Part II

Religion and Nationalism in Contemporary China
Religion and the Nation

Confucian and New Confucian Religious Nationalism

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Abstract

For Confucian rulers, maintenance of the unified empire they had inherited from the Qin in 206 BCE was not only seen as a political task, but also had religious ramifications. Confucian state ritual determined the position of other philosophies and religions in Chinese society, and was given a political interpretation.

This contribution shows how the republican zeal to reestablish a unified nation after the collapse of the Qing Empire was – in its radical decline of Confucianism – fundamentally religious, and how also Maoism was shaped within the traditional politico-religious paradigm. This contribution also argues that, in its dynamic relation with a growing religious adherence, contemporary CCP-supported New Confucianism has become a religious component of the CCP nation-state.

Keywords: Confucianism, New Confucianism, imperial China, Republican China, People's Republic of China

Origins of Chinese politico-religious self-identity

China’s so-called ‘period of regional development’ (1700-771 BCE) is characterized by a series of developments that would determine the country’s further history: (1) bronze started to be used in the production of agricultural tools, which made it possible to both increase the area of agricultural land that could be tilled and the efficiency with which this could be done; (2) society became hierarchically organized with the formation of different communities (Weber’s ‘Gemeinschaften’) within the layer of popular culture;

1 The following paragraphs summarize some of the elements I addressed in previous publications. See Dessein (2011; 2012; 2014).
2 This term was coined by Stover (1974, pp. 42ff).
3 The Chinese most likely learned the casting of bronze from the northern Eurasian mobile pastoralists around 1700 BCE. See Fitzgerald-Huber (1995, p. 67).
and (3) political power became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a proto-bureaucratic elite that formed a separate social and ideological community (‘Gemeinschaft’). An increased agricultural output may have made it possible to feed a larger number of people, this growing population, in its turn, necessitated a continuous expansion of the agricultural land. As directly available farmland was limited to the central plain (zhongyuan 中原) of the Yellow River (Huanghe 黃河) and its tributaries, the point necessarily came where expansion of the farmland of one of the many different feudal domains that constituted ‘China’ at that time, was only possible to the detriment of the neighboring domains. The economic and political crisis that thus ensued gave rise to the formulation of different ‘philosophies’ in the subsequent periods of ‘Spring-and-Autumn’ (Chun-qiu 春秋, 722-481) and ‘Warring States’ (Zhanguo 戰國, 481-221). These ‘philosophies’ are basically analyses of and suggestions for solving the crisis. This period that is also known as the period of the ‘One Hundred Philosophical Schools’ in Chinese intellectual history, has therefore been of major importance for Chinese state building, and for the establishment of the peculiar and intricate relationship between ‘philosophy’ and ‘politics’ in Chinese culture. The existence of a so-called Jixia Academy (jixia xuegong 稷下學宮), an assembly of political advisors founded in ca 360 BCE by Duke Huan, ruler of the feudal ‘state’ Qi 齊, points to it that this period of Chinese history was, indeed, characterized by politically inspired intellectual debate. The ‘philosophies’ that were formulated in this period are strikingly similar in their aim to reinstall an imagined ‘golden era’. Chinese ‘philosophies’ are hence not only oriented towards the Diesseits, but they are also fundamentally oriented towards the past.

The magnitude of the unification of all the different feudal states under one central leadership in 221 BCE by the ruler of the Qin state was such that he no longer referred to himself as ‘king’ (wang 王) – the name that had been used to refer to central authority in the previous period – but as Qin shi huangdi 秦始皇帝: the first ‘august emperor’ of Qin. The first

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5 See in this respect Dessein (2001).
6 Lloyd and Sivin (2000, pp. 30-35), remark that this Jixia Academy is not a meeting place for intellectuals, comparable to a contemporary research center. For the interpretation of the Jixia Academy as a center of learning: see Makeham (1994). See also Sivin (1995, chapter 40); Lee (2000, pp. 44-46).
7 Bauer (2006, p. 37). This also explains why, in China, it was not the authority of demonstration that determined the validity of a saying, but its philosophical origin.
8 See Bodde (1986, p. 53).
‘august emperor’ also manifested the major break with the past he had achieved in his choice to govern his country through applying the Legalist doctrine, the only political doctrine that did not take a eulogized historical period as example. This choice was undoubtedly also given in through the Legalist doctrine’s focus on law and punishment as policy guidelines, a characteristic that added to the practical usefulness of this doctrine to also effectively unify the country.9

The fall of the Qin Dynasty after having ruled for only fifteen years was the chance for the former feudal lords, who had been deprived of their privileges by the first emperor, to return to the political scene. Now that the short-lived Qin Dynasty had proven the unsuitability of Legalism as guideline for practical politics, this gave room for other philosophies to come to the forefront in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE). Many hypotheses have been formulated as to why it has been Confucianism – in its ‘New Text School’ interpretation – that could establish itself as the new political doctrine. One of the elements that may have been conducive to this effect may be that the founders of the Han Dynasty who were of non-noble descent saw in the Confucian focus on the concept of ‘governing through humanness’ (ren 仁) – as opposed to governing through hereditary right – an excellent instrument to legitimate their rule.

The transition from the Qin to the Han has been of a threefold political importance. Firstly, with the return to power of the former feudal lords, the hierarchical social structures that had existed in pre-imperial times were reinstalled. Secondly, after its promulgation as only orthodoxy in 136 BCE, Confucianism was crafted into these inherited hierarchical structures and a Confucian bureaucracy was installed to administer the Chinese ‘body politic’.10 In order to uphold the Confucian political, moral, and divine order, functionaries were selected on the basis of their knowledge of the Confucian

9 See Bauer (2006, p. 37). Katz (2009, p. 43), remarks that in the Qin-Han era, ‘written legal texts began to be used in place of oaths in order to command assent and obedience’, and that this era further witnesses an increasing prevalence of state-sanctioned violence.

10 Schwartz (1985, p. 377) calls Emperor Han Wudi the ‘Constantine of Confucianism’, who followed the momentous advice of the New Text School ideologue Dong Zhongshu (ca 179–ca 104 BCE) and others to establish the ‘five classics’ of Confucianism as the foundation of all official education and to proscribe all ‘unorthodox’ doctrines. Dull (1994, p. 3) remarks that the reign of Emperor Wu (140–87 BCE) of the Han Dynasty is the period in which Confucianism for the first time was recognized as the ‘ism’, ‘to the exclusion of all others, that was to be acceptable to the state and was to become the object of study for those who hoped for an official career’. See also Schmidt-Glintzer (1999, p. 18).
‘canon’ of examination materials. A third consequence was that China’s typical economic landscape of hydraulic cultivation of small plots of land – an ecotype that was fundamentally different from the economic landscape of the surrounding regions, combined with its unique political structure, fundamentally shaped Chinese ‘self-identity’.

That the Confucian literati saw themselves as the ‘natural’ inheritors of a ‘national’ and ‘divine’ historical lineage is evident from the ‘Prefaces’ to the Maoshi 毛詩 version of the Songs (Shijing 詩經). While the songs that are included in the Shijing themselves go back to the tenth to sixth centuries BCE and depict the Chinese people as born through divine intervention, and as ensuring themselves of continued divine support through ritual offerings, the extant ‘Prefaces’ to the songs are most likely written around the beginning of the Common Era and present the ‘history of China’ as one single development from the eleventh century BCE up to 599 BCE. This presentation importantly implies that the secular realm, which is referred to as ‘All-under-Heaven’ (tianxia 天下), is connected to the spiritual realm.

The connection between the secular and the spiritual realm is also evident in the Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu fanlu), the major work of the Han-Dynasty Confucian scholar and ideologue Dong Zhongshu 董仲書 (ca 179-ca 104 BCE). Through developing analogies between heaven – the collective of deceased ancestors, earth, and man, this work that is conceived as a commentary on the Confucian Classic Chunqiu (Spring and Autumn Annals), presents ‘All-under-Heaven’ as a holistic ‘organism’ in which every part is interrelated with every other part. It is the task of Confucian rule to preserve harmony (hexie 和諧) – that is, to uphold the existing social order – in this organism. As Dong Zhongshu explains:

When the ancients invented writing, they drew three [horizontal] lines which they connected through the centre [by a vertical stroke], and then

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12 See Wolf (1966, pp. 25-30).
13 Schwartz (1985, p. 30) remarks that the God (dì 帝) to which the first stanza of the ode Sheng min refers is ‘the nonhuman high god who engendered the dynasty’.
14 Yu (2005, p. 34) remarks that the politico-religious narrative of Confucianism, in fact, builds on the system that was developed already in the Shang Dynasty (traditionally 1766-1122 BCE), when ancestors were transformed from kin to symbols of divine power.
15 Schwartz (1985, p. 364) has characterized this ‘cosmological Confucianism’ as a kind of ‘phenomenalist philosophy’. ‘Phenomenalism’ is hereby understood as a belief that governmental and social irregularities can lead to vast dislocations in nature.
called this wang (ruler/king). These three lines represent heaven, earth, and man; the connecting of them through the centre represents the way (dao 道) of [the ruler]. Who, if not a wang, could take the central position between heaven, earth, and man, so as to connect and council them? Therefore, a wang models himself on heaven. [...] He models himself on its dao and thereby brings his administration into operation. He models himself on its will and, with it, attaches himself to humaneness (ren 仁).16

An important implication of the idea that the ruler mirrors his moral behavior on heaven and can therefore be a model to emulate in his own right is that a ‘universalizing’ potential was attributed to Confucianism, that is, it was thought that ‘barbarians’ could become part of the Confucian ‘All-under-Heaven’ through education and emulation.17

**Religion and Confucian nationalism**

According to Pierre Bourdieu, when political or ecclesiastical elites elevate one religious system over another, the displaced beliefs and practices become stigmatized as ‘magic’, ‘sorcery’, and ‘superstition’, and are associated with the vulgarity of the common people. When, in this way, a body of knowledge is centralized and systematized by a class of specialists, this creates a field of power between those who hold religious authority and those who do not.18 This is precisely what happened with the sole recognition of New Text School Confucianism as official orthodoxy in the Han Dynasty. Although Confucianism may not be a ‘full-fledged religion’, the religious ramifications of the Confucian politico-religious construct described above transformed Confucianism – at least for the elite – into a ‘civil religion’ with its proper symbols, rules of behavior, and ritual prescripts. These rituals further had the possibility to bestow on the commoners ‘a sense of belonging

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16 Dong (1988, p. 794b). This interpretation of the role of politics can also be read in Xu Shen’s (ca 58-ca 147) Shuo wen jie zi (Explanation of Single Graphs and Analysis of Compound Graphs), the oldest extant etymological dictionary of the Chinese language (Xu, [1981] 1988, p. 7b). The intricate connection between the realm of secular governance and the realm of the divine is also reflected in the references to the Shijing (Songs) in the Confucian Lunyu (Analects). For the significance of the fact that the Lunyu refers to the Shijing: see Shryock (1966, p. 4).

17 See Levenson (1964), and Dessein (2016). Note that such a ‘model role’ is also present in the way the People’s Republic of China presented itself as the leader of the Communist World.

to an “imagined community” of supremely civilized subjects of the realm’. In this light, Clifford Geertz’s statement that religion is ‘a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic’, gains an extra meaning when religion and politics form an interconnected whole. In Confucian China, where religious symbols and rituals necessarily also had a political meaning, upholding harmony in ‘All-under-Heaven’ was as much a divine as a ‘national’ political mission.

That Confucianism became the only sanctioned doctrine does not mean that ‘China’ became philosophically or religiously homogenous. Analyzing the religious world in market terms, Yang Fenggang claimed that religious regulation leads to the development of a tripartite religious market: a ‘red’ market of officially recognized religions, a black market of forbidden religious organizations, and a grey market of those religions that are not forbidden but are not orthodox either. Applying this model to imperial China, the practical outcome of the recognition of Confucianism as only orthodoxy to the exclusion of all other ideologies, was that Daoism, Buddhism, and popular religions were displaced to the ‘grey zone’ of the religious market – in imperial China, there was no systematic prohibition of religious cults. Hubert Seiwert has described this situation as follows:

As soon as we leave the domain of the ideological homogenous elite culture, it becomes clear that the cognitive and normative orientations of the elite claimed to possess universal value, but did actually not do so. Chinese history (not only the pre-modern one) is full of examples of attempts to control society ideologically, to eliminate ‘false’ (heterodox) doctrines and writings, and to render the correct interpretation of the world universal validity.

19 Nylan, ([2008] 2009, p. 61). Yu (2005, p. 51) states that: ‘Just as the state’s recognition of Confucius and its continual process of canonizing his descendants were indicative of its own moral discernment and enlightenment, so the designated descendant’s fulfilment of their ritual duties on behalf of the state betokened their acknowledgement of the regime’s legitimacy’. For the term ‘imagined community’: see Anderson (1991). On the religion sphere being a kind of imagined community as much as the nation is: see Chapter 4.
20 Geertz (1966, p. 4). Note that this phenomenon is also true for Marxism-Leninism in the People’s Republic of China.
A practical outcome of the concentration of politico-religious power in the hands of the Confucian elite, the displacement of non-Confucian faiths to the grey market, and the absence of an institutionalized system of political opposition was that political opposition – by definition a threat to the preservation of a Confucian harmonious ‘All-under-Heaven’– often canalized itself in religiously inspired movements. It can therefore be called a Confucian paradox that it is precisely because Buddhism, Daoism, and popular religions had been displaced to the grey zone of the religious market that they had become more difficult to control.\(^\text{23}\) It was, on the other hand, also their position in the volatile zone of the grey market that, to the degree that they were (thought to be) favorable for political unity and could thus serve a nationalist aim, religion and religious cults were (1) appealed on by the political elite, and (2) could and were taken up by the Confucian elite themselves.\(^\text{24}\) Indeed, the elevation of Confucianism to the status of ‘civil religion’ did not even mean that the elite became homogeneously Confucian. The division of the spiritual world in Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and popular religion and local cults remained far more complex than the simple socioeconomic default lines of elite vs. popular socioeconomic groups.\(^\text{25}\) Non-Confucian concepts may, in themselves, not have been conducive to maintain social harmony, they could – and were – integrated in elite philosophy in so far as they did not infringe on or threaten the maintenance of harmony in ‘All-under-Heaven’. Hubert Seiwert has, in this respect, differentiated ‘orthodoxy’ from ‘orthopraxy’:

The orthodoxy, i.e., elements of the world view that could bring social cohesion, did not belong to one of these three traditions (i.e., Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) exclusively, but were shared by all – in any case, in so far as they were integrated in elite culture. [...] What was expected of the members of the elite culture was not necessarily that they confessed to Confucianism, but rather that they confessed to the

\(^{23}\) See Weggel (1980, pp. 127-128). This is reflected in the traditional Chinese concept of law. Chinese law is occupied with infringements on morality and criminal cases because these are seen as infringements against the Confucian cosmological harmony. See Bodde and Morris (1967, p. 4).

\(^{24}\) Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 22) remark that the function of the lay followers of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism was to ‘transmit their tradition of practice and to serve the entire society’.

\(^{25}\) See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 23). Also see Chapter 1.
basic cognitive and normative orientations of civil religion. Here we touch upon the meaning of orthopraxy [...] 26

In a situation in which the dividing lines between the red and the grey religious market were the product of a continued negotiation, non-Confucian belief systems had to accept varying degrees of political restrictions. 27

The nineteenth century: Redefining Confucianism as ‘religion’

The Manchu Qing Dynasty was characterized by the flourishing of a variety of – especially non-Chinese – religions. The newly conquered region of Xinjiang was dominantly Muslim, Tibet and Mongolia were dominantly Vajrayana Buddhist, and in the Eastern and Central parts of China, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism were proliferating. These religions, along with traditional Daoism, sinicized Buddhism, and local cults, made Qing China a multireligious place. 28 To administer this diversified religious empire, the Qing court had implemented a policy of religious pluralism, whereby the government, according to tradition, maintained the right to judge which religions were orthodox and which were not.

The incursions of European forces in China that started in the nineteenth century not only brought about economic and political consequences, but they also had a major effect on the way the spiritual world was perceived and organized. To qualify this change, it is necessary to first devote some space to the issue of ‘religion’ understood as zongjiào 宗教, a term that, as many ‘modern’ terms, was introduced in nineteenth-century China through Japan. 29 Typical for the age of modernization in which not only political authorities, but also scholars and believers develop to be major social forces

27 In theory, the emperor had absolute religious authority. He had the right to intervene in religious matters as he saw fit. In this, he could decide on the basis of his own judgment. See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, pp. 27-28).
29 Coining the term ‘zongjiào’ was, in Japan (where the term is pronounced shūkyō), related to the adoption of religious freedom in its 1889 constitution. In this way, Shintō as national cult was distinguished from ‘religions’ that were, under Western influence, allowed to develop. While all Japanese citizens had to participate in Shintō, participation in ‘religion’ was an individual choice. As outlined by Hardacre (1989), religions were encouraged to modernize by adopting a nationalist and rational discourse. See also Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 210); Brook (2009, pp. 38-39).
in the process of defining religion, the Western presence in China also meant that the traditional Chinese spiritual realm started to be redefined in terms of the Western concept of ‘religion’ (zongjiao) – a term that was not surprisingly first used in its reference to European Christianity.\(^{30}\) As a logical consequence, the traditional division between the Confucian ‘civil religion’ and the large grey zone of all other ideologies and faiths that had prevailed in imperial history, was interchanged for a new ‘European’ division between ‘orthodox religion’ (Christianity) and ‘superstition’ (mixin 迷信). That is to say that the new category zongjiao also displaced Confucianism to the grey zone of the religious market,\(^{31}\) thus showing, as expressed by Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank “the fluidity and contextuality of the boundary between superstition and religion.”\(^{32}\) This displacement was also the result of the following: the traditional interpretation of Confucian rule, *i.e.*, the conviction that there is an intricate connection between the spiritual and the political world, necessarily implies that any change in the political structure of China has to lead to a change in its religious make-up. That is to say, when the nineteenth and early twentieth-century intellectuals strove to create a Chinese nation-state after Western model, this could not but have its ramifications for the position of Confucianism – the backbone of traditional elite culture.\(^{33}\) It may for the great majority of these intellectuals have proven to be almost impossible to settle with a displaced Confucianism – an intellectual struggle for modernity set in.

This observation puts into perspective the general assumption that in its confrontation with European dominance, the Chinese elite increasingly saw the creation of a Chinese nation-state (*guojia* 國家) after Western model as the *only* possible political alternative for China to survive.\(^{34}\) A more qualified statement would indeed be that while some of the intellectuals of the final decades of the empire wanted to do away with Confucianism once and for all – it may be reminded here that Sun Yatsen (孫逸仙, 1866-1925) and Jiang Jieshi (蔣介石, or Chiang Kaishek, 1887-1975) were Christian

\(^{30}\) See Yang (2012, p. 27).

\(^{31}\) See Duara (1991, p. 76).

\(^{32}\) Ashiwa and Wank (2009, p. 9).

\(^{33}\) See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 43).

\(^{34}\) This nineteenth-century Chinese nationalism can be defined as ‘reactive nationalism’, *i.e.* nationalism, the coming to consciousness, of a group that suffered mistreatment, discrimination, and abuse at the hands of another group. Such a ‘reactive nationalism’ is different from ‘organic nationalism’ that arises naturally as a result of time, inbreeding, and geographic isolation, and is still different from ‘constructed (or artificial) nationalism’ that is a deliberate and conscious creation by the state from above, via the systematic mass dissemination and inculcation of a nationalist ideology. See Chang (2001, p. 24).
converts\textsuperscript{35} – the political visions of what may be the majority of them reveal a lingering belief in the values of (a redefined) Confucianism. As Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer observed:

China wanted to completely throw away its past, a young generation wanted to open a new page in history, and yet, getting free from the past was not successful, and this was seen as the core problem of China by many.\textsuperscript{36}

When scholars such as Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857) claimed that there was no Western knowledge worth to be studied except for military technology and knowledge of weaponry, and that, therefore, it would be sufficient for China to master this military knowledge in order to be able to defend itself against the West, this reveals a maintained conviction in the value of Confucianism in its connection to national unity.\textsuperscript{37} This conviction was also visible in the ‘Self Strengthening Movement’ (\textit{ziqiang yundong} 自強運動) of the 1860s – an attempt to make China materially so strong that it would be better able to defend itself against the West, as well as in the works of Wang Tao 王韬 (1828-1897). Contrary to Wei Yuan, Wang Tao had travelled to Europe and had discerned in Europe a peculiar cultural tradition. He therefore claimed that it was necessary to study European culture in order to become acquainted with the basis of its superior technology. Knowledge and the use of Western technology would, in practice, lead to it that Chinese (Confucian) culture as ‘essence’ (\textit{ti} 體) would embrace Western technology as ‘function’ (\textit{yong} 用).\textsuperscript{38} The final outcome of this would be that the different national histories would fuse into an era of universal peace in which the world would become one ‘great unity’ (\textit{datong} 大同). The choice of the term \textit{datong}, a term borrowed from the seventh chapter \textit{Liyun} 禮運 of the Han Dynasty Confucian work \textit{Liji} 禮記, echoes the age-old Confucian claim

\textsuperscript{35} Sun Yatsen in this respect claimed that it was due to Christianity that America was more prosperous, stronger and had a higher civilization than China had. It would therefore be Christianity that could give China back its dignity. See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 69).

\textsuperscript{36} Schmidt-Glintzer (2009, p. 33). According to Metzger (2012, p. 228), ‘From this normative standpoint, modern Chinese history essentially is the story of a troubled progression toward increasing discontinuity with the Chinese tradition and increasing convergence with Western modernity’.

\textsuperscript{37} Wei (1852).

\textsuperscript{38} See Wang (2001, pp. 41-42). For an evaluation of the Fairbankian interpretation of China’s modernization process from first understanding only the superiority of Western weapons, then grasping that of Western institutions, and finally appreciating Western values: see Metzger (2012, p. 238).
that in this unified world, the right to rule ‘All-under-Heaven’ would remain a Confucian prerogative.

A lingering faith in the value of Confucianism as the ‘essence’ of the Chinese tradition was most obvious in the writings of the so-called ‘Radical Confucians’. For the ‘Radical Confucians’, it was ‘State Confucianism’ (guoxue 国学) that was to be blamed for the decline of the Chinese empire. The ‘State Confucians’ had been in power ever since the Han Dynasty and the main aim of their policies had been to legitimize and to uphold political power in the hands of the ruling elite. This had resulted in authoritarianism and a centralization of imperial power. ‘State Confucianism’ therefore had to be replaced by ‘Radical Confucianism’ (junxue 君學), a moral teaching that is critical for all political and social injustice and is aimed at the well-being of the Chinese people.39 An analysis of the publications of the ‘Radical Confucians’ in the journals Journal of National Essence (‘Guocui xuebao’ 國粹學報, published between 1905 and 1911) and People’s Tribune (‘Minbao’ 民報, published between 1905 and 1910) shows that they saw the period of China’s history before the unification under the first empire as the ‘golden age’ of Chinese history, characterized by philosophical debate free from the direct control of the government – we can, again, refer to the so-called Jixia Academy here, and in which knowledge was disseminated among all men of letters. Since the unification of the empire under the Qin Dynasty and the rise of Confucianism to the status of state orthodoxy in the Han Dynasty, China had glided into the ‘dark ages’. The ‘Radical Confucians’ claimed that a Renaissance of China – in this explicitly referring to European history – did not mean that one had to do away with the Confucian tradition, but, on the contrary, that such a Renaissance was only possible through returning to the ‘essence’ of Confucianism as formulated in the ‘Spring-and-Autumn’ period.40 Radical Confucians thus tried to establish a genealogy of the Chinese nation that goes back to the Yellow Emperor.41 This illustrates what was remarked by Martin Kern: ‘Through remembrance, history turns into myth’, whereby ‘it does not become unreal but, on the contrary, and only then, reality in the sense of a continual normative and formative force’.42 In their endeavour to return to the essence of Chinese culture, the ‘Radical

39 As remarked by Kuehner (2015, p. 25), in ancient usage, the term ‘guoxue’ referred to an institution, not to a field of learning. In its early twentieth-century usage, the term was reintroduced from Japan where it, as kokugaku, was used to denote those nineteenth-century Japanese scholars who rejected all foreign intellectual influence, specifically Chinese Neo-Confucianism.
40 See Hon (2014, p. 31); Zarrow (2007, pp. 23f).
41 See Kuehner (2015, p. 31).
Confucians’ were also profoundly anticlerical – a position that can be interpreted as a reaction towards Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy.43

A still very different reaction to the degrading of Confucianism as a result of the new religious paradigm can be seen in the figure of Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927). He advocated to redefine Confucianism within the new ‘religious’ paradigm, that is as a religion (zongjiao) in its own right. In order to transform Confucianism into a ‘national religion’ (guojiao 鄉教) – and the only possible one for that matter, he proposed to ban all religious institutions and transform the Confucian temples that had begun to be confiscated starting in 1901 into schools for instruction in what he called Kongjiao 孔教, the Confucian religion.44 A ‘modernized’ Confucianism would thus have to become the Chinese ‘orthodox religion’, in the same way as an ‘orthodox’ Christianity was perceived as ‘orthodox religion’ in many modern nineteenth century European countries.45 Reshaping Confucianism as a national religion may have meant that elements of local cults that had traditionally been integrated in ‘State Confucianism’ would now have to be avoided, thus completely severing local cults from the realm of official ‘religion’,46 it, on the other hand, would also mean that Confucianism would no longer be a dividing factor between the elite and the common people, but that Confucius would become a symbol for all and to be honoured by all in the nation-state – a guojiao indeed.47 The parliamentarians of the early Republic saw the proposal to elevate Confucianism to ‘national religion’ as against the freedom of religion and it was voted down in 1913 and again in 1916.48 With Confucianism dismissed as vehicle to rally the collective feelings of all people, Sun Yatsen brought in the Kuomintang (KMT, the Nationalist Party) and the concept ‘party state’ (dangguo 黨國).

44 See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, pp. 45-47); Ashiwa and Wank (2009, p. 7 and p. 9).
45 This shows that Kang Youwei was not so much driven by ‘intellectual rationality’ as by an inspiration to modernize tradition. See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 52). In his zeal for a spiritual Confucian renewal and unification of the Chinese race and nation along with a social reform, Kang Youwei and his disciples were followed by the Guangxu Emperor. See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 207).
47 See Kuo (2008, p. 67).
48 See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 56). This may partly be explained by the fact that among the 274 members elected (indirectly, through colleges of local elites) to the first national parliament between December 1912 and January 1913, sixty were Christians, a proportion that was totally out of measure when we consider that Christians accounted for less than 1 percent of the population. See Goossaert and Palmer (2001, p. 70). On the concept of ‘modern’ separation of state from religion: see Ashiwa and Wank (2009, p. 2).
nationalist feelings for the state were identified with the KMT that came to be regarded as the incarnation of the new state.\textsuperscript{49} According to Sun Yatsen, it was necessary to first deconstruct the Chinese ‘cultural state’ in order to create the Chinese ‘nation-state’. In his inaugural speech on the first congress of the KMT in January 1912, he therefore declared that he no longer wanted to ‘govern’ the state through the Party (\textit{yidang zhiguo} 以黨治國), but to ‘establish’ it through the Party (\textit{yidang jianguo} 以黨建國).\textsuperscript{50} The only way for the citizens to respond to the nationalist appeal and to contribute to the ‘establishment of the state’ was hence to become member of the Party – much in the same way as they, in imperial times, had to become part of the Confucian bureaucracy.

Although, in a context in which traditional religions, including Confucianism, had been displaced, the focus on nation-building through the KMT may have made Chinese nationalism an overall non-religious phenomenon,\textsuperscript{51} the identification of the KMT with the nation-state that was to be created through the Party made both the KMT as instrument and the modern nation-state as final political aim ‘sacred’ institutions.\textsuperscript{52}

**Maoist China and Confucianized communist nationalism**

The Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s and the way the KMT government reacted to this event raised support among different social groups for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), established in Shanghai in 1921. In his article ‘On the people’s democratic dictatorship’, published in June 1949, a few months before he proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China from Tiananmen – the place also Chinese emperors had used to announce major political decisions, Mao Zedong 毛澤東 alluded to the leading role of the CCP in its historical mission of modernizing the Chinese peasants and workers in the following words:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[49] See Harrison (2001, pp. 190-193). This move would also prove important for presenting the Chinese Communist Party as incarnation of the unified (\textit{datong}) nation-state. See further.
  \item[50] See Fitzgerald (1996, p. 185).
  \item[51] See Cohen (2005).
  \item[52] Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 175) remark that Chiang Kai-shek appealed on the citizens with such watchwords as ‘orderliness, cleanliness, simplicity, frugality, promptness, precision, harmony, and dignity – ideals encapsulated in the four traditional virtues of propriety, rectitude, honesty, and sensitivity to shame – drawn from Confucian tradition but given a modern meaning within the framework of loyalty to the state’.
\end{itemize}
Under the leadership of the working class and the Communist Party, from an agricultural into an industrial country, and from a new-democratic into a socialist and communist society, abolish classes and realize the Great Harmony [大同].

This statement can be seen as a development of an earlier statement Kang Youwei had made in his *History of Chinese Philosophy* (Zhongguo Zhexue Shi 中國哲學史):

In the world of the 'great unity' (*datong* 大同), there will be no difference between classes and races. There will be no inferior people nor religious leaders. Everyone will be equal and ‘All-under-Heaven’ will enjoy equal rights.

While we may expect that Kang Youwei must have exempted Confucianism, the doctrine he wanted to have recognized as ‘state religion’ (*guojiao*), from the religions referred to in this statement, for Mao Zedong and the CCP, loyal to the Marxist militant atheist interpretation of ‘religion’ as ‘opium for the people’, also Confucianism had to be discarded as ‘superstition’. Hence the campaign to ‘smash the four olds’ (*po sijiu* 破四舊). However, when Mao Zedong stated that: ‘[T]here are some things which need not have any national style, such as trains, airplanes and big guns. Politics and art should have a national style’, this shows that also he was not free from the idea that the Chinese political tradition had its particular value and should

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54 Kang (2002, p. 716). Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 170) note that also Hong Xiuquan had promised to, through the Taiping rebellious movement, create a proto-communist peaceful society on earth. Apocalyptic revolution, Christian influence, and communist utopianism, so they claim (2011, p. 39) are the three elements that, throughout the next century, never cease to interact. For the CCP’s explicit claim of filiation to the Taiping movement: see Cohen (1997, pp. 292-293).
55 The ‘four olds’ are ideas, culture, customs, and habits. Yang (2012, p. 46) defines ‘militant atheism’ as a type of atheism that ‘treats religion as the dangerous opium and narcotic of the people, a wrong political ideology serving the interests of the exploiting classes and the antirevolutionary elements’, whereby ‘political forces are necessary to control and eliminate religion’.
56 Quoted through Schram (2002, p. 437), who interprets this saying of Mao’s as an expression of the conviction that ‘a revolutionary transformation guided by Marxist theory [...] did not mean turning the country into a carbon copy of the Soviet Union’, and of Mao’s conviction that ‘the assimilation of the past provides not only raw material but also a “method” for elaborating a correct line today’. 
continue to exert its influence on contemporary politics. Very different from the ‘elite orthopraxy’ that had characterized the Confucian society, but in the same way as Kang Youwei’s concept of a Confucian guojiao and Sun Yatsen’s KMT had contained the possibility to rally all people for a ‘national’ cause, also the organization of the Communist state had the potential and possibilities to penetrate all layers of society.

In the same way as the Confucian emperors had been conceived to be models for ‘All-under-Heaven’ through their moral superiority, the adoption of Marxism-Leninism gave China the possibility to reshape itself as a model for other developing and underdeveloped countries in a communist ‘All-under-Heaven’. Zhou Enlai’s (1898-1976) claim that ‘socialist patriotism is not a narrow nationalism, but a patriotism aimed to strengthen national pride under the guidance of internationalism’, is also reminiscent of the distinction Liang Qichao (梁启超) made between ‘small nationalism’ (xiao minzu zhuyi 小民族主義) and ‘great nationalism’ (da minzu zhuyi 大民族主義): while ‘small nationalism’ was, according to Liang Qichao, the feeling of the Han for the other ethnic groups within the borders of the former Qing empire (guonei 国内), ‘great nationalism’ was the sentiment of all people towards all people beyond the borders of the former Qing empire (guowai 国外). This homeland concept was visible in the CCP policies that were formulated during the 1930s, when it was attempted to gain the support of all Chinese citizens through deemphasizing ethnic difference. Such policies were implemented during the famous Long March (Chang zheng 長征) of 1934-1936.

Mao Zedong’s veiled admiration for Confucian political concepts notwithstanding, the official religious policy meant that, in contradistinction to the Republican period in which religions were displaced to the grey zone of the religious market, the CCP’s militant atheism meant that religion was

57 For Mao’s indebtedness to Confucian thinking, Guo Moruo’s (1892-1978) Makesijin wenmiao 马克思進文廟 (Marx Visits a Confucian Temple), a text written in 1925, is revealing. In this text, Guo Moruo, a friend of Mao Zedong, places the following statement in the mouth of Confucius in response to Marx’s description of the ideal Communist society: “Yes, truly (...) your ideal society and my world of ‘great unity’ are completely the same without us having deliberated over it. Let me cite a part of an old text of mine for you!”, after which Confucius starts to recite the part of the Liji on datong. (Guo in Liu 1953). See also Dessein (2017).

58 For the rivalry between the PRC and the Soviet Union over leadership in the communist world: see Näth (1975, pp. 259-268, p. 284, and p. 307); Chen (2005, p. 43).

59 Quoted through Chen (2005, p. 41).

60 Liang ([1903] 1983, p. 75). Zarrow (2004, p. 47) suggests that Liang’s ‘deepest inspiration […] came from what we can loosely call the Confucian tradition’. Also see Chapter 3.

further degraded to the black zone of the religious sphere, i.e., the zone of forbidden religious organizations that work in the underground and arises to cater to religious needs that cannot be expressed in the open market.\textsuperscript{62} A suppression of religion does not, however, eradicate religious feelings. Rather, other forms of religiosity will develop. As most people fear the consequences of acting in the black market, they will redirect their religious needs in innovative ways, thus negotiating, as it were, a new grey market with the authorities. In Maoist China, this possibility was facilitated through the integration of secularized medicine, martial arts, and body cultivation techniques placed under the new category of \textit{qigong} 赤功 into the new state.\textsuperscript{63} The grey religious market that was thus created would flourish in an innovative way during the period of the Great Leap Forward (\textit{Da yue jin} 大躍進, 1958-1960).

Although Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Daoism had been protected under the principle of religious freedom in the beginning years of the PRC and the leaders of these five recognized religions were even given political acknowledgment – they had to help with the construction of the new state\textsuperscript{64} – since 1953 and especially with the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957) and the Great Leap Forward, religious freedom became severely restricted and religious festivities, traditional clothing, etc. were forbidden because they would have obstructed economic production.\textsuperscript{65} As

\textsuperscript{62} The CCP’s antireligious stance was also inspired by the fact that many redemptive societies had sided with the Guomindang during the civil war because of their fear for atheist communism. See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 141). These societies were intellectually often linked to the ‘national essence’ (\textit{guocui} 國粹) movement. See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 108).

\textsuperscript{63} The Nationalist project of the martial arts that were claimed to be able to restore the original purity of the ‘national essence’ was thus continued in the PRC. Also \textit{qigong} and traditional Chinese medicine that were made ‘scientific’ (\textit{kexuehua} 科學化) in the Nationalist project were continued. See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, pp. 92, 110, 116-117). Also ordinary superstition, which was not to be automatically confused with organized counterrevolutionary activity was allowed. See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 149).

\textsuperscript{64} ‘As long as a part of mankind is technologically backward’, so was stated in a \textit{Renmin ribao} editorial of 1950, ‘any idea about taking coercive action is useless and positively harmful. This is the reason why we advocate protecting freedom of religious belief, just as we advocate protecting freedom to reject religious belief’. Quoted through Welch (1972, p. 4). While the CCP called for the systematic confiscation of Han temples and denied political rights to their priests and ‘superstitious’ specialists, the temples, monasteries, and mosques of the minorities were to be protected, and their leaders could be appointed to political positions. See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 144). Zhang Chengzhi 張承志 (b. 1948), a Chinese Muslim novelist and essayist, is even credited with having coined the term ‘red guards’ (\textit{hong weibing} 紅衛兵). See Fisac (2003, p. 163).

\textsuperscript{65} See MacInnis (1972). Also see Chapter 1.
in the Great Leap Forward movement, rural China had been reorganized in communities (Weber’s *Gemeinschaften*) that resemble traditional kinship groups, the disastrous outcome of this economic experience paradoxically strengthened the old community loyalties. The main difference with the imperial period in this was that the leaders of the new communities in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward were no longer lineage elders, but rural CCP cadres. Many people reverted to such old pre-revolutionary religious activities as worshipping deities, divination, or fortune-telling, and violence between enemy lineages and communities was often accompanied by religious rituals that served to express kinship and community solidarity.\(^{66}\) Communist policies that had aimed at building a nation-state in which loyalty would be to the nation-state through establishing CCP cells as substitute for the local temples that had been the traditional places of symbolic power where local unities and disunities had been settled, had clearly failed.\(^{67}\)

It is for the development of religious nationalism in communist China important to note that communism shares three important features with religions: (1) a certain conviction about life and the world, (2) a set of rituals that give expression to this conviction, and (3) a peculiar social organization of a moral community of adepts and practitioners. The only characteristic that communism does not share with religions is that it does not believe in the supernatural. This ‘supernatural’ aspect was, however, substituted with the State, the CCP, and Mao Zedong as divine trinity.\(^{68}\) Communism further shares characteristics (1) and (2), and to a certain extent also (3) with Confucianism.\(^{69}\) It is therefore fairly easy to redirect one’s religious feelings from religion (or Confucianism) towards the ‘communist utopia’. This became obvious in the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). This period in which religion was seen as one of the ‘four olds’ (*si jiu 四舊*) that had to be eradicated, was simultaneously, as labelled by Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, the ‘apotheosis’ of political sacralisation.\(^{70}\)

\(^{66}\) See Perry (2001, pp. 288–294). As remarked by Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 225), ‘Family practices and values can be considered the sanctuary of traditional religion, especially in times of repression and change’.

\(^{67}\) See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 55).

\(^{68}\) See Yang (2012, pp. 36–37) who therefore calls communism a ‘pseudo-religion’.

\(^{69}\) Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 167). We can also refer here to the famous poster *Mao Zhuxi qu Anyuan* (President Mao goes to Anyuan), first published in 1968 and perhaps the most important painting of the Cultural Revolution period, on which Mao Zedong is portrayed in classical attire. Also see note #55.
In the same way as religion had, in traditional China, always been interpreted as conducive to maintaining the holistic world, also devotion to the communist ideal was to serve the sacred nation – and, for that matter, Mao as incarnation of the Party and thus of the nation-state.\(^2\) As much as the Cultural Revolution was the denouncement of tradition and of Confucianism it is generally claimed to be, it is, I would therefore claim, paradoxically also fundamentally Confucian in its aspect of, after the chaos caused by the Great Leap Forward, projecting the Party and Mao Zedong – the ‘Great Saviour of the People’ \((\text{renmin de dajuixing 人民的大救星})\) – as moral examples and only guarantee to overcome the chaos. The CCP directed Mao cult that supplied to the religious market, functioned in the same way as Confucian rituals had done in the veneration of the emperor and ‘All-under-Heaven’.\(^2\) The Red Book \((\text{Mao zhuxiyulu 毛主席語錄})\) became the sacred canon of this ‘political religion’ and statues of the ‘Red Sun’ \((\text{hong taiyang 紅太陽})\) of Chinese communism were erected and venerated.\(^3\) For the hundreds of millions of sincere worshippers engaging in Mao worship, the feelings they experienced were almost religious.\(^4\)

Communist self-cultivation was advocated by Liu Shaoqi in his essay \textit{On Self-cultivation of the Members of the CCP} \((\text{Lun gongchandangyuande xiuyang 論共產黨員的修養})\). This essay that, as stated by Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer is ‘riddled with quotes from Confucius’s \textit{Analects} and the \textit{Great Learning} and from neo-Confucian philosophers’ explains how ‘self-cultivation was necessary for keeping one’s faults and ideals before one’s consciousness. [...] the Communist needed to conduct a class struggle within his own mind [...] the Party member was to become aware of and eradicate every trace of selfishness in his mind; otherwise, it would gradually corrupt his mind and body, and lead him to lose sight of objective reality and of his true self’.\(^5\) In the ‘political religiosity’ of the Cultural Revolution era, communist study and ritual replaced Neo-Confucian self-cultivation,

\(^2\) See Duara (2008, p. 64). According to Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 189), another explanation for the dedication with which the Chinese engaged in the Mao cult is that it was simply too dangerous to be suspected of not engaging in the cult. Zealous enthusiasm was often the only way to demonstrate sincerity and avoid being struggled against.

\(^3\) See Aijmer (1996, p. 227).


and the CCP and Mao Zedong as incarnations of the moral norm had to bind the people – and thus the nation – together.\textsuperscript{76}

**The post-Mao era: Communist new Confucian nationalism**

The realities of Maoist China that became increasingly visible after the death of the ‘Great Saviour of the People’ on 9 September 1976 had major ramifications for the Party’s legitimation. The patronage and corruption that raged in the Party stood in stark contrast with the role of ‘moral example’ Mao Zedong had attributed to himself and to the Party. Deng Xiaoping’s policies that focused on market principles also undermined the communist adagio of the Party as consumerism provided the Chinese citizens with a new ideal: ‘becoming rich’ was the new maxim. The identification of the Party with the Chinese nation-state further meant that decline of the Party’s credibility contained a threat for the possibility of the nation-state to rally the commitment of the Chinese citizens.

The decline of moral authority of the Party at first instance led to a spiritual void.\textsuperscript{77} It is in this void that the post-Mao era has witnessed a gradual growth of religious adherence, including a reemergence of qigong.\textsuperscript{78} It is therefore important to note that a consumerist modernity as introduced by Deng Xiaoping also has important ramifications for the ‘religious market’.\textsuperscript{79} It is characteristic for consumerist modernity that all social relations – including religious and ideological ones – are patterned after the ‘consumerist syndrome’.\textsuperscript{80} Free choice on the commodities’ market encroaches on religion in the sense that religion is transformed to be a commodity in its own right. This means that (1) the religious customer seeks self-realization (no longer support for the state) in religion, and (2) religions become flexible in their search for the approval of the religious customer.\textsuperscript{81} Andrew Dawson in this respect speaks of ‘prosumption’, a

\textsuperscript{76} See Thornton (2007). Remark that not only Confucianism knows the practice of self-cultivation, but that Buddhism and Daoism also do. In practice, the Cultural Revolution antagonized different sub-groups of Chinese society. However, the class struggle had to, ultimately, ‘make the people one’.

\textsuperscript{77} See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 191).

\textsuperscript{78} For an evaluation of the nature of this reemergence: see Otehode (2009, pp. 250-261).

\textsuperscript{79} Simmel (2004), stated that consumerism is a worthy replacement for religion, because, like religion, it enacts a dream world with material objects.

\textsuperscript{80} See Bauman (2005, p. 84); Speck (2013, p. 28).

\textsuperscript{81} See Speck (2013, p. 30).
neoliberal process ‘to collapse the acts of production and consumption into a singular process through which commodity value is both extracted and generated at one and the same time’. In contradistinction to traditional religious life that focuses on the weakness of human beings as a species, in the individualized consumerist religious market, religion focuses on the weakness of one individual as against the omnipotent species of human beings. This new function of religion explains why, on a ‘religious market’ that caters to the wishes of the consumerist religious customer who has become convinced that there is nothing that cannot be purchased, setbacks in life – the encounter with the insufficiency of human life and the impossibility of state policies and science to overcome these setbacks – may lead to religious fundamentalism – a form of religious individuality that allows no relativism. Religion thus becomes a means with which the effect of state policies and of science can be criticized from an individual standpoint. This attitude, it has been claimed, is especially true for those who are more vulnerable to the shortages of life – in China these typically are ethnic minorities and the workers and farmers who were the first advocates of the CCP but have seen their economic and social position deteriorating in the Deng Xiaoping era – that is, those left behind in the scramble for the entry tickets to the consumers’ party. With religious affinity no longer directed towards upholding the state, or, as Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer phrased it, with a “Middle Kingdom” that has lost its Middle, the PRC government has been in search of something to give the Chinese ‘All-under-Heaven’ a spiritual center again.

In a politico-cultural context in which religion has traditionally been seen as a potential threat for the ruling (Confucian/communist) class, the contemporary steep increase of religious adherence and the potential for growing religious fundamentalism make a resort to religion as ideological alternative for communism impossible. This explains why the government is now increasingly promoting age-old Confucianism – a doctrine that is

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82 Dawson (2013, p. 137). See also Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody (2008). Dawson (2013, pp. 137-138) remarks: ‘Such is the case because the notion of the prosumer is paradigmatically late modern in that its merger of producer and consumer plays to the contemporary valorization of the individual as the central axis around which all else is held to revolve’.

83 See Bauman (2005, p. 183); Speck (2013, pp. 31-31); Gaenssbauer (2015, p. 46); Meng (2012, p. 33).

84 See Bauman (2005, p. 182).

85 See Beck (2010).


87 Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 3).
not categorized as ‘religion’ in the so-called ‘Document 19’ of 1982 that supplements the 1982 Constitution – as ideological alternative. In its renewed function as instrument to uphold national unity under CCP rule, Confucianism (now called ‘New Confucianism’ (dangdai xin ruxue 當代新儒學) has thus been reshaped to function as a doctrinal backbone to ‘communist New Confucian Nationalism’. On the religious market, Confucianism thus finds itself in a dynamic relation with religions that are – as was the case in Confucian China – tolerated to the extent that they foster national unity. It is in this respect also more than noteworthy that guoxue has been reintroduced by the CCP government, that is, not as a parallel to junxue Confucianism which criticized ‘state Confucianism’, but, on the contrary, as a type of learning that is to be advocated in order

88 This ‘Document 19’ (‘On the Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country’s Socialist Period’) is an exponent of so-called enlightenment atheism: a form of atheism that regards religion as ‘an illusory or false consciousness, being both nonscientific and backward’ and therefore as making propaganda necessary in order ‘to expunge the misleading religious ideas’. See Yang (2012, p. 46). The perceived threat for national unity the CCP state feels religion is exerting, is also evident from Xi Jinping’s speech delivered at the ‘Working Meeting for Religion’ on 23 April 2016. In this speech, he calls upon all religious people to unite in order to realize the ‘double one hundred’ and the ‘China Dream’ of the grand revival (fuxing 復興) of the Chinese people, to take their responsibility for the ‘harmonious society’ (shehui hexie 社會和諧), to deeply love their country, and to persevere in the ‘sinicization’ of religion. See ‘Xi Jinping zai quanguo zongjiao gongzuohui shang fabiao zhongyao jianghua’習近平在全國宗教工作會上發表重要講話 http://www.sara.gov.cn/xwzx/tplb/333676.htm, accessed 12 May 2016. Also see note #64.

89 It is, in this respect, important that, as noted by Yang (2012, pp. x-xi), ‘Since the May Fourth and New Culture Movements around 1919, Chinese elite intellectuals, influenced by European Enlightenment discourses, have become critical of and despising toward religion. The received wisdom has been that the Chinese as a whole have never been religious’. Promoting Confucianism may also divert attention away from ‘foreign’ religions and popular cults. See in this respect Yang (2012, p. 179); Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 260). Gaenssbauer (2015, p. 54) remarks that ‘According to He Guanghu, in the PRC Marxism and Communism had been turned into a religion of the political community (guojiao 國教), but that “in a society marked by materialism and corruption there are not many people left nowadays who still believe in Marxism and Communism, [...] Chinese people are instead called now to show patriotism (aiguo zhuyi 愛國主義). He Guanghu describes patriotism in China as a “quasi-religion” (zhun zongjiao 準宗教) or “pseudo-religion” (wei zongjiao 偽宗教), since patriotism implies belief in the state and the worship of human power’. See He (2012, pp. 220, 230).

to sustain CCP rule. We may, in the same vein, also mention the renewed attention for the cult of the Yellow Emperor. It is in all this, and very similar to the practices in imperial China, remarkable how in the CCP's use of Confucianism, only those elements of this traditional ideology that do not infringe on the (communist) nation-state are selected. Selectiveness is also evident from the Chinese leadership's gradual revaluation of the function of religion. Chinese communist leadership has meanwhile abandoned the slogan that religion is ‘opium for the people’, and has resorted to a policy of what it calls ‘mutual accommodation’ – that is, conducive to the creation of a ‘harmonious society’ (hexie shehui 和諧社會). This policy, further, also allows the CCP to continue its policy of propagating atheism.

The revaluation of Confucianism in mainland China that, actually, already started in the 1980s when Li Zehou voiced his admiration for the ‘pragmatic rationality’ (shiyong lixing 實用理性) of Confucius and his influence on Mao’s thought, was boosted when, following the economic rise of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, a similar economic rise also occurred in the PRC. Confucianism was no longer, as had been the case in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, condemned as the cause of China’s misfortune but, on the contrary, as an important factor of economic progress. Consequently, the pragmatist attitude of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in which the Chinese tradition was redefined in European terms, was exchanged for a reinterpretation of the European tradition in Chinese terms. Wang Bo, professor of philosophy at Peking University formulated this attitude as follows in 1999: ‘We are

91 See Kuehner (2015, pp. 36-38), who refers to Liu Dong’s claim that ‘I have no hesitation asserting that if Chinese civilization is to survive, Chinese tradition deserves to be popularized and traditional guoxue, especially Ruxue, must reach even greater constituencies’. See Liu (2011, p. 46). We may also refer here to the fact that many universities in the PRC have recently established a guoxue institute, and that there is a guoxue website: guoxue.com.

92 See Goossaert and Palmer (2011, p. 260). The turn to Confucianism can also be interpreted as an attempt to ‘anchor’ CCP rule in more than only economic growth. See Weber (2015, pp. 186-187).

93 Goossaert and Palmer (2011, pp. 2, 316-317, 322, 325-327); Gaenssbauer (2015, pp. 25, 33); Mou (2009, p. 171); Rošker (2016, p. 216). Rosker (2016, pp. 218-219) remarks that where ‘in the Analects (Lun yu), Confucius makes a radical distinction between sameness (in the sense of uniformity, tong) and harmony or harmonization (he), and criticizes the former in the following terms: ‘The nobleman creates harmony, not sameness. Ordinary men, on the contrary, are all the same and cannot create harmony’, in the contemporary period ‘harmony’ is rather conceived of as ‘conformity’. Weber (2015, p. 173) dates the academic revival of Confucianism back to the 1970s.

confronted with the following dilemma: What do we wish? That the object of our study would be “Chinese”, or that it would be “philosophical”? This is reminiscent of He Bingsong who, in the late 1930s and the 1940s, claimed that it was not China that had to learn from the West, but the other way round. For this, he referred to such eighteenth-century intellectuals as Voltaire and Leibniz who were admirers of Chinese culture. Zhuo Xinping also gives expression to the revaluation of a Chinese uniqueness:

We recognize in the ‘Chinese dream’ the potential for a great development and blossoming of Chinese culture. [...] but in order to bring this ‘Chinese dream’ to realization we must unite the entire Chinese people by means of this cultural belief and must mobilize all forces which it is possible to mobilize. [...] This means that we must, of course, allow to unfold, in the course of the economic and social development aspired to, also those positive effects contributed by adherents to religions. Any [...] manner of proceeding which might tend to construct a contradiction between the broad majority of adherents to religious beliefs and ourselves is a manner of proceeding which we must decidedly oppose [...] The ‘Chinese dream’ and the building of a ‘beautiful China’ [...] both belong to the cultural belief of our Chinese nation. At the same time this is the cultural belief of every individual person in China. This is our spiritual home.

A revaluation of Confucian values is not restricted to the philosophical and academic milieu. Also in the PRC’s political rhetoric, a reconnection to Confucian philosophy is visible. Former Premier Wen Jiabao said the following:

From Confucius to Sun Yatsen, the traditional culture of the Chinese nation has had valuable elements, many positive aspects concerning the nature of human beings, and democracy. In this way, it emphasizes love and compassion, sense of community, harmony between different viewpoints, and the sharing of the world.

This strand of thought is also visible in the ‘cultural nationalism’ of Kang Xiaoguang, important New Confucian theoretician and advisor to former Premier Zhu Rongji:

In the following 20 to 50 years, Confucianism will fight a decisive battle with Western culture. This will be a battle on life and death, since it concerns the future of the Chinese nation. I am firmly convinced that democracy will doom the future of China, while Confucianism or Confucianizing can best serve the interests of the Chinese nation. This is my fundamental opinion. [...] The hegemony of Confucian culture first has to be established. One has to realize that it will take continuous efforts for Confucianism to beat the West.100

The age-old aura of moral superiority of the junzi 君子 that was once used by Mao Zedong is now used by Xi Jinping to boost CCP and his authority.101 Xi Jinping’s message is that a further modernization of the Chinese nation-state is only possible under CCP rule and in combination with the Chinese cultural tradition. By referring to Confucianism, the CCP is accentuating the compatibility between the two and is, in this way, presenting communism as the natural continuator of the Confucian Chinese tradition.102 President Xi Jinping formulated it thus during his visit to Qufu, the birth place of Confucius:

That I come here, to Qufu, to the Institute for Confucian Research, shows that the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party enhances traditional culture. [...] The Institute for Confucian Research [...] incarnates the conviction of the Party and the State. [...] Many viewpoints of Confucius and of Confucianism were a great contribution to the intellectual richness of humanity, and provide a lot of fundamental concepts of which some are common with the thought of other countries, while others – such as ‘humanity’ (ren) and ‘do not do to another what you do

101 Kallio (2015, p. 76) quotes Michael Schuman (2014) in this respect: ‘Xi also apparently believes that Confucius can bolster his own standing in the country. Confucius’ ideal government was topped by a “sage-king” [...] By combining one-man rule with the morality of Chinese antiquity, (Xi) appears to be painting himself up as some newfangled communist/Confucian sage-king – an all-commanding figure who will usher in a new epoch of prestige and prosperity’.
102 See Zlotea (2015, p. 162). In Chapter 5 of this volume, Robert D. Weatherley remarks that ‘[t]he use of historical memory to stimulate popular nationalist sentiment is second nature to the Chinese Communist Party’. 
not wish others would do to you’ (*ji suo bu yu, wu shi yu ren* 己所不欲，勿施於人) – are unique. We may not cut off history. We have to summarize it and to adopt the valuable heritage of Confucius to Sun Zhongshan. [...] Comrade Mao Zedong has used a lot of quotations of Confucius and Confucian ideas in his speeches. [...] In my speeches, I also use a lot of words of Confucius. [...] Now we see the value of Confucian thinking much more clearly. [...] If we want to bring China’s case to a good end, then it is necessary that we are in accordance with the method of China’s national situation.103

Jyrki Kallio therefore summarized the recent development as follows:

If Confucius is the new figurehead for China, then President Xi Jinping is the figurehead for the project to revive traditional schools of thought in China. The beginnings of the Party’s project were noticeable as far back as the 1980s, and it was during Hu Jintao’s era (2002-2012) that the ‘harmonious society’ became the catchphrase for the Party’s goals. [...] Xi Jinping has since widened the scope and has been talking about China’s desire to build a ‘harmonious world’.104

Or, how with the revaluation of Confucianism for a national agenda, also the age-old ‘All-under-Heaven’ ideal has returned to the fore.

**Conclusion**

The development of the practical use of Confucianism in China since the Han Dynasty perfectly illustrates the claim by Anthony Kemp that: ‘(a) sense of time is fundamental to human thought to the extent that the past must be invoked in order to establish any present ideology, even one that involves a discounting of the past. All ideologies are fundamentally descriptions not of a present state, but of a past history.’105

This observation suggests that, in twentieth-century China, no radical rupture occurred when the culturalist concept made place for a ‘national’

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104 Kallio (2015, p. 76).
identity. Rather on the contrary. The very fact that Chinese nationalism and communism grew from a humiliated culturalism has continued to shape the way the country perceives itself and presents itself to the world. As defined by Prasenjit Duara:

The shape and content of national identities in the modern era are a product of negotiation between remembered historical narratives of community and the institutionalized discourses of the modern nation-state-system.106

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