

UNITED WISDOM

Initiation: How Cultures Mark a Transition

Meaning and Direction

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

P28 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Initiation: How Cultures Mark a Transition

Epigraph

> *Each of these ceremonies has its own particular purpose.*

Arnold van Gennep. Les rites de passage, chapterI, original pagination[15], clause fragment. United Wisdom's own translation from French: "ces cérémonies ont chacune leur objet propre."

What this article is about

A cultural rite can mark a changed position so that others can recognize it. The same word "transition," however, does not make different ceremonies identical in meaning, participants, or obligations. This essay considers a particular classical account of capping in the Li Ji and the Anglican order of confirmation in the1662 Book of Common Prayer. Van Gennep's historical framework helps ask about sequence while retaining each ceremony's own purpose. We distinguish a sign, public recognition, and the life continuing after an event. In an invented scene, an exhibition curator chooses captions that preserve differences instead of turning traditions into one story of inward growth. This is editorial reflection on named texts, not a complete history of initiations or an account of all Chinese or Christian communities. It offers no instructions for reproducing rites. Absence of a ceremony establishes no immaturity, and a cultural example licenses no imposed ordeal, danger, or compulsory renewal.

I. A Person's Change and Recognition of a Position

Imagine an exhibition about life transitions. Its curator prepares two textual displays: capping in a classical Chinese source and Anglican confirmation. This invented scene contains no historical artefacts. She first writes "A person becomes new," then notices that this answers before the sources. One concerns recognition of an adult man in particular relationships; the other ratification of baptismal promises before the church. Calling both inward renewal erases what is recognized and who participates. She therefore begins with definite captions, leaving comparison until afterwards. Different subjects receive room to appear.

A transition can concern a changed position meaningful to several people: one learns of a duty, another changes their address, a third witnesses recognition. This is our chosen question, not every rite's definition. Theological, familial, and political grounds cannot be reduced to convenient agreement. Our curator does not decide what participants really meant

beyond the text. She asks which passage it names and which relationships become visible. Reading requires neither adopting its faith or social order nor dismissing them as a shell around universal experience.

There is a difference between what has happened and what others can now recognize. Someone may have learned an activity long before others stop treating them as a beginner. A public form may already have occurred while its participant still wonders how to live with a new obligation. These possibilities are not extracted from historical texts as established psychological laws. They help distinguish ability, position, and personal understanding. An exhibition can identify a public sign without claiming to explain a person’s entire experience. That limit makes the account more informative: a ceremonial day need not complete learning, doubt, and relationships with everyone simultaneously. Several different questions can remain after one recognized event, without automatically making the event meaningless or the participant inadequate.

The general word “initiation” also needs care. Here it names comparison of entry into a recognized position, not a hidden content identical across cultures. One Chinese text cannot describe the whole of Chinese society; one Anglican order cannot speak for all Christianity. Two examples are not a sufficient sample of the world. The essay chooses limited witnesses to examine several questions more closely: what a sign marks, which past it continues, who recognizes the passage, and what remains afterwards. Answers keep their source-specific grounds. A contemporary reader can compare ways of describing transition without being required to choose or repeat another community’s rite as proof of maturity. Reading and participation have different responsibilities, and familiarity with a description does not confer the authority of a participant.

II. A Sequence Can Make Differences Visible

In the first chapter of The Rites of Passage, van Gennep distinguishes separation, an intervening position, and incorporation. The adopted passage immediately qualifies this: the parts need not be equally developed, and a classification of activities cannot be absolutely rigid. This is a historical analytical proposal, not a proved law governing every life. It offers our caption a useful order of questions: from which position does someone separate, what interval lies between positions, and where are they incorporated? Questions do not yet supply answers. If the source names no distinct intermediate stage, the curator should not invent one to make a diagram prettier or more symmetrical. A useful framework must retain room for what its examples do not establish.

A sequence keeps an object within its setting. A cap may look decorative without its placement and subsequent forms of address. A promise seems independent when its earlier counterpart disappears. Our curator records events explicitly named by the texts, providing no instructions

for imitation. Their relationship matters more than a technique of performance. A sign can be understood within an order without learning to organize a ceremony. Cultural description need not invite reproduction elsewhere; an exhibit can describe relationships while leaving performance to their community.

Event order does not explain every meaning. Two texts can include preparation, a public action, and later obligations while retaining different foundations. One concerns proper relations in family and polity; the other concerns Christian faith and grace. Keeping only three empty boxes removes the difference before comparison begins. In the same adopted passage, van Gennep retains each ceremony's particular purpose. That limits the temptation to call every rite a version of one technology for changing people. Our exhibition's diagram serves the text: its boxes contain definite words and relationships, with a note where the second example offers no direct equivalent. Similarity in order becomes one observation, rather than the authority to replace the meanings through which the participants' own account understands the event.

This reading also acknowledges what remains unknown. A historical normative text says what should happen; it does not by itself reveal how many people followed that order, what they felt, or how usage varied by place. Those questions require other evidence. "The prescribed order" keeps the caption within its scope. The curator need not fill its limits with a general story about ancient people or a necessary need of every society. Unknown matters do not make the text useless. They preserve its own subject and protect comparison from oversized conclusions. What was read can be named confidently without claiming a history that has not been researched. The distinction is between an available account and the broader claims someone might wish to attach to it.

III. A Cap, a Name, and Forms of Address

In BookXL of the Li Ji, translated by James Legge, capping concerns recognition of an adult man. The displayed passage names three caps, a maturity name, and subsequent presentations to relatives and officeholders. This is a particular classical normative account retaining a male hierarchical form, not an image of every person's development. The essay establishes no exact age, prevalence, or present arrangement in Chinese families from it. Comparison concerns the connection between a visible sign and changed address. An object does not stand apart from people expected to recognize a position afterwards. Remove that relationship, and a cultural sign becomes a convenient decoration for the general word "growth." Its particular setting deserves to remain part of the account.

Our imagined display can foreground the word "name," but must explain its place in this text. The maturity name is not presented as freely inventing a wholly new person. It belongs within a public sequence and a recognized position. A contemporary name change may have other

reasons, rules, and experiences; this example does not explain them. The curator keeps a question about how a word allows others to address someone, without making it a universal symbol of rejecting the past. The source's name accompanies continuing relationships rather than erasing them. A new sign can therefore mark a different way of belonging to an existing world. This is a limited reading of the passage, not a rule that every name change must preserve the same ties or meaning.

The passage continues with exchanged courtesies. This lets our analysis consider recognition as relational: both the sign worn and the way others address its wearer change. The question endorses none of the historical duties attached to adult position. It shows that a ceremonial form has addressees and consequences within the described order. A visitor who notices only clothing misses that side; a visitor who notices only duties also loses their public expression. Comparison retains both without transferring the historical hierarchy into contemporary life or making it harmless merely because the text is beautiful and distant. Respectful reading can keep an account visible while questioning its values. It does not require admiration of every relationship the source treats as proper or established.

The prescriptive language matters. The Li Ji connects adult position with familial and public services; it does not demonstrate immediate competence without assistance. Recognized expectation and actual capacity can be distinguished without assigning a modern psychology to the ancient author. Our display retains historical content beside a question: which relationships become visible afterwards? Its answer concerns the text. Personal reflection begins separately, resisting appropriation of cultural material as proof that someone today needs a similar trial or must earn a right to adulthood.

IV. Ratifying an Earlier Promise in One's Own Person

In the Anglican order of confirmation in the1662 Book of Common Prayer, prepared participants ratify a promise previously made in their name at baptism. The adopted text includes the bishop's question, the participant's response, laying on of hands, and prayers. This is a particular Christian liturgy, irreducible to a secular declaration of independence. Our limited comparison concerns an earlier promise acquiring a different mode of personal expression rather than disappearing. The passage relates to an existing faith and church community. The essay examines the order's wording, reports no observation of participants' actual feelings, and derives no rules for every Christian denomination. Its question remains narrower than a claim about how religious maturity generally occurs or is experienced.

The curator can compare this ratification with changed address after capping, but must first retain their distinction. One text marks an adult public position and prescribed relationships; the other ratifies faith and a promise before the church. Their limited similarity concerns an event addressed to others and followed by continuing expectations. Their difference concerns

which continuation has meaning within each source. Writing “A person chooses the self” on both displays erases those grounds. Wording about personal consent in the liturgical preface cannot, without further justification, become a modern theory of freely choosing any content. It concerns a definite promise in a definite confessional order. The participant’s voice remains important without being made to carry conclusions that the source itself does not offer.

The liturgy also prays for continuing strengthening and guidance. The sign is not described as the end of all future life in faith. Prayer nevertheless supplies no empirical guarantee of psychological stability. The curator can show continuation while keeping theological language theological. This avoids turning a ceremony into a device promising an identical result for everyone. Contemporary reflection raises a separate question: which action follows the named event, and what assistance might still be needed? That question belongs to this essay. It does not replace the prayer with a supposedly hidden real meaning, and it does not require a reader to adopt the religious foundation to consider a public relationship. Theological claims and an editorial question about continuing life can stand beside each other while remaining different kinds of statements.

Official contemporary hosting does not mean every present circumstance of performance has been researched. We identify a particular edition: the1662 text reproduced from Baskerville’s1762 printing, hosted by the Church of England. Evidence concerns the pages read. A visitor may find this less ceremonial than a tale of ancient mystery, but learns the wording’s origin and the precise order examined. Accuracy retains cultural meaning while distinguishing belonging, textual history, and personal response. Attentive reading does not make this the single correct form for every life.

V. Who Witnesses, and What Is Recognized

Public recognition cannot be reduced to the number watching. Our sources concern particular relationships: relatives and officeholders in one account, a bishop and church congregation in the other. A large contemporary audience does not by itself create such a relationship. An event can be shown to thousands without clarifying which obligation was accepted or who recognizes it. This is an editorial question, not a study of publicity. It distinguishes a viewer, a witness, and a participant. Seeing a sign does not automatically confer authority to interpret it for someone or demand fulfilment of an unknown promise. The scope of witnessing matters alongside its visibility.

A historical witness may belong to an established order rather than being freely chosen by the participant. Removing that feature to fit a contemporary idea of support would distort the account. The curator can describe it and separately ask what the source regarded as sufficient recognition. That question does not settle present relationship norms. Contemporary room to decline or retain privacy is this essay’s editorial boundary, not the secret teaching of every

ancient rite. Distinguishing these levels prevents cultural respect from requiring approval of coercion. An account can remain intact without licensing an ordeal imposed on someone who has not agreed.

A visitor asks whether someone who missed a ceremony has remained unchanged. The curator cannot answer for that person’s whole life. She can show that the text connects a position with a particular form of recognition. That does not establish a universal judgment about someone living within another order. Absence of a sign proves no absence of ability, responsibility, or significant change. Another public form may operate; a passage may remain unannounced. This essay does not investigate those possibilities on the person’s behalf. It retains the boundary between describing a cultural order and claiming authority to assess everyone through its signs.

Recognition can remain disputed afterwards. People may understand its continuation differently, and a normative text does not explain every disagreement’s resolution. A ceremony should not become a guarantee of consensus. Our caption concerns the prescribed form and its named significance. A visitor seeking actual conflicts would need other historical witnesses. This proves neither a defect in the rite nor its unconditional success; it marks the material’s limit. Comparison becomes more honest when it promises no more than was read and leaves participants’ experience as a separate inquiry needing its own sources. Their voices cannot be supplied merely by interpreting a prescriptive passage.

VI. A Visible Sign Does Not Explain Every Experience

A reader may imagine that an outward form necessarily brings the same inward state. A name, a response, or changed address is not a direct record of feeling. Our sources give these things their own normative and religious meanings; this essay has not researched individual participants’ experiences. The curator therefore does not say that everyone felt freedom, certainty, or completion afterwards. She shows available words and actions. This leaves room for personal experience without pretending it is already known. A cultural sign can matter without promising identical feeling at its performance or an unchanged emotional state for the rest of life.

The reverse mistake calls an outward action empty because it cannot prove inward transformation. This loses what the text says about relationships, promises, and recognition. A visitor need not share confirmation’s theological grounds to understand what its participant’s response addresses. Nor must the visitor adopt the Li Ji’s hierarchy to see a name’s relation to position. Understanding is not agreement. It requires naming content accurately before discussing its value. Differences of conviction need not make another form meaningless decoration or an inaccessible mystery. Intercultural reading can recognize an intelligible

relationship while retaining a definite disagreement about its grounds, obligations, or contemporary suitability.

Comparison establishes no common mechanism of spiritual action. Words and bodily signs appearing together do not prove that different ceremonies change people through the same force. Anglican laying on of hands belongs within prayer and church meaning; clothing and address in the Chinese account belong within specified relationships. The essay keeps those grounds. Its common question is narrower: how is a definite change expressed and addressed to others? That needs no hidden unified metaphysics and turns no account into a validated technique. Forms of public expression can be compared without equating faith, political order, or each participant’s experience. Similarity helps a question travel; it does not settle every answer in advance.

A contemporary reader can therefore delay a personal conclusion. A strong image can be noticed, its caption read, and a question left open. There is no immediate need to select a rite for one’s life or declare its absence a deficiency. The exhibition offers attention to a source, not a self-change programme. If an image evokes a memory, that encounter has a separate significance. It can matter without matching the historical meaning. A personal response need not become proof that a culture always taught precisely that lesson. Both subjects can remain: the account read and the question arising beside it. Neither has to absorb the other to justify continued attention.

VII. Comparing Without Appropriation or Imposed Trials

Cultural comparison grants no authority to administer someone else’s rite. Knowing several actions from a text is not the same as gaining recognized authority to perform them for others. A shortened account is particularly inadequate as the foundation of a new initiation. Our exhibition invites no imitation and sells no ceremony as a universal renewal method. It shows a sign belonging to particular relationships and words. Someone today may choose a modest personal way to mark change, but should identify it as their own form. That retains the distinction between a personal decision and a claim of authorization from a historical tradition. Reading a source does not manufacture that authorization.

Danger does not become valuable merely because it is called initiation. This essay supplies no repeatable ordeal, rule to endure pain, or duty to risk oneself for maturity. A practice’s historical existence does not justify present application. Understanding a motif does not require making the reader undergo a test. This is our editorial boundary, not a claim that every source contains contemporary safety rules. Another group should not be asked to prove authenticity through danger either. Interest in tradition must not create authority over somebody else’s body without their agreement. Cultural belonging deserves respect without

being made conditional on satisfying an outsider’s expectation of dramatic suffering or transformation.

A subtler appropriation keeps an impressive sign while removing its addressees. A cap then decorates individual growth; a promise becomes a handsome phrase about independence. The curator can avoid this by retaining relationships and source limits. She need not retell a tradition’s entire world, but must not change the selected passage’s subject. Here that means naming an adult male position in the Li Ji and ratification of a baptismal promise in Anglican confirmation. Further comparison can be original and useful when identified as the essay’s contribution. A new reading need not pretend it was the original meaning already shared by every participant in the cultures under discussion. Its value does not depend on inventing such agreement.

A good caption sometimes includes “not established.” Individual experience, equal prevalence, and the whole subsequent history have not been established here. These limits should not displace the available content, but prevent its automatic enlargement. Our visitor sees a definite example and the account’s scope. A question beyond it calls for another source rather than demanding that the first answer everything. This keeps further inquiry possible. The material’s own meaning can be respected without turning it into a finished map of all life transitions. Unknown matters still exist after a useful comparison. Naming them leaves a reader with a more accurate basis for the next question, rather than a false impression that every relevant difference has already been explained.

VIII. What Continues After the Sign

Watching only the ceremonial moment leaves continuation outside the frame. Our selected texts connect recognized positions with later relationships and duties. This is no general law of compulsory growth; it prompts attention beyond the sign alone. What may now be expected, whom does a promise address, and which relationships continue? The questions need no identical answer for everyone. Our curator can end a caption with continuation explicitly named by the source, without adding a happy outcome on participants’ behalf. A transition remains an event with definite significance. Subsequent life remains time that cannot be entirely understood through one ceremonial moment, however meaningful that moment is within its particular setting.

Continuation also prevents a false opposition between a sign and ordinary work. A ceremony may have its own value while the next action has another subject. Someone need not prove the event genuine every day, but speaking a promise does not itself fulfil it. Our contemporary examination distinguishes what was announced from what was done. This editorial question arises beside the sources; it is not their hidden shared theory. It preserves meaning in a form while allowing discussion of a later action. Such accuracy does not devalue memory. It

prevents memory from replacing every fact about present relationships between participants. A remembered event and an unfinished responsibility can both matter without cancelling each other.

A contemporary passage may remain private or use another form. This essay does not develop the separate topic of transition without public ritual or choose a ceremony for someone. It examines particular cultural descriptions attentively. A reader can retain several questions without surrendering room to assess their answers. Which sign do participants understand? Which position does it name? Is there agreement and a limit to expectations in the present situation? The latter are our current questions, not every historical rule transferred intact. They can be considered without making a life revolve around finding a rite that finally makes change sufficiently real for an outsider. Cultural comparison offers questions; it need not become a requirement to obtain ceremonial permission to continue.

Our curator finishes with two different captions and a modest comparative map. It contains limited similarities, not a conclusion that all cultures create a new person identically. Each text retains the people, relationships, and grounds of its sign. A question about making passage recognizable can be shared; what is recognized and continued remains different. Such reading approaches another cultural account without requiring appropriation or absorption into one’s own story. A transition’s meaning gains detail. Alongside a striking moment stand the accuracy of a name, promise, witness, and boundary beyond which participants’ lives have not yet been researched. A comparison can end there while leaving both respect and further questions available to the reader.

What this means in practice

Choose one limited passage from a cultural account and record its title, edition, and precise scope. Name what the text prescribes or describes separately. Do not add imagined feelings to source evidence. Leave unknown experience unknown. This exercise concerns reading, not performing a rite.

Then note a sign, its addressees, and the named continuation: which position becomes recognizable, who addresses whom, and which obligation or connection remains. A source may not answer every question. An empty space can remain empty rather than being filled by a general framework.

For comparison, choose another definite passage. Find one limited similarity and one difference in grounds. Public recognition may appear in both, for example, while an adult public position is not the ratification of a Christian promise. Record which question the comparison clarifies and what it does not establish.

This voluntary editorial reading exercise is not a psychological method or an invitation to repeat historical actions. It establishes no immaturity in someone without a ceremony. A personal response can remain separate from historical meaning. Declining the exercise does not diminish anyone’s room for significant change.

Key quotation

> *When the capping was over, he received the name of his maturity.*

Li Ji, BookXL, displayed paragraph2. James Legge1885 translation.

Connections between traditions

1. **Sequence and unequal elaboration: van Gennepl, [14–15]; Li JiXL, paragraph2.** Van Gennep distinguishes separation, an interval, and incorporation without demanding equal elaboration; the Li Ji describes successive caps and a maturity name. Similarity concerns the order within which a sign matters. The mechanism keeps an action beside preceding and subsequent positions. Here it makes a ceremony more intelligible than an isolated object. An analytical framework nevertheless differs from a normative Chinese account. Comparison proves neither all three phases in every rite nor a participant’s feelings.

2. **Addressees of recognition: Li JiXL,4–6; Confirmation1662, preface and bishop’s question, PDF173.** One account expresses recognition through relatives and public figures; the other ratifies a promise before the church. Their limited similarity is an event addressed to definite others. The mechanism identifies relationships making a sign publicly recognizable. Here it distinguishes witnessing from audience size. Adult male position within historical hierarchy is not a Christian promise. Comparison makes neither order a contemporary voluntary group and grants no witness authority over another person.

3. **A new sign and an earlier connection: Li JiXL,2; Confirmation1662, ratification of baptismal promise, PDF173.** A maturity name marks a position in continuing relationships; the liturgical response ratifies a promise previously made in the participant’s name. Their limited similarity is passage without erasure of everything preceding it. The mechanism connects a new designation with a retained tie, resisting a formula of complete reset. A name is not a baptismal vow, and public adulthood is not ratification of faith. No conclusion requires every name or life change to retain earlier obligations.

4. **A ceremony’s own purpose: van Gennepl, [15]; Confirmation1662, prayers PDF173–174; Li JiXL,1.** Van Gennep does not reduce ceremonies to one transitional function. The Christian order retains prayer for grace; the Chinese account retains particular familial and public relations. The shared question asks what an empty framework loses. The mechanism restores each account’s grounds, preserving cultural specificity here. Historical classification does not

verify theology, and a similar question makes neither grace nor hierarchy one metaphysical mechanism or validated psychological technology.

5. **Words and bodily signs: Li JiXL,1; Confirmation1662, response and laying on of hands, PDF173.** The Li Ji connects carriage, speech, and ceremonial relationships; confirmation includes a personal response and bodily sign within prayer. Similarity concerns expression extending beyond an abstract announcement. The mechanism notices different sides of an event, allowing a more precise caption. Normative relations and liturgical prayer retain their own grounds. Bodies and words in both establish no common inward effect, obligatory experience, or authority to reproduce actions beyond their setting.

6. **Limits of a general account: van GennepI, [15], nonrigid classification; Li JiXL,4–6; Confirmation1662, PDF173–174.** The analyst retains complexity; specific texts name roles and continuing duties. Their limited similarity is that a general term does not exhaust the account. The mechanism asks which questions a framework leaves open. Here prevalence, personal experience, and subsequent history remain unknown. Prescription is not field observation; careful classification does not cancel faith or relationships. This establishes neither uselessness in every ceremony nor a requirement that everyone undergo one.

Primary sources

Only named passages are adopted. Van Gennep was read in French; both epigraph versions are United Wisdom's own translations. The English key quotation retains Legge1885; Russian is translated from it, without collating Chinese. The Anglican order was read in the specific officially hosted PDF. Normative and religious grounds remain; actual participants' experiences and a universal ritual history were not researched.

- Van Gennep. Les rites de passage, chapterI, original[14–15]; French text, UQAM electronic edition, PDF19–21.
- Li Ji. BookXL, Meaning of the Ceremony of Capping; complete displayed section. James Legge1885, Sacred Books of the East28; Internet Sacred Text Archive.
- Church of England. Book of Common Prayer1662, Order of Confirmation, PDF173–174; reproduction of Baskerville1762 printing.

Tags

initiation, transition, culture, rite, ceremony, recognition, position, adulthood, name, promise, witness, relationships, tradition, history, Li Ji, Legge, confirmation, Anglicanism, van Gennep, sequence, separation, incorporation, boundary, responsibility, belonging, comparison, source, consent, accuracy, continuation

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.