

1. The progenitor of agriculture (*xiannong*)
2. The progenitor of sericulture (*xiancan*)
3. Meritorious sovereigns of past dynasties (*lidai diwang*)
4. Teachers of rulers (*shengshi*)
5. The three sage-rulers and masters of medicine (*sanhuang*)
6. Confucius (*xianshi*)
7. Meritorious officials of the Ming (*gongchen*)
8. Deified personages honored in temples in Nanjing (*Nanjing shenmiao*)
9. Deified personages honored in temples in Beijing (*jingshi jiumiao*)
10. Various deified persons (*zhushen*)
11. Wandering ghosts and spirits (*litan*)

The third group of state sacrifices worshipped the imperial ancestors. These state rituals were performed inside the imperial ancestral temple compound (*taimiao*), a large complex of buildings erected around three halls that defined the worship of imperial ancestors.<sup>14</sup> These three halls,