
Introduction

Confusions over Confucianism

THE PROBLEM I SET OUT TO SOLVE in this book is the confusions and controversies over the religious nature of Confucianism. Although Confucianism has long been commonly accepted as one of the major world religions in our popular imagination, and portrayed as the most important religion of China in introductory textbooks on world religions, it might come as a surprise to many that it is neither considered a religion by most people in China nor counted as a religion by the Chinese government. In fact, Confucianism is not included in the Chinese official classification of the Five Major Religions, which includes Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. And although many scholars in the West have treated Confucianism as a religion since the turn of the twentieth century, such as Max Weber in his influential 1915 study *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, intellectual disagreements among scholars over whether Confucianism is actually a religion have never ceased. Today these ongoing debates take place within many academic disciplines, including religious studies, history, anthropology, philosophy, Asian studies, sinology, and sociology.

In recent years several excellent and widely read studies of Confucianism have renewed people's interest in the life and thought of Confucius, such as *The Authentic Confucius* and *Lives of Confucius*, as well as research that draws attention to the important development of Confucianism in contemporary Chinese society, such as *China's New Confucianism*.¹ And a few studies have made major contributions to the historical and theoretical examinations of the concept of religion, from *Genealogies of Religion* to *The Invention of World Religions*.² This is indeed the perfect time for us to revisit the deep-seated issues involved in the confusion over the religious nature of Confucianism.

I argue that the confusions come mainly from three sources: (1) the conceptualization of Confucianism as a world religion at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, which was a historical product of the emergence of the "world religions" paradigm in the West; (2) the problematic

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way in which Confucianism—and Chinese religions in general—has been studied in the social sciences, represented by survey research that often recycles existing questions, such as “Do you belong to a religious denomination?” which are based on a Judeo-Christian framework of religion that cannot capture the complexity and uniqueness of Chinese religious life; and (3) the complex and often contradictory development of Confucianism in today’s China, in which Confucian rituals are currently experiencing a lively revival among ordinary people, while the state is consciously promoting Confucianism as a possible source of political ideology and social ethics in order to legitimize its rule in the twenty-first century.

In the past twenty years, there has indeed been a revival of diverse religious ritual practices in Chinese society, including Confucian ritual practice, as the country undergoes rapid technical, industrial, and economic growth. The Communist Party has been grappling with the tension between its stated atheism and the reality of China’s ritual-rich religious life, and Confucianism has emerged as a possible test case for the party to modify or even reinvent its relation to religion. As an ancient, “native” tradition rather than something with a “foreign” origin, such as Christianity, Confucianism also has broad appeal to many increasingly nationalistic Chinese people, including a sizable number of intellectuals. It is indeed conceivable that Confucianism may play a significant role in China’s political developments in the near future, as Daniel Bell suggested in his 2008 book *China’s New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society*.³ However, institutionally and politically, the religious status of Confucianism in China has never been fuzziy.

In this book I set out to untangle the many tousled threads that have made the discussion of the religious nature of Confucianism particularly difficult, both in the past and in the present. In order to make sense of the many seeming contradictions in our understanding of Confucianism, we need to be aware of the epistemological, political, and social assumptions that are embedded in the discussions of its religious nature. All concepts and classifications have histories, and I contend that in the case of the controversies over Confucianism as a religion, they are never purely intellectual or scholarly disagreements; there are always complex political and social dimensions to the struggles over the classification of Confucianism.

WHY CONFUCIANISM MATTERS

What constitutes a religious life in today’s world? What are the new forms of religious life for people living in the twenty-first century? I suggest that the case of Confucianism can help us see beyond the existing social scientific criteria that center on church attendance and membership,

which are rooted in monotheistic definitions of religious life that are primarily influenced by the religious histories of Euro-America, and instead turn our attention to the shifting boundaries of religious life that are constantly redefined and made sense of through the richness of people's shared everyday life.

On October 23, 2009, the *New York Times* published an article titled "Globally, Religion Defies Easily Identified Patterns."⁴ The article refers to the report, "Religious Change around the World," released the day before by Tom W. Smith of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.⁵ The thorough report rightfully claims to be "the most comprehensive analysis to date of global religious trends," yet for anyone looking for a definitive answer to the secularization debate, he or she is bound to be disappointed. For instance, in the case of the United States, although the report confirms that there have been declines in terms of church attendance and identification with a religion, when it comes to the frequency of praying, there have been clear increases in recent years: "Daily praying (several times a day + daily) fell from 54% in 1983 . . . then rose to a high of 59% in 2004–2006."⁶ Indeed, as the report concludes,

But this does not amount to a simple confirmation of secularization theory. The secularization hypothesis predicts a general and sweeping decline in religion. While the preponderance of evidence does show a secular shift across time, age cohorts, and levels of development, the pattern is very mixed and nuanced. Trends are not universal and vary greatly in magnitude and on how widespread they are. They differ both across and within religious traditions and geo-cultural regions. Also, there is considerable variation across different religious indicators.⁷

This report is unusually perceptive in its emphasis on the variations across different religious indicators. And it also points to how different indicators—whether we examine church attendance, membership identification, or frequency of prayers—will give us vastly different understandings of the state of religious life in a given society.⁸ A recent essay in the *New York Review of Books*, "China Gets Religion!," makes a great case for broadening our conceptual frameworks about religion in order to discover the vibrant religious life being lived in Chinese society.⁹

These conclusions resonate clearly with my own research on the re-emergence of religious life in contemporary China in general, and the revival of Confucian rituals in particular. However, there are two main difficulties in describing Confucianism in the traditional language of religion. The first lies in the fact that it is hard to define membership in Confucianism because there are no definitive conversion rites in Confucianism, such as baptism in Christianity, which is a necessary rite for many Christians, or the rite of *guiyi* in Buddhism, which is an elective rite for the most

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devout Buddhists rather than for all Buddhists. There is nothing that is the equivalent in the Confucian tradition, even though there have been recent attempts to create such rituals for Confucianism, including efforts made at the Sacred Confucius Hall in Shenzhen, which remain isolated attempts, still too obscure for most people to even be aware of.

The second comes from the fact that there are no official religious organizations in contemporary Confucianism, such as churches or mosques, nor is there an official priesthood or clergy. Although there are still many Confucian temples available for ritual practice in China, they are officially cultural institutions, under the auspices of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (*guojia wenwu ju*), an agency that is part of the Ministry of Culture.¹⁰ Even the two most ardent promoters of Confucianism as a religion today, the Hong Kong Confucianity Academy (established in 1930) and the Sacred Hall of Confucius in Shenzhen (established in 2009), are not registered as religious organizations; the former is an educational and cultural institution with no campus of its own, and the latter is a cultural venue sharing space with an art gallery in a large public park.

As Confucianism lacks a conversion rite, official religious organizations, and a clergy, it is indeed difficult to speak of membership in Confucianism in general, since the social foundation of Confucianism is not religious institutions but diverse and interconnected social and cultural systems. As a result, to become a Confucian is a gradual process that involves ritual practices, moral self-cultivation, as well as participation in certain Confucian cultural and social institutions. Moreover, to be a Confucian has meant very different things in different historical periods and different cultural contexts in China. Indeed, to be a Confucian is to have one of the most fluid identities, hence the traditional religious indicators cannot be applied to Confucianism straightforwardly.

What makes the case of Confucianism representative of certain characteristics of contemporary religious life might be its “diffused” rather than “institutional” nature, as C. K. Yang first suggested in 1961.¹¹ In the case of institutional religion, we find churches or mosques with a clear institutional structure, organized clergy, and definitive membership affiliations. In the case of diffused religion, the religious activities are conducted in a wide range of settings, such as the family, and there is often a fluid sense of belonging—rather than the more visible institutional ties of membership—shared by people who participate in common ritual practices. Sociologists such as Nancy Ammerman and Lynn Davidman have been studying religions outside of the often confining framework of organized institutions; for instance, by focusing on the everyday practices of Judaism as “lived religion” or “everyday religion,” they show how people creatively “live out” their religious identities in everyday life, instead of trying to define them through their memberships or beliefs.¹²

My study shares similar concerns. I believe we should respect the primacy of the everyday practice of religion, and I agree with the critical insight that it is us, scholars of religion, who should try to adjust our conceptualizations and definitions of religion in order to accurately represent the rich, diverse social reality of practice through our research. It should not be the other way around. This is indeed the approach taken by several excellent recent empirical studies of religion in contemporary China, from Adam Chau's 2006 ethnographic study *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* to Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer's 2011 comprehensive analysis *The Religious Question in Modern China*, which examines the development of China's multiple religious modernities.¹³ Other notable examples—both historical and contemporary research—include recent work by Richard Madsen, Mayfair Yang, Xun Liu, and Rebecca Nedostup.¹⁴

Does this mean that a more diffused religious tradition such as Confucianism is as *legitimate* a religion—conceptually—as the ones that are centered on institutionalized practice, such as congregational life? Should we pay as much attention to personal worship and other noninstitutional forms of rituals, such as private prayers, as to more institutionalized forms of religious action, such as church attendance? One might suggest that we can find many forms of prayers and prayerfulness in Confucian life, from communal prayers in Confucius temples during formal ceremonies to private prayers to Confucius, to meditative practices such as the reading of classical texts from the Confucian canon, which is a tradition that is similar to *lectio divina*.¹⁵

Furthermore, we see over and over again in both survey research and ethnographic fieldwork that a Chinese person may routinely worship at different religious sites belonging to “different religions”—“different” according to our classification—concurrently, from a temple devoted to Confucius to another devoted to the *guanyin* bodhisattva, from a shrine for the God of Wealth to the shrine for one's ancestor spirits, sometimes on the same day or in the same week. Should we argue that it is wrong to conclude that this person's practice is deviant from the perceived standard behavior of religious life, which assumes that one should follow the practice of only a single religious tradition at a given time?

I argue that the answers have to be yes to such questions, for it is of utmost importance for us to take seriously forms of religious life that are fundamentally different from the monotheistic model that has been the unacknowledged norm in the history of the scientific study of religions. Instead of treating the differences between the actual Chinese religious practices and our existing intellectual framework as denoting something abnormal, exceptional, or impure, we need to reevaluate our own conceptual schemes and treat the actual practice in everyday

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life in China as normal and legitimate, no matter how novel it might seem to us.

This new emphasis on the uniqueness of religious life rather than its perceived commonness (the kind of questions asked in religion surveys around the world, including belief, membership, church attendance) will allow us to do better justice to the rich, imaginative, and creative nature of religious practice as lived by people in different societies. Indeed, in societies not dominated by Judeo-Christian or Muslim traditions, such as China, non-monotheistic religious life has been the more familiar form of practice. We might discover that Chinese religious life has more in common with Greek and Roman religions before the rise of Christianity than with contemporary America, where the main mold and logic of religious practice has been monotheistic.¹⁶

By focusing on the uniqueness of Confucianism in this study, I hope we will arrive at a more complete account of the fate of religion in our increasingly rationalized, scientifically advanced, yet still often miraculously enchanted twenty-first-century life. By critically examining the historically conditioned theoretical categorization of Confucianism as world religion, as well as its implication in the social scientific research about Confucianism and Chinese religions in general, we can allow ourselves to focus on the empirical reality of Confucianism through conceptual lenses that are informed by our historical sensibility, methodological reflection, and an openness about the meaning of the very notion of “religion” itself in our global contemporary life.

THE MOST PRESSING QUESTIONS

For every scholarly project, there are at least one or two hard-hitting questions that touch on the deepest concerns of that particular intellectual enterprise. They might take the form of a question from the audience after a public presentation of the project or the form of a written response from a colleague who has thought about the same issues long and hard. They might even take the form of a nagging concern that refuses to go away as one tries to formulate a systematic solution to the problem at hand. Such questions are necessary for the integrity of the project; one has to deal with them with as much clarity as possible, either implicitly in one’s thinking about the fundamental issues or explicitly in one’s answers to critics. Such questions keep us honest.

For this project, the most hard-hitting question seems to be the following: although great efforts seem to have been made to historicize the concept of religion and especially the concept of Confucianism as a religion, the question remains whether there is a hidden definition of religion that

is being used in discussions of the contemporary revival of Confucianism. In other words, is there a “minimal” definition of religion—Durkheimian perhaps—being implicitly adopted, since this study has an emphasis on the revival of Confucian rituals? Is this project committing to an unacknowledged normative understanding of religion as ritual practice?¹⁷

Indeed, why do we emphasize ritual practice in Confucianism? In *Ritual and Its Consequences*, Seligman et al. argue that they are more interested in what rituals do than what they are. Their insight on the performative aspect of rituals resonates with my research. They state that ritual “creates and re-creates a world of social convention and authority beyond the inner will of any individual,” and they argue that this understanding of ritual is central to many traditions, especially Judaism and Confucianism: “[S]uch traditions understand the world as fundamentally fractured and discontinuous, with ritual allowing us to live in it by creating temporary order through the construction of a performative, subjunctive world. Each ritual rebuilds the world ‘as if’ it were so, as one of many possible worlds.”¹⁸

I believe that ritual in the Confucian tradition has indeed been helping create “a world of social convention and authority” for people who practice them, and ritual has been the fundamental element that holds this tradition together through thousands of years of fractions and discontinuities. Ritual practice in Confucianism has been essential, continuous, as well as creative. Regardless of how we define Confucianism and whether we call it a “religion,” Confucian rituals have been and will possibly remain the most salient component of this complex tradition, from the time of Confucius’s teaching to the dawn of the twenty-first century. Instead of trying to understand the changing landscape of Confucianism only through decoding Confucian thoughts, it is time for us to pay close attention to the actual ritual actions carried out by ordinary people. These actions represent a link with the past, as well as a bridge to the future.

Although I do not attempt a substantive definition of religion in this study, as a sociologist I do believe that it is important for us to stay value-neutral regarding whether Confucianism is a religion. In his invigorating book *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*, Fenggang Yang suggests that “there are three major social forces contending to define religion: scholars, believers, and the government.”¹⁹ This is indeed the case, and it is especially true in contested situations such as Confucianism. In his book Yang does offer a substantive definition of religion; he believes that it is our obligation as social scientists—both to be “socially responsible” and to “engage in scientific endeavor”—to strive to define religion in our research.²⁰

My response is to emphasize the uniqueness of my sociological project, which is an in-depth analysis of the processes through which the

state and other social actors—including scholars of Confucianism, social scientists, Confucian practitioners, and other activists—contest, negotiate, and construct Confucianism. In this project I am not offering an analytical and substantive definition of religion as a scholar because it is essentially irrelevant to my subject matter. What I am studying is not whether Confucianism *is* a religion but whether and how Confucianism has been constructed and contested as a religion by various social forces.

More specifically, this is what I mean by my value-neutral position. Because of the late nineteenth-century formulation of the “world religions” paradigm, it has already become a *social fact* that Confucianism has been understood as a world religion for over a century, both in our popular imagination and in our academic knowledge production. It exists independent of what competing definitions of religion we as scholars use. The truth is that we can no longer go back to the time when Confucianism was not seen as a world religion; we are living with the very concrete legacy of this historical classification and its lasting legacy. As scholars we must closely examine this social fact of “Confucianism as a world religion” through concrete, historical, and empirical analysis.

And this social fact is not unchanging. The classification of Confucianism is what the philosopher of science Ian Hacking calls an “interactive kind.” In *The Social Construction of What?*, Hacking argues that “ways of classifying human beings interact with the human beings who are classified”:

There are all sorts of reasons for this. People think of themselves as of a kind, perhaps, or reject the classification. . . . Moreover, classifications do not exist only in the empty space of language but in institutions, practices, material interactions with things and other people. . . . Interactions do not just happen. They happen within matrices, which include many obvious social elements and many obvious material ones. . . . Inanimate things are, by definition, not aware of themselves in the same way. Take the extremes, women refugees and quarks. A woman refugee may learn that she is a certain kind of person and act accordingly. Quarks do not learn that they are a certain kind of entity and act accordingly.²¹

Indeed, the classification of Confucianism as a world religion exists not only in language but also in institutions, practices, and material and social interactions. The classification has been made use of by Western comparative religions scholars since the 1870s, Chinese political activists since the 1910s, social scientists since the turn of the twentieth century, and potentially the Chinese state in the near future. These social actors have tried to modify, challenge, negotiate, or redefine the content and meaning of the classification, and the classification also affects the actual practice and identification of people who are subjected to it. As a

matter of fact, this particular classification has been having this interactive, “looping effect” for over a hundred years, and my research aims to show the matrices through which the interactions take place.

In doing so, I examine the ways in which Confucianism is employed by different people and groups—as a religion or not as a religion—without agreeing with one side of the debate or the other. In other words, as a sociologist, I focus on the observation, analysis, and unpacking of the social factors related to the different positions, such as the concrete ways in which people engage with the debate, rather than offering an open-and-shut definition of religion.

This also allows me to stay open-minded in examining future possibilities of the development of Confucianism. For instance, if Confucianism were to be classified as a religion by the Chinese government in the near future, I would be studying what effects this change might have on the ways people practice Confucian rituals and ethics, and what effects this might have on people with other religious identities. Would Confucianism acquire new forms of conversion process? Would a Chinese Christian still feel comfortable considering herself or himself Confucian? An analytical strategy of distinguishing “use” and “mention” is indeed sometimes useful in this context; I often do not “use” religion as a category in my analysis—that is, according to a normative, universal definition—but I do “mention” and pay close attention to the myriad ways people make use of the category of religion throughout my historical and ethnographic work.²² As a result, I can examine the diverse cultural, political, and institutional processes underlining debates and conflicts without holding a specific position regarding whether Confucianism is a religion.

In other words, my engagement with religion—what is claimed to be or contested to be religion in social life—is fundamentally historical, acknowledging both the historical nature of its changing developments in social reality and the historical nature of the changing categories we use as scholars in understanding them. This means that the intellectual concepts and heuristic tools available to us in this particular given historical moment also condition my attempt at a value-neutral analysis, the way all humanistic scholarship is. Rather than trying to offer an ahistorical definition of religion, I follow Nietzsche’s insight in *On the Genealogy of Morality*: “Only something which has no history can be defined.”²³

UNDERSTANDING CONFUCIANISM EMPIRICALLY

The three themes of this book—the historical process of the making of concepts and classifications regarding Confucianism in the nineteenth century, the problems with social science methodology in our study of

Confucianism in the twentieth century, the multifaceted realities of the revival of Confucianism in contemporary China in the twenty-first century—constitute the three parts of this book. Part I, “The Puzzle of Classification: How Did Confucianism Become a World Religion?” has three chapters. In chapter 1, “Four Controversies over the Religious Nature of Confucianism: A Brief History of Confucianism,” I briefly introduce the four major controversies in the past five centuries over whether Confucianism is a religion: The first is the Chinese Rites and Term Controversy (1579–1724), which involved Jesuit missionaries in China. The second is what I call the Term Controversy (1877–91); it involved missionaries in China as well as scholars in the newly emerging intellectual discipline “comparative religion.” (This controversy is examined in full in chapter 2.) The third is the Confucianity Movement (*kongjiao yundong*) (1911–20), which was a failed movement to make Confucianity (*kongjiao*) into China’s state religion. The fourth is the latest debate over the religious nature of Confucianism, the so-called Confucianism as a Religion Controversy (*rujiao shijiao zhizheng*), which took place in China between 2000 and 2004. (This debate is examined in full in chapter 3.)

Chapter 2, “The Making of a World Religion,” examines the connection between the making of Confucianism as a religion and the emergence of comparative religion as a discipline in Great Britain in the late nineteenth century, based primarily on extensive archival research I conducted in the Max Müller Archive at Bodleian Library in Oxford, the British India Office Archive at the British Library, and the Archive at the Oxford University Press. I show that by allying himself with Max Müller and the emerging discipline, former missionary and the first professor of Chinese at Oxford James Legge moved the controversy over the religious nature of Confucianism from the small circle of missionaries in China to a new arena, which was the emerging field of comparative religious studies, and both the settlement of the so-called Term Controversy and the legitimation of Confucianism as a world religion were facilitated by the new discipline. Through innovative boundary work, Max Müller and Legge helped establish a legitimate intellectual field to promote the discourse of world religions of which Confucianism was an essential part.

Chapter 3, “The Confucianism as a Religion Controversy in Contemporary China,” analyzes the contemporary debate in China over whether Confucianism should be classified as a religion. I first introduce the formation of the official religious classification, the Five Major Religions in the 1950s in socialist China; I then focus on the contemporary Confucianism as a religion controversy in 2000–2004, an important debate among Chinese intellectuals with significant academic, social, and political implications.

The next part of the book, part II, is titled “The Problem of Methodology: Who Are the Confucians in China?” and contains three chapters

devoted to the difficulty of studying Confucianism in empirical research. Chapter 4, “Confucianism as a World Religion: The Legitimation of a New Paradigm,” is an overview of how Confucianism has been classified as a world religion in both popular and academic texts in the past one hundred years. Through an analysis of popular as well as scholarly publications, academic associations, and academic curriculum since the turn of the twentieth century, I suggest that this classification has had a lasting impact on both our popular imagination and academic institutions.

Chapter 5, “Counting Confucians through Social Scientific Research,” discusses the long-standing problem of identifying Confucians in China (and East Asia in general) through social science research methods, a problem deeply rooted in the nineteenth-century conceptualization of Confucianism and the overall classification of Chinese religions. In this chapter, as someone who has had experience designing a major survey of Chinese religious life in 2007, I argue that we need to fundamentally change the way we frame our research questions in order to gain a real sense of the diversity and vitality of Chinese religious practice.

Chapter 6, “To Become a Confucian: A New Conceptual Framework,” offers a new conceptual framework for addressing the empirical question of who the Confucians are in China, suggesting a three-tier definition that takes into consideration Confucian religious ritual practice such as Confucius worship and ancestral worship, as well as Confucian spiritual exercise and social rituals. In this conceptualization, we might be able to make the distinction among a ritual Confucian, a spiritual Confucian, and a cultural Confucian in the context of contemporary life.

The last part of the book, part III, is titled “The Reality of Practices: Is Confucianism a Religion in China Today?” It can be argued that there have been several important stages in the recent endorsement of Confucianism by the Chinese state. I suggest that these developments can be divided into five steps, each signified by concrete and noteworthy events:

1. *The Political Ideology Step*

This critical step was signified by the use of the “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*) slogan, explicitly borrowed from Confucian political philosophy, by President Hu Jintao on September 19, 2004, at the Sixteenth Chinese Communist Party Congress. It has become the central political idea of the Hu Jintao–Wen Jiabao administration; the party has been using the slogan consistently since then.²⁴

2. *The State Ritual Step*

The first official veneration of Confucius in the Qufu Confucius Temple on September 28, 2004, marked the beginning of this development. The annual formal ceremony has been broadcast

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on Chinese national television since 2005. Since then, numerous formal ceremonies honoring the birthday of Confucius have taken place in Qufu and Beijing, as well as many provincial cities and towns with newly renovated Confucius temples.

3. *The Culture Step*

The culture step has at least two parts. The first aspect is the overseas one, represented by the founding of the first Confucius Institute on November 21, 2004, in Seoul, South Korea, which launched a global project supported by state funding in the amount of two billion yuan. By the end of August 2011, there were already 353 Confucius Institutes and 473 Confucius Classrooms in 104 countries and regions in the world.²⁵ Indeed, now one can find a Confucius Institute “from Paris Diderot University to Penn State University, and from Argentina to Zimbabwe.”²⁶ They not only promote the name of Confucius as a Chinese cultural brand but also attempt to recast contemporary China as synonymous with Confucianism. The second aspect is domestic, represented by the October 2006 broadcast of Yu Dan’s widely popular seven-part television lecture series on the *Analects* of Confucius, aired on a state-owned, prime Chinese television station. Her book on the *Analects* based on the series has sold several million copies.

4. *The Confucian Symbol Step*

This refers to the emphasis of China’s Confucian heritage through symbolic means, such as images, texts, and artworks. The opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics on August 8, 2008, with its numerous references to Confucius and Confucianism, was the first major event that attempted to link China’s recent rapid economic growth—displayed in the cutting-edge stadiums and the high-tech capability of the Beijing Olympic Games—with its Confucian past. The latest example might be the erection of the giant bronze statue of Confucius near Tiananmen Square in January 2011, which was mysteriously taken down a few months later, on April 21, 2011.²⁷

5. *The International Politics Step*

This is a new development in the state’s promotion of Confucianism. One might argue that the award of the first Confucius Peace Prize on December 8, 2010, possibly a response to the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize, is one of the first exercises in using Confucius as an explicit political tool on the stage of international politics.

As we can see, 2004 marked the turning point of the official revival of Confucianism in ideological, ritualistic, and cultural terms. Explicitly symbolic and political uses of Confucianism on the international stage soon followed and have increasingly intensified.

In my study, I focus on personal rituals performed in Confucius temples rather than formal ceremonies, such as the annual veneration and worship of Confucius taking place on his birthday on September 28, which so far have been mostly organized and conducted by central or local government officials.²⁸ Although such ceremonies certainly contain religious elements, they tell us more about the way in which the state mobilizes symbolic resources for its own political purposes than the less noticeable, yet arguably more resilient revival of Confucian rituals practiced by ordinary people.

Chapter 7, “The Emerging Voices of Women in the Revival of Confucianism,” examines the role of women in the current revival of Confucianism, from their participation in intellectual debates regarding Confucianism, to their promotion of Confucian thoughts in popular culture, to their participation in ancestral worship rituals.

Chapter 8, “The Contemporary Revival and Reinvention of Confucian Ritual Practices,” is based on my fieldwork from 2000 to 2010, primarily interviews and participant observations in a dozen Confucius temples throughout China. I suggest that there is a noteworthy revival as well as reinvention of religious ritual practices in Confucius temple settings, and there is also a revival of Confucian social rituals in today’s China.

Chapter 9, “The Politics of the Future of Confucianism,” touches on the possible future developments of Confucianism in Chinese society: as cultural identity, political ideology, ethical outlook, ritual practice, symbolic tool in politics, and even the foundation for the civil religion of China. Will Confucianism evolve into a full-fledged “religion” in the current social and political climate? Will there be tension between a “Confucian religion” and other religious traditions? This chapter addresses these important issues regarding the future of Confucianism.