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An Investigation of Capping Ceremony

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Introduction:

Ancient China was a state of rites and ceremonies, demonstrating a comprehensive and refined system for the practice of propriety. This system was once revered by the neighbouring states. Amongst the diversity of rites and ceremonies, the Capping Ceremony was the most highly regarded. Through this ceremony, the identity of the coming adult transforms from being a child to being an adult. So what impact and influence could the Capping Ceremony have on individuals and the society? These are my points of discussion in today's presentation.

1. The Procedure of the Capping Ceremony

To explore the "Capping Ceremony", it must begin with the inspection of the entire ceremonial procedure. The records on the "Capping Ceremony" in *Liji* place an emphasis on the meanings and significance behind the ceremony, the details of the ceremonial procedure are clearly documented in chapter one of *Yili*. According to the "Shi Guan Li" chapter in *Yili*, the complete ceremony consists of many steps, and I believe they can be categorized into three respective areas.

i) Preparation before the Formal Ceremony

First of all, the date, the facilitator and the guests of the capping ceremony need to be decided by means of divination. Before the formal ceremony, divination is carried out in the ancestral hall to determine the best date to hold the ceremony and the most suitable facilitator and guests to invite. The "Capping Ceremony" is regarded as a very significant event as it marks a new chapter in a person's life as he begins to be accepted by society as an adult with responsibilities; therefore, it is important that the participants are of respectable social status and prestige, eminent virtue is specially highly regarded, so as to set role models for the

coming adult at the event. Hence, it was thought to be essential to inquire both the time and the guests of the ceremony by divination. Three days before the actual ceremony, the date and the guest list are to be finalized and confirmed by means of divination, so that the invitations can take place. Moreover, the day before the formal ceremony, the host family would hold a small ceremony outside their ancestral hall to announce the date and the exact time of the event, and the guests are informed once again. On the day of the formal ceremony, the instruments and the ceremonial attires and hats required are arranged in the morning, and then the host family prepares to welcome and greet guests.

ii) The key component of the Capping Ceremony

Throughout the entire Capping Ceremony, the coming adult will be presented with three sets of attire (Guan Fu). The first set is called the Zibu Guan Fu, this attire contains a black hat; the second set is known as the Pibian Guan Fu with the whole attire being white in colour and it is a hunting costume; the last set is called the Juebian Guan Fu, the attire is a mix of black and red colours, it is mostly black with a little bit of red colour in the middle. After the change of attires for the coming adult has completed, the facilitator will salute him with respect and this marks the beginning of his adulthood and that the coming of age has taken place.

In ancient China, the various kinds of hats were symbols of power and military. The three hats in the attires presented at the event show the coming adult's entitlement to holding sacrificial ceremonies, serving the army. *Zuozhuan* states that "sacrificial ceremony" and "military power" are the two most significant affairs of a state.¹ To have power in those two areas was considered the most prestigious; besides, participating in politics was also a symbol of power, because only the nobleman were empowered to govern a region and educate its people. So putting on the hats signifies the inheritance of power and titles, so it is a crucial step in the ceremony.

¹ Translated by Taiyu Cao . Original text: '國之大事，在祀與戎。' Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 *Chunqiu Zuozhuanzhu* 春秋左傳注,(Beijing: zhonghua Shuju, 1965), p.861.

iii) Visitation after the Capping Ceremony

As the Capping Ceremony ends, the young man who has just been admitted into adulthood will next move to the inner courtyard house to pay respect to his mother for giving birth to him and for raising him, and the mother will greet back. What is also very significant to the young man at this ceremony is that he will be given his courtesy name (zi) by the facilitator of the ceremony. In ancient times, the nature of one's given name and courtesy name is fundamentally different. As recorded by the chapter "Tan Gong" of *Liji* that one is known by his given name (ming) when he is a child, he obtains his courtesy name (zi) after his Capping Ceremony.² After a baby has been born for three months, his parents would name him, and this given name is the ming (名); after he becomes a coming adult and participates in the Capping Ceremony, he is then presented with his Zi (字), the courtesy name. The "Shi Guan Li" chapter in *Yili* states: "The courtesy name is given to the young adult after the Capping Ceremony; it is for the purpose of showing respect to one's original given name."³ After one becomes an adult, only the emperor and his parents can address him by his given name, all others need to use his courtesy name." From looking at this passage, we can see that an adult can no longer be directly addressed by his name given at birth, the ming (名), but he requires a courtesy name for his peers and others to use.

After the courtesy name is given, the young adult then pays visits to his siblings, relatives and to all the guests who participated in his Capping Ceremony. This part of the procedure is necessary as it highlights the differences in the young man's manners and approaches when dealing with others before and after the ceremony. Finally, the young adult pays a formal visit to show respect to the Duke and the ministers, who will give blessings and some advice to him. After all the visitations are complete, then the host family will begin to send the guests off.

² Translated by Taiyu Cao . Original text: '幼名，冠字。' Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.256.

³ Translated by Taiyu Cao . Original text: '冠而字之，敬其名也。君父之前稱名，他人則稱字也。' Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Jiagong Yan 賈公彥, *Yili zhushu* 儀禮注疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.62.

2.The Influence and the Significance of the Capping Ceremony

The purpose of the ceremony is to inform teenagers the fact that they have already become adults. But on a wider scope, this ceremony also imposes great impact on society as well as having significant meanings for individuals.

This ceremony can indirectly help to establish a more stable and peaceful society

It is true that order is the necessity for social stability. As we know that laws have existed throughout the ages, but they come as a form of punishment, and social stability requires everyone to get along well with each other and co-exist in peace. In this case, the presence and the implementation of propriety seem necessary. It is told in Chinese classics that the parrot can speak, but it still belongs to the bird species, the orangutan also can speak, but it is still an animal, if people can speak but without performing propriety in their lives, then how are they differentiated from those birds and animals?⁴ This indicates that propriety can lead humanity to creating a civilized world. According to traditional Chinese culture, the practice of propriety should be demonstrated in the five cardinal relationships which constitute the core of social order; these five relationships are between father and son, superior and subordinate, husband and wife, and also between siblings and friends. The scholar lue dalin once said that the characteristics of an adult are not only in his physical differences from children, but in the understanding of the five cardinal relationships. Everyone's life goes through different stages, and their roles vary from year to year.⁵ From the perspective of social development, by undergoing the Capping Ceremony, it is to announce the person's new chapter in life as an adult, and following on from there, adulthood leads to possibility for marriage which introduces the relationships of husband and wife as well as father and son. In the meantime, adulthood involves taking roles and responsibilities in a workplace in the society and this would inevitably generate relationships between superior and subordinate,

⁴ Translated by Taiyu Cao . Original text: ‘鸚鵡能言，不離飛鳥；猩猩能言，不離禽獸。今人而无礼，虽能言，不亦禽兽之心乎？’ Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.17.

⁵ Translated by Taiyu Cao . Original text: ‘所谓成人者，非谓四体肤革异于童稚也。必知人伦之备焉。’ Weishi 卫湜, *Liji Jishuo* 禮記集說, (Changchun: Jilin Press, 2005), p.749

and between colleagues and friends. Therefore, it is said in *Liji* that the Capping Ceremony is indeed the beginning for the practice of propriety. The ceremony is to inform the young man of the possible human relationships he needs to face once he is recognised as an adult, as his duties as an adult will continue to generate the five cardinal relationships throughout his life.

The Capping Ceremony can help to Shape One's Character

Firstly, the teenager will experience transformation in his mentality. As we mentioned earlier, the roles that children and adults play in life are different. Children are still at the early stages of receiving and accepting information and knowledge. In ancient times, children begin to study at the age of eight, they are taught from learning to read, to mastering Six Arts comprising the six disciplines of rites, music, archery, charioteering, literacy and mathematics. These are all learning processes, and the whole process is led and guided. For a coming adult, the Capping Ceremony carries the message that after becoming an adult, he will turn from the early stages of only receiving knowledge to the mature stage of producing output and critical thinking on that knowledge. Having become adults means that they would need to contribute to society. In ancient times, most of the educated are nobleman, which means that they may be given the duty of governing a region and its people. To do this, they should have the appropriate ways of dealing and getting along with others and the ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil. Therefore, when the coming adults are given the three sets of attire during the Capping Ceremony, each time, the facilitator of the ceremony will read out appropriate verses to encourage the coming adult. For example, he says: "Choose a suitable day, and put on your hat of Zibu Guan, forsake your childish mind, and practise your virtues of an adult carefully."⁶ This shows and emphasizes that the thoughts of an adult should be different from that of a child. The respected elders at the ceremony will give advice and guidance to the coming adult in this regard. Just as recorded in *Guoyu*, after Zhao Wenzhi attended his Capping Ceremony, the respected elders said to him that from now on, he should proactively learn from the virtuous and take their advice into consideration.⁷

⁶ Translated by Taiyu Cao . Original text: '令月吉日，始加元服，弃尔幼志，顺而成德，寿考惟祺，介尔景福。' Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Jiagong Yan 賈公彥, *Yili zhushu 儀禮注疏* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.55.

⁷ *Guoyu 國語* (Shanghai Guji Press, 1978), p.409-427.

So the entire ceremony, from beginning to the end, serves the purpose of informing the coming adult his future responsibilities and expectation.

The Significance of the Capping Ceremony to the Youth of Modern Society

With the change of history, today Capping Ceremony has disappeared and is not valued as before. Sometimes, some coming-of-age ceremonies can be seen, but being influenced by Western culture of advocating freedom, coming-of-age ceremonies are mostly about the celebration of freedom from parental supervision, the true spirit of the Capping ceremony no longer exists. The modern celebration of coming-of-age does not to a large extent inform its coming adult a sense of responsibility for independence and the need of contribution to one's family and to the society. In many instances, they only come to realise their duties as an adult when faced with drastic situation or devastating problems. Taking my father's story as an example, he said that it was only at the moment of his father's death that he suddenly realized that the duties of his family had fallen on his shoulders, he felt his thoughts became more mature and steady than before. I believe that the experience of the ceremony itself is a way of awaking the sense of duty in young people. For example, we participated in the Opening Ceremony at the Academy of Sinology before attending any formal classes; the experience of the ceremony brought us a sense of gratitude towards the ancients' wisdom and this realisation has helped us value and place great importance on the learning content of the classics.

Conclusion

By examining the content discussed, the Capping Ceremony being the most highly regarded ceremony in ancient China, it is carried out in a suitable and careful manner. This can be seen from the whole process, from the beginning on choosing the date and guests by divination, to the key component of the ceremony in which the coming adult is presented with three sets of attire, to the final part of being given a courtesy name and visiting relatives and respected elders. This ceremony indirectly facilitates the realisation of social stability and peace; as for individuals, it serves an educational purpose, the transition of one's status establishes a responsible attitude in one's life. Unfortunately, this kind of ceremony has been gradually

overlooked, as it is often considered that the modern clothing is completely different from the clothing of ancient times, so this ceremony is no longer suitable for the present society. This is partly true. Although it is undeniable that capping is only a form of celebration, but more importantly, it conveys the true culture and values in itself.

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