

## S/A 4074: Ritual and Ceremony

### Lecture 18: Rites of Exchange and Communion

- \* Rites of exchange/communion involve offerings to god(s) for something in return (“the gift theory”). May be specific or general
- \* Various attempts have been made to classify logically (e.g. distinctions between types of offerings; continuum from bribes to devotion)
- \* Distinctions between manipulative magic/pure devotion break down: no act is purely disinterested or purely disinterested.
- \* Such rites invoke complex relations of mutual interdependence between humans/divine, and are significant to social and cultural processes by which the community organizes and understands itself
- \* Hindu *puja*:
  - invoke 16 different presentations/attendances
  - performed both at home and publicly
  - involve hospitality: treating the god as an honored guest or host
  - key moment involves seeing the god and being seen in turn
  - invokes a “grammar of devotion” and fosters a positive human/divine relationship
- \* Chinese “spirit money”:
  - focuses on burnt offerings of “money” and other items to obtain more practical benefits from gods, ghosts, and ancestors
  - human bureaucracy continues into the afterlife. In both, virtue is rewarded, but cash works out deals and cuts through red tape
- \* Two specific rituals:
  - (1) the rite to “repay the debt” (i.e. incurred from the “celestial

treasury” on birth);

(2) the rite to “restore one’s destiny” (i.e. drained at critical junctures where good fortune is experienced).

\* Similarities exist in rites of exchange/communion in the symbolic grammar, the things offered, and the actions taken

\* The concept of “sacrifice” has been commonly discussed:

- Hubert and Mauss distinguish other ritual offerings from sacrifice by the concept of sanctification/consecration (i.e. making the offering holy)

- theories of sacrifice have focused on “communion” (i.e. union of the human and divine where the human, the divine, and the offering come together). Sustains and orders the universe/human relations, among other things

- consecration/sacralization can make the offering participate in the divinity of the god, even become the god itself

- found in many societies (e.g. Judaism, Christianity, the Maya, native American peyote rituals, and Aztec human sacrifice)

- such offerings redefine the culture’s cosmological boundaries, while simultaneously allowing the crossing or transgression of those very same boundaries