

A heavenly aura: Confucian modes of relic veneration

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Abstract: Although concepts and practices related to the veneration of relics are usually identified with Buddhism in China, this article will suggest that they are also relevant to Confucius (551–479 BC) and ‘Confucianism’. Ideas about the special efficacy of great persons and things associated with them predate Buddhism, which spread from India to China in the 1st century AD. The display of personal items that had once belonged to Confucius and places that figured in his biography powerfully evoked the ancient sage to scholarly pilgrims who visited his home area and temple in Qufu, Shandong. Drawing on Buddhist scholarship for working definitions and typologies, I investigate the material forms of relic-related practices in the Confucian milieu, particularly at Qufu. I also analyse a now-destroyed shrine, near modern Shanghai, in which multiple media were employed to replicate relics of Confucius and bring his beneficent presence to a place he never visited.

Keywords: Confucius, relics, Qufu, Kongzhai, shrine, Confucian Religion Association, Kong lineage

INTRODUCTION

In this article, I examine ideas and practices related to the veneration of relics in China, focusing specifically on the forms that can be associated with Confucius and ‘Confucianism’ (*rujiao* or *ruxue*).¹ Known in Chinese as Kongzi (‘Master Kong’), Confucius lived from 551–479 BC and has long been recognised as China’s great

¹The convenient though problematic terms ‘Confucian’ and ‘Confucianism’ will be used here to refer to Confucius’s teachings and their later interpretations, as well as to certain aspects of ideology, institutions, and rituals of governance in dynastic times. For a fuller discussion of terms, see Csikszentmihalyi (2001: 243–4 and 292–7); for general introduction to Confucianism, see Goldin (2011), Richey (2013), and X. Yao (2000).

teacher.² His teachings, which were developed and modified by his disciples and later interpreters, are generally understood to be resolutely humanistic. Thus they would seem to be incompatible with the religious practice of relic veneration. However, the modern conception of Confucianism as a form of secular humanism has obscured important aspects of traditional Confucian ideology and practices that only now are beginning to be studied.³ But even the scholars who are working to broaden our understanding of Confucianism have largely overlooked the place of relics in its traditions. By contrast, studies of Buddhism now routinely acknowledge the importance of relics to Buddhist doctrine, ritual, and devotional practices, as well as to the religion's spread across Asia.⁴ Drawing on this scholarship for working definitions and typologies, the present article investigates relic-related practices and their material forms in the Confucian milieu. After considering early evidence, I survey the most significant elements that enabled Confucius's homeland of Qufu, Shandong, to become the premier destination of scholarly pilgrims seeking to pay homage to the relics of Confucius and be inspired by their auspicious aura. I then analyse a now-destroyed Confucian shrine at Kongzhai, near modern Shanghai, in which multiple media were employed to replicate relics of Confucius and provide a focus for scholar-pilgrims to experience his beneficent presence. Significantly, the locale had no direct connection to the ancient master, but purported to be a microcosm of his home, temple and tomb in Qufu. By imitating the defining features of Qufu's primordial sites, Kongzhai's patrons sought to maximise the efficacy of their shrine, despite its distance from Qufu.

DEFINING 'RELICS'

Recent scholarship on a variety of world religions and cults suggests that the term 'relic', from the Latin *reliquare*, 'left behind', covers a variety of media through which a devotee can gain connection to a special figure.⁵ These include various forms of bodily remains, personal articles, sites of important events, music, and teachings. In

²For recent scholarship and references on the life of Confucius, see Nylan & Wilson (2010) and Csikszentmihalyi (2001).

³For recent studies of various aspects of the cult of Confucius as they relate to Confucian ideology, see essays in Wilson (2002c); also Sommer (2003), Tillman (2004), and Wilson (1996 & 2002a).

⁴I have gained many insights from the profusion of recent scholarship on Buddhist relics, especially Birnbaum (2007), Faure (1992 & 1995), Germano & Trainor (2004), Kieschnick (2003), Lee (2010), Ritzinger & Bingenheimer (2006), Ruppert (2000), Schopen (1998), Sharf (1999), Shen (2000), Strong (2004a & b), and Trainor (2004).

⁵Besides references on Buddhist relics cited in the preceding note, I have found scholarship on Christian and other Western relics useful; e.g. Bagnoli *et al.* (2010), Brown (1981), Head (1999), Smith (2012), and Vikan (2012).

many religions, relics are conceptualised as direct conduits to spiritual forces and often serve as objects of devotion. The Roman Catholic church recognised three categories of relic: the bodily remains of saints, objects belonging to or used by saints, and items that came into contact with either of the other two types.⁶ Through their earthly relics, deceased saints in heaven could aid the living, such as through miracles of healing, or by interceding on the worshipper's behalf to attain eternal salvation. Sites where relics were present became destinations for pilgrims seeking to benefit from divine power. Physical relics are frequently preserved in magnificent containers, or reliquaries, and many mediaeval Christian examples survive in European and American museum collections.⁷

In China, and East Asia more generally, relics are most closely identified with Buddhism, a religion that originated in India with Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, who lived from approximately 563 to 483 BC. According to the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, an early scripture in the Pāli canon, he gave explicit instructions near the end of his life for his disciples to deal with his body after cremation.⁸ They were to divide his corporeal remains into eight portions and enshrine them inside reliquary mounds, called *stupas*, so that worshippers could make offerings to them and receive blessings, even salvation. Not limited to the cremation remains, relics could also be created through monastic ritual, prayer, and meditation, thus continually increasing their quantity.⁹ In addition, the deaths of particularly holy or charismatic monks of later times augmented the supply of relics, whether their bodies were cremated or miraculously preserved intact.¹⁰

Relics played an important role in the extension of Buddhism to other regions of Asia in the centuries before and after the start of the Common Era.¹¹ In the 3rd century BC, the Buddhist emperor Ashoka (304–232 BC) ordered 84,000 stupas built to distribute relics throughout South Asia and sponsored monks and monasteries to spread Buddhist teachings. Indian and Chinese monks brought Buddhist relics to China, and reliquaries attributed to Ashoka's distribution also were 'discovered' there, some allegedly appearing miraculously on their own.¹² John Kieschnick points out that before the introduction of Buddhism, China had no cult that focused on the physical remains of any great person, and he suggests that the numinous power attributed to Buddhist relics was a major factor in the religion's success.¹³ John Strong observes that these relics 'served to link particular places and peoples to the life and

⁶Head (1999).

⁷e.g. see Bagnoli *et al.* (2010) for the catalogue of a major exhibition shown at several museums.

⁸Trainor (1997: 21); Trainor (2004: 9).

⁹Faure (1995: 214).

¹⁰e.g. see Kieschnick (2003: 34).

¹¹Trainor (1997: 39–45); Huaiyu Chen (2007: 60–3).

¹²Huaiyu Chen (2007: 62–4); Faure (1995: 214).

¹³Kieschnick (2003: 30–2).

times of the Buddha', and they spread his teachings 'to places that the living Buddha never visited'.¹⁴ More than merely signifying the Buddha or recalling his life events, relics constituted his presence and extended his biography, and in this sense, could 'have adventures of their own'.¹⁵ Corporeal relics had charisma, they could perform miracles, and 'their possession brought prestige'.¹⁶

In addition to the corporeal remains that appear in cremation ash and related jewel-like particles, the Indian Buddhist discourse on relics also included two other major types, 'relics of use' and 'teaching (*dharma*) relics'.¹⁷ Relics of use encompassed everyday objects that the Buddha had owned or handled, such as his clothing and begging bowl, which are often called 'contact relics' because he came into direct physical contact with them. Also classified as relics of use are places with which he was closely associated, such as the *bodhi* tree under which he achieved enlightenment and the park where he preached his First Sermon. As in Roman Catholic tradition, such objects and sites often inspired the construction of shrines and monasteries, which became destinations for pilgrimage by the devout. The emperor Ashoka made pious visits to thirty-two locations that were associated with events in the Buddha's life and built monuments at many of them.¹⁸ The third category of Buddhist relics, teaching relics, includes everything that records the Buddha's message, from brief quotations to whole sutras. Shakyamuni himself told his closest disciples that his *dharma* would replace him after he died, implying that it was the most important of the three forms of relic.¹⁹

Strong notes that many modern scholars discuss visual images as a fourth kind of relic, belonging to the category of 'commemorative relics', which 'remind one of, or somehow point to, or represent the Buddha'.²⁰ However, as Strong points out, the doctrinal source that refers to images and their commemorative function is a sutra that enumerates different types of *shrines* and is not primarily concerned with relics as such. Commemorative relics are man-made and have no direct connection with the Buddha, unlike relics belonging to the other three major categories. Nonetheless, as Kieschnick suggests, the worship of images and attribution of special powers to them were important dimensions of Buddhism's impact on China, no less significant than

¹⁴ Strong (2004b: 7).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kieschnick (2003: 36–50).

¹⁷ My discussion here draws particularly on Faure (1992), Ruppert (2000: Introduction), Sharf (1999), and Strong (2004a: Introduction).

¹⁸ Dehejia (1997: 38).

¹⁹ Strong (2004b: 8–9).

²⁰ Strong (2004b: 18–20).

the introduction of its cult of corporeal relics.²¹ Relics and images were both capable of working miracles and causing supernormal events: ‘In Chinese terms, the numinous (*ling*) evokes a miraculous response (*ganying*).’²²

CONCEPTIONS OF CONFUCIUS AND CONFUCIANISM

Until recently, such overtly religious elements have not been part of our conception of the veneration of Confucius and the teachings associated with him. He and the important later figures who developed his ideas have generally been identified with purely secular and humanistic concerns, particularly those that address the roles and responsibilities of individuals within hierarchical social frameworks. Starting with the earliest account of his life, written around 100 BC, Confucius himself has been presented as an exemplary teacher, scholar, and authority on ancient rituals; and in recent years, as a political expert (*zhengzhi jia*).²³ For an individual, the primary concerns of Confucianism focus on learning, moral cultivation, and reciprocal obligations; for society at large, they centre on principles of rulership and social harmony. Its ancient texts offer a guide to self-cultivation and articulate lofty ideals of governance that remained influential for nearly 2,000 years of dynastic rule. These principles were premised on the belief that earthly concerns were integrally related to the cosmic order, and ‘religious life and social organization were deeply intertwined’.²⁴ The ideal ruler aspired to bring harmony to the realm by carrying out appropriate and timely rituals and by exemplifying such virtues as benevolence (*ren*), filial piety (*xiao*), propriety (*li*), and righteousness (*yi*). Government officials mastered Confucian texts and were expected to perform local versions of appropriate rites and to promote social virtues within their jurisdictions. Ordinary people were taught to honour the obligations of the ‘five bonds’ (*wu gang*) that defined familial relationships.²⁵

For virtually the entire dynastic period, Chinese emperors maintained a state cult for worshipping Confucius, his disciples, and later interpreters.²⁶ These figures received a succession of honorific posthumous titles over the centuries, and in 1530 Confucius was formally designated as the ‘Ultimate Sage and First Teacher’ (*Zhisheng xianshi*),

²¹ Kieschnick (2003: 28–9).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Recent years have also seen a burgeoning of movements to apply versions of Confucianism to contemporary life, both in China and abroad; see Billioud & Thoraval (2007), Nylan & Wilson (2010: 262–5), and X. Yao (2000: chap. 5).

²⁴ Goossaert (2008: 211).

²⁵ On Confucian prescriptions for ordinary people, see Ebrey (1991).

²⁶ Wilson (2002*b*) provides a detailed introduction to the temple cult and further references.

the epithet referenced on a well-known 18th-century portrayal (Figure 1).²⁷ His ideas on moral self-cultivation, governance, and ritual were canonised in the ‘Confucian Classics’, which were fundamental to the education of scholars and government officials. Officials and other men who had passed the lowest-level civil-service examination performed sacrifices to the spirits of Confucius and the other canonised figures in government-funded temples at regular intervals. Following a prescribed liturgy and physical configuration, the celebrants offered wine, meat, vegetables, incense and silk, along with solemn prayers, ceremonial hymns, and ritual dance. However, as Lionel Jensen and others have demonstrated, these overtly religious aspects of Confucianism were deliberately obscured in recent centuries, first by Jesuit missionaries in China and Japan, and later by Chinese reformers and modernisers.²⁸



Figure 1. Bust portrait of Confucius, entitled *Portrait of the Ultimate Sage and Foremost Teacher* (*Zhisheng xianshi xiang*). Rubbing of incised stone tablet erected by Prince Yinli, now in the Forest of Steles (Bei lin), Xian, China. Qing dynasty, 1734. After E. Chavannes (1909), *Mission Archéologique dans la Chine Septentrionale* (Paris, Leroux), 5: CCCXCIX no. 873. Photograph by author.

²⁷ On the succession of Confucius's honorific titles, see Wilson (2002b); for the 1530 ritual reforms, see Huang (2002) and Sommer (2002).

²⁸ For the role of European Jesuit missionaries in moulding a conception of Confucius to advance their own agendas, see Jensen (1997); also Demattè (2007). For the agenda of 20th-century Chinese modernisers, see Goossaert (2008); also Goldin (2011: 108–11).

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Jesuits argued that Confucianism was an ethical philosophy, whose rituals merely expressed respect, and thus did not conflict with monotheistic requirements of Christianity. This characterisation of Confucianism allowed Chinese converts to continue to participate in sacrifices at the temples of Confucius and to express their filial piety in rites of familial ancestor worship. Although the papal authorities ultimately ruled that these observances were idolatrous and converts had to abandon them, the controversy helped to establish a European conception of Confucianism as primarily secular and humanistic. In the 20th century, some nationalistic reformers in China also promoted Confucius as the Chinese counterpart to the West's great rational philosophers, and this characterisation has reappeared under official auspices in contemporary post-Mao China.²⁹ By suppressing the elements of traditional Confucian beliefs and ritual practices that seemed idolatrous or superstitious, Confucius could be presented as a unifying national symbol and his legacy an important part of Chinese civilisation. As Herbert Fingarette has observed, modern Chinese and Western writers alike have often portrayed Confucianism 'either as an empirical, humanist, this-worldly teaching or as a parallel to Platonist-rationalist doctrines'.³⁰

Other early 20th-century modernisers took a countervailing approach by attempting to establish Confucianism as China's national religion, on the model of Protestant Christianity in Western nations.³¹ This movement was most prominently associated with Kang Youwei (1858–1927), an influential advocate of reform in the late Qing-early Republican period, and Chen Huanzhang (1881–1933), the founder of the Confucian Religion Association (*Kongjiao hui*). Organised in Shanghai in 1912, the Association brought together advocates for restoring Confucian texts to the educational curriculum and crusaders seeking official recognition for Confucianism as China's national religion, with Confucius as its founder and premier saint.³² Members of the Association adopted a 'Confucian calendar' (*Kong li*) counted from the year of his birth, analogous to Jesus and the Christian calendar. After the Qing dynasty fell in 1911, they aspired to install Confucian ideology at the centre of republican governance, which replaced imperial rule, and they hoped to expand Confucian doctrines from an elite concern into a universal popular religion.³³ However, the Chinese Parliament voted in 1913 and again in 1916 not to accord official recognition to Confucianism as a 'religion' (*zongjiao*), and indeed rejected the idea of establishing

²⁹ Nylan & Wilson (2010: 194–5; Epilogue); also Goldin (2011: 111–13).

³⁰ Fingarette (1972: 1).

³¹ For detailed treatments, see Hsi-yuan Chen (1999), Duara (2008: 49–51), Goossaert (2008: 220–1), and Nedostup (2009).

³² Hsi-yuan Chen (1999).

³³ Goossaert (2008: 221).

any national religion for China. Instead, five religions were given official institutional status: Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam.

Confucian values versus Buddhist relic practices

Confucianism clearly differs from religions in which corporeal relics are important. One of its cardinal values is filial piety, whose fulfilment requires, among other things, that a person maintain the physical integrity of his body, which he had received from his parents. A body that was not intact at death could not be buried in the family cemetery, even if the deceased had been morally exemplary. Thus, there was no Confucian practice equivalent to the Buddhist worship of the bone fragments and crystalline particles left after the cremation of its holy persons. Indeed, a famous diatribe against the worship of body relics heralded the start of the fundamentalist revival known as Neo-Confucianism. In 819, Han Yu (768–824) wrote the ‘Memorial Against Welcoming the Buddha Bone’ (*Jian ying Fo gu biao*) to criticise the lavish reception of an alleged finger-bone of the Buddha, which was brought with great pomp to the palace for the emperor to worship.³⁴ Perhaps the most famous reliquary in China today is the set of nested boxes made of various precious materials to house it, which was discovered in the underground chamber of the Famen Temple pagoda in 1987.³⁵

On the other hand, the Buddhist concepts of ‘contact relics’ and ‘teaching relics’ readily fit with Confucian predilections. The teaching relic was particularly congenial, as it aligned with longstanding Chinese tendencies to identify doctrines and texts with their authors.³⁶ The justification for official sacrifices to Confucius was that they honoured the Way of the ancient sages, which he had transmitted through his teachings and writings. The Confucian Classics were repeatedly monumentalised by carving the texts on large stone tablets, beginning with the Han dynasty’s ‘Xiping Stone Classics’, erected in the capital at Luoyang between 175 and 183 AD.³⁷ As for ‘contact relics’ and other kinds of ‘relics of use’, devotees sometimes attributed spiritual power to objects and places that had an association with Confucius and other revered figures in his tradition. The term most often used for all these kinds of relics is *ji*, usually translated as ‘traces’ but also meaning ‘footprints’ or ‘tracks’, alternative translations that underscore their connection to human beings who had once walked the earth.³⁸ Confucian ‘traces’ were venerated in distinctive ways and for different reasons than Buddhist ones, and the origins of these practices predate the introduction of Buddhism

³⁴ Han Yu’s memorial is translated in De Bary & Bloom (1999: 583–5).

³⁵ Wang (2005) provides a detailed description.

³⁶ Csikszentmihalyi & Nylan (2003: 59–60, 87–8, 91, 97–8).

³⁷ The latest set was carved between 1791 and 1794 and erected in the Qing dynasty capital at Beijing; see Nylan (2001: 48–9), von Spee (2013: 214), and Wilkinson (2000: 439–40).

³⁸ Wu (2012) discusses *ji* in the more general sense of ‘ruins’.

to China. Perhaps the most important conceptual difference from Buddhist practice is that the purpose of Confucian veneration was to stimulate moral cultivation and benefit society, rather than to obtain blessings and gain merit toward salvation.

Ancient modes of venerating *ji*

The antiquity of ideas associating great figures of the past with their ‘traces’ is attested by poems in the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*), also known as the *Classic of Poetry*, one of the books that Confucius is said to have compiled and edited from much older sources. A poem that is often quoted in commemorative inscriptions for shrines to worthy officials, who represented local exemplars of Confucian governance, is the short poem ‘Sweet Pear’ (‘Gan tang’):³⁹

[This] umbrageous sweet pear-tree;
Clip it not, hew it not down.
Under it the chief of Shao lodged.

[This] umbrageous sweet pear-tree;
Clip it not, break not a twig of it.
Under it the chief of Shao rested.

[This] umbrageous sweet pear-tree;
Clip it not, bend not a twig of it.
Under it the chief of Shao halted.⁴⁰

The poem calls for the protection of a tree identified with the Earl of Shao, a revered leader in the early Zhou dynasty, who had formerly stood under it. This association of man and tree inaugurated an enduring tendency to attribute human qualities or behaviour to trees, as will be further discussed below. A place where an admired figure had done something might become a site for venerating him in later times, marked by the installation of a commemorative stone stele, and perhaps an offering shrine. Literate visitors to the place would expect to be inspired to ponder the past while reflecting on the person’s deeds and character. A classic example to which later writers often referred was a memorial stele on Mount Xian in Hubei, dedicated to the exemplary governor Yang Hu (221–78), which frequently (and perhaps conventionally) moved visiting scholars to tears.⁴¹

‘Traces’ were sometimes invisible or intangible. For Confucius himself, even music could function as a relic of the ancient sage-rulers, who became vividly present to him when he played or heard certain pieces. One piece induced him to visualise King Wen,

³⁹ Schneewind (2013: 348).

⁴⁰ Translation from Legge (1898: 26).

⁴¹ Von Spee (2013: 223–4).

the founder of the Zhou dynasty, whom Confucius regarded as an ideal ruler.⁴² And famously, during his sojourn in the neighbouring state of Qi, Confucius became oblivious to the taste of meat upon hearing the Shao music, which he associated with the even more ancient sage-emperor Shun.⁴³ To give material form to intangible traces, the most common strategy was to put up a commemorative stele, inscribed with a text that identified the object of veneration. Over the centuries, more than one stele was erected in Linzi, Shandong, to associate the locale with Confucius's experience of hearing the Shao music.⁴⁴ Another example is the installation of a stone inscribed 'Place Where Confucius Saw All-under-Heaven as Small (*Kongzi xiao tianxia chu*) near the summit of Mount Tai, a plausible vantage point for honouring Confucius's observation that the world seemed small from the top of the mountain.⁴⁵

Most important to Confucians of later ages, however, were the teachings of Confucius, which transmitted the principles of ancient sage rule without geographic limit: 'The Master's Way is broad, great, lofty, and bright; it is heaven and earth, sun and moon, pressing the borders of the universe.'⁴⁶ Educated men internalised his 'teaching relics' through memorisation and reflection, ideally to advance their own moral cultivation and create social harmony through proper governance.

RELICS AND THE TEMPLE OF CONFUCIUS IN QUFU, SHANDONG

Origins of the cult

The worship of Confucius originated in his homeland, the ancient feudal state of Lu (modern Qufu), centred at first on his grave. Qufu possessed the tomb of Confucius and thus his body relics. According to the Han Grand Historian Sima Qian (145–c.86 BC), who composed the first comprehensive biography of Confucius, rituals at the

⁴² The event is noted in his earliest biography; see Sima (145–c.86 BC: 47.1925).

⁴³ Sima (145–c.86 BC: 1910).

⁴⁴ According to local records, early 19th-century residents unearthed an old stone inscribed with monumental characters reading 'Confucius Hears the Shao Music' (*Kongzi wen Shao yue*), but it disappeared amid late Qing social unrest, and a replacement was carved in 1911, just before the fall of the dynasty; see post at <http://www.twwiki.com/wiki/%E9%BD%8A%E6%95%85%E5%9F%8E%E9%81%BA%E5%9D%80> (accessed 11.2.2014). A better image of the modern, refurbished stele is at <http://www.panorama.com/photo/83211904> (accessed 11.2.2014).

⁴⁵ A rubbing from a late Ming stele with this inscription, erected in 1637 by officials serving in the area, is reproduced in Baba (1940: 20). For the recently refurbished stone, *in situ* on top of Mount Tai, see <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a4/%E5%AD%94%E5%AD%90%E5%B0%8F%E5%A4%A9%E4%B8%8B%E5%A4%84.jpg> (accessed 11.2.2014). The anecdote comes from Mencius (Mengzi), Confucius's major successor; see Legge (1933: 954 (VII.1.XXIV)).

⁴⁶ From a commemorative inscription by Zhang Jiude, dated 1610; transcribed in Sun (1716: 5.5 (339)).

tomb began shortly after his death in 479 BC.⁴⁷ Although Duke Ai of Lu had avoided employing Confucius in government, he performed a sacrifice *post mortem*, and subsequent rulers made offerings during annual festivals. Confucius's closest disciples remained at his grave to mourn him for three years, and one of them, Zi Gong, built a hut and stayed there for a further three. All of this was extraordinary because there was no blood relationship between Confucius and these men, and thus no ritual obligation to mourn him and make offerings to his spirit, as if for an ancestor.⁴⁸ Many disciples and others in the region moved their homes close to the grave, forming a settlement that came to be known as Kong Village (*Kongli*), from the surname of Confucius and his patrilineal descendants.⁴⁹ By the time of Sima Qian's visit, near the



Figure 2. Stump of the tree allegedly planted at the grave of Confucius by his disciple Zi Gong. Kong Cemetery (*Kong lin*), Qufu, Shandong. Photograph by author.

⁴⁷ Sima (145–c.86 BC: 47.1945–7). For detailed discussion of the evolution of the cult, see Wilson (2002*b*).

⁴⁸ For principles of ancestor worship, see Sommer (2003); also Ebrey (1991: chap. 2).

⁴⁹ Members of the Kong lineage have been recognised as the descendants of Confucius for over 2,000 years and have maintained genealogical records for much of that time. Now some eighty generations deep, their most recent genealogy, published in 2009, occupies eighty volumes.



Figure 3. Stone pillars and figures on the ‘Spirit Way’ leading to the grave of Confucius. Kong Cemetery (*Kong lin*), Qufu, Shandong. Photograph by author.

end of the 2nd century BC, the cemetery had enlarged in area to over one *qing* (about 14 acres), implying that a considerable number of descendants and devotees had been buried *ad sanctos*. The disciples are said to have brought trees from their own native places, thus supposedly accounting for the great diversity of species growing in the cemetery. The remains of a Chinese pistache (*kai mu*) allegedly planted by the faithful Zi Gong is still to be seen near Confucius’s grave (Figure 2). The grave itself was embellished or rebuilt numerous times over the centuries and up to the present. Although much refurbished, the basic elements that exist today were in place by the 12th century. A spirit way leads to an offering hall (Figure 3) in front of a tomb mound that was furnished with a stone stele, altar and incense burner (Figure 4).

The surrounding region boasted many other kinds of relics of the ancient sage. Sima Qian wrote that the former residence of Confucius had been turned into a temple, where his clothing, zither, carriage, and writings were preserved.⁵⁰ In 195 BC, the founding emperor of the Han dynasty offered a large-beast sacrifice (*tailao*) there.

⁵⁰Sima (145–c.86 BC: 47.1945–6). The temple also replaced Confucius’s tomb as the primary locus for sacrifice.



Figure 4. Grave of Confucius. Kong Cemetery (*Kong lin*), Qufu, Shandong. Photograph by author.

As this imperial recognition marked a major milestone in the evolution of the cult of Confucius, the event is included in most versions of his hagiography (Figure 5). Sima's description makes it clear that Qufu had become a place for a special kind of pilgrimage in the Han dynasty, for he notes that lesser nobles and ministers often travelled there before taking up posts in the region. In the postscript to his biography of Confucius, Sima wrote of his own visit, in terms that suggest a deep emotional connection:

The *Classic of Poetry* says, 'The great mountain, I look up to it! The great road, I travel it!' Although I cannot reach him, my heart goes out toward him. When I study Master Kong's works, I imagine that I see the man himself. Going to Lu, I visited his temple hall and contemplated his carriage, clothes and sacrificial vessels. Scholars regularly go to study ritual there, and I found it hard to tear myself away. The world has known innumerable princes and worthies who enjoyed fame and honour in their day but were forgotten after death, while Confucius, a commoner, has been looked up to by scholars for more than ten generations. From the emperor, princes and barons on down, all in the Central Kingdom who study the six arts take the Master as their final authority. Rightly is he called the Ultimate Sage.⁵¹

⁵¹ Sima (145–c.86 BC: 47.1947); translation modified from H. Yang & G. Yang (1979: 27).

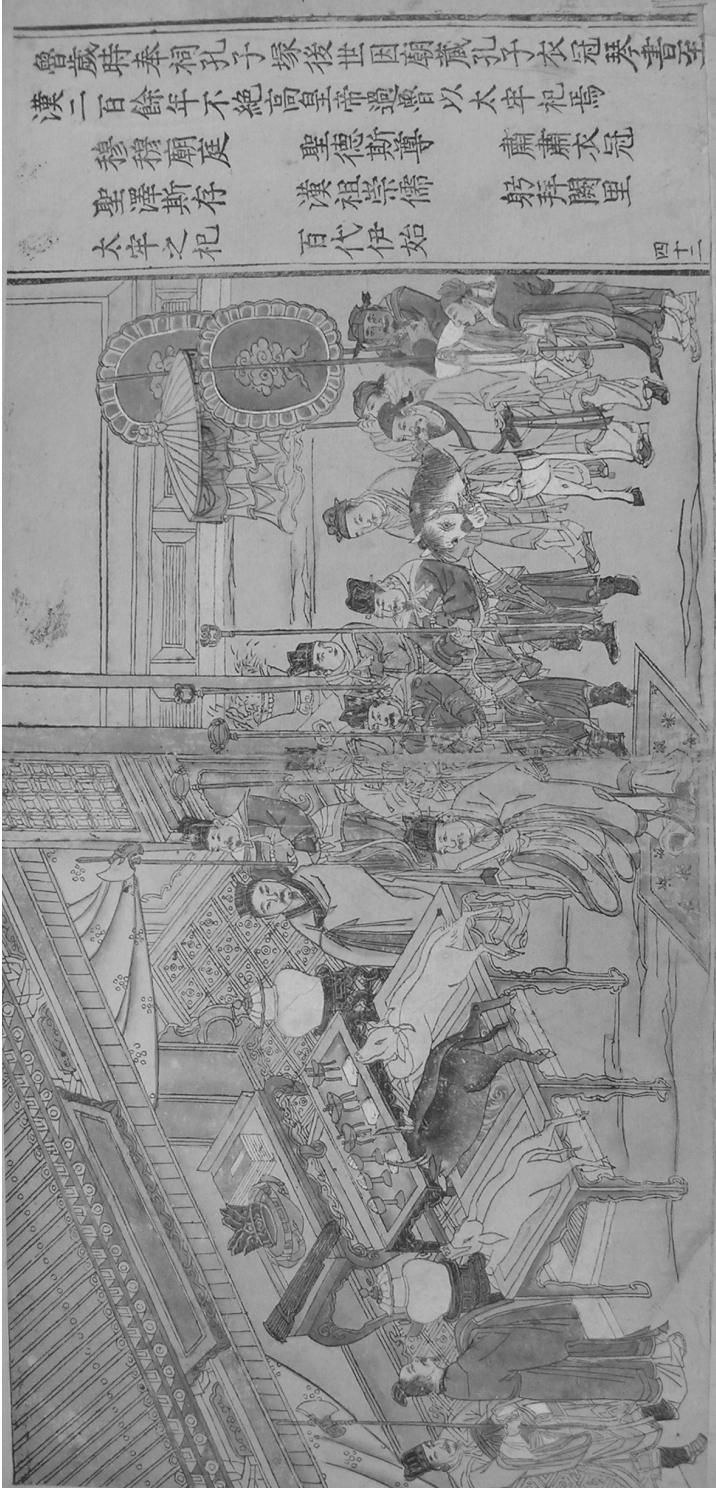


Figure 5. Han Emperor Gaozu sacrificing at the grave of Confucius, from *Shengji tu* [Pictures of the Traces of the Sage]. Page of a hand-coloured woodblock-printed album, published by Zhu Yinyi. Ming dynasty, 1548. Beijing University Library. Photograph by author.

Sima Qian's experience of visiting Qufu to pay homage to Confucius in turn became a model for educated men of later eras, who would have been well aware of it from studying his monumental history, *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shi ji*). Moreover, his detailed chronology of Confucius's life helped to confer special significance on the places where particular events happened or teachings were expounded. It is no coincidence that the 15th-century compiler of the first pictorial hagiography of Confucius used Sima's text to order the scenes, and quoted excerpts from it to annotate them.⁵²

Pilgrimage attractions in Confucius's homeland

Numerous sites in the Qufu region became stops on the scholarly pilgrim's itinerary and were described in later publications, including the private genealogies published by members of the Kong lineage under various titles, the official *Gazetteer of Qufu county* (*Qufu xianzhi*), and the numerous versions of the hybrid *Gazetteer of Queli* (*Queli zhi*), named for Confucius's home precinct.⁵³ In addition to recording places of significance to his life that could be visited, such works often included a convenient pictorial overview of the area, typically under the title 'Picture of the State of Lu' (*Lu guo tu*) (Figure 6).⁵⁴ Some also provide individual illustrations of the area's most significant places. For example, a short distance to the southeast of Qufu is Mount Ni (*Ni shan*), a particularly scenic location that figured importantly in accounts of the birth of Confucius. Sima Qian wrote that Confucius's mother made an offering to pray for a son at Ni 'hill' (*Ni qiu*); and when the baby was born with a slight depression in the top of his head, resembling the hill, he was given the personal name Qiu.⁵⁵ Illustrated separately in Kong-family publications since at least the 13th century, Mount Ni came to include geological features that the descendants linked to the nativity story. Adding apocryphal elements to embellish Sima Qian's terse account, they alleged that Confucius was born in a cave at the foot of the mountain, which is

⁵² For detailed discussion of illustrated biographies and hagiographies, see Murray (1997).

⁵³ Agnew (2006: 158–82) provides detailed discussion of these different types of compilations and the sometimes competing interests that they represented. Of the genealogies compiled by various lineage members, the most relevant for my present purposes are Kong Chuan (1134) and Kong Yuancuo (1242). The administrative *Gazetteer of Qufu* was published in 1774, after the Kongs lost control over appointments to the local magistracy. Books titled *Gazetteer of Queli* (or close variants), first published in 1505 after a major reconstruction of the Qufu temple, recorded the long history, important people, and varied rituals associated with Confucius, his descendants, and his cult in Qufu. Although compiled at the instigation and under the supervision of high officials, it openly adopted material from Kong genealogies. Most later editions were published by Kong descendants and reflect their perspectives and interests.

⁵⁴ One updated edition of the *Gazetteer of Queli* gathers the diverse assortment of objects and places closely linked to Confucius into a separate chapter, under the title 'Treatise on Traces of the Ancient' (*Guji zhi*); see Kong Zhencong (1609: 8.1–4).

⁵⁵ Sima (145–c.86 BC: 47.1905).

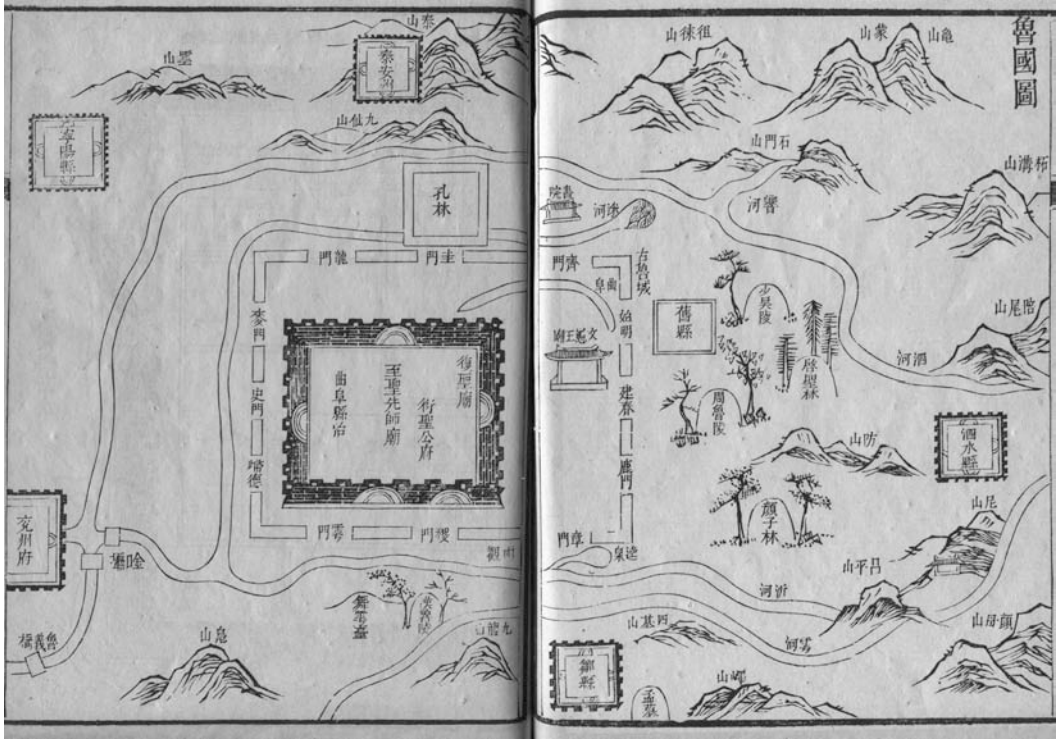


Figure 6. Picture of the State of Lu, from Song Ji & Song Qingchang (1673), *Quli guangzhi* [The Expanded Gazetteer of Quli], (repr. Qufu, n.p., 1870), 1: 6–7. Photograph by author.

marked ‘Cave of Female Efficacy’ (*Kunling dong*) on pictorial plans (Figure 7).⁵⁶ The name next to Mount Ni’s highest section, Five Oldsters Peaks (*Wulao feng*), commemorates another family tale of five old men representing the essence (*jing*) of stars appearing in the sky on the night before Confucius’s birth. Illustrations of Mount Ni also depict the shrine and academy established there in the mid-10th century, with separate buildings for sacrifices to Confucius and his father. The site even includes a hall for the spirit of the mountain, whom the Song emperor Renzong ennobled in 1050 with the title ‘Marquis who Engendered the Sage’ (*Yusheng hou*).

⁵⁶The earliest depictions of Mount Ni appear in Kong Yuancuo (1242: tuben 4 & 9). A cave still exists in the location indicated on the pictures, but it is now called Cave of the Master (*Fuzi dong*); see photo at http://www.chinakongmiao.org/templates/T_common/index.aspx?nodeid=310&page=ContentPage&-contentid=1890 (accessed 15.3.2014). Sima Qian does not mention the physical circumstances of Confucius’s birth, and hagiographical illustrations typically show his mother lying on a bed inside a comfortable house. According to the descendants’ embellishment of the story, she abandoned the baby in the cave because he was so ugly, and he was cared for by wild animals until she relented and took him home; see Jing (1996: 30–2).

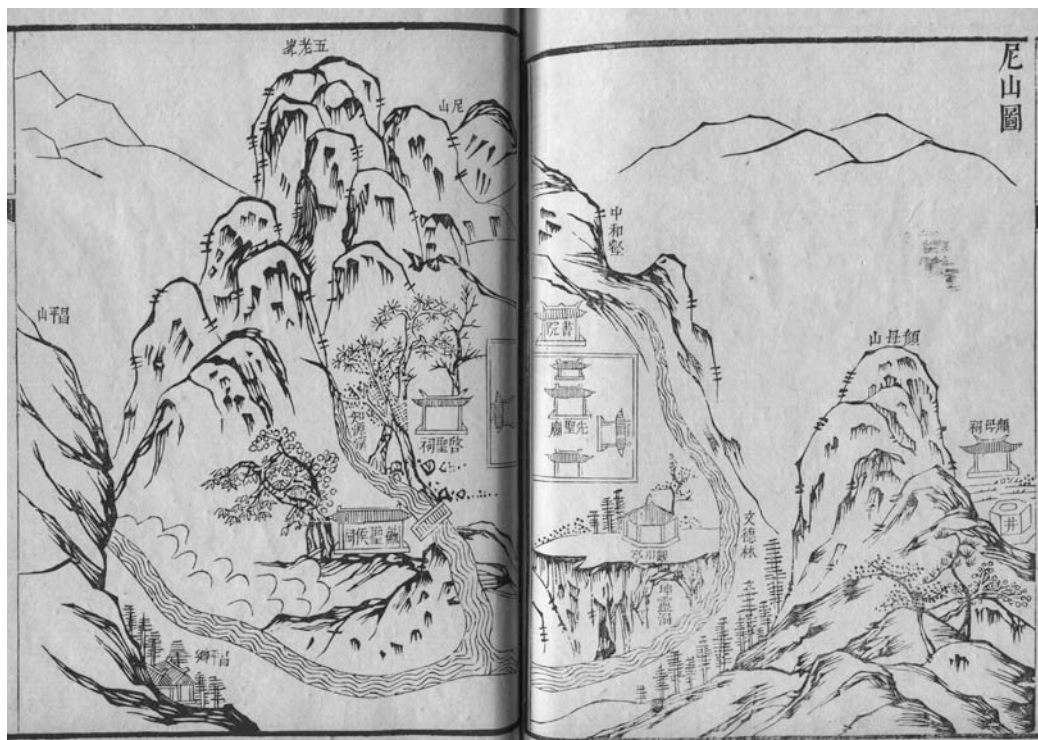


Figure 7. Picture of Mount Ni, from Song Ji & Song Qingchang (1673), *Queli guangzhi* [The Expanded Gazetteer of Queli], (repr. Qufu, n.p.,1870), 1: 10–11. Photograph by author.

The Qufu Temple of Confucius

Reverential visitors who came to experience something of the ancient master's aura in his home region invariably went to the great Temple of Confucius in Qufu itself, which evolved over the course of several dynasties into a magnificent complex comparable to the imperial palace (Figure 8).⁵⁷ After a devastating fire in 1724, the Yongzheng emperor provided generous funding for an expanded reconstruction of the temple and sent top craftsmen from Beijing to make replacements for the sculptural icons in the main sacrificial hall. His equally generous son, the Qianlong emperor, visited Qufu eight times and wrote many eulogistic inscriptions to carve on steles, in addition to bestowing material largesse. By the middle of the 18th century, the facilities had become particularly impressive, and many buildings had yellow-tiled double roofs in

⁵⁷ A thorough documentation of the evolution of the Qufu temple and all its components is provided in Nanjing Gongxueyuan jianzhuxi (1987). Miller (forthcoming) discusses its layout in relation to the ancient principles of palace and temple architecture that originated in the Zhou dynasty, which also influenced the design of Buddhist monasteries and Daoist temples.

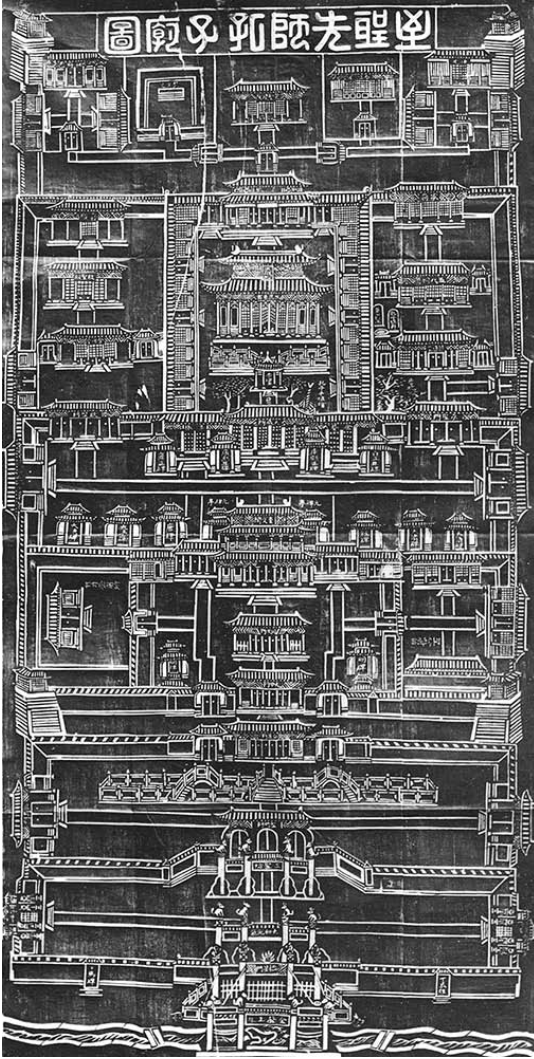


Figure 8. Plan of the Temple of Confucius in Qufu during the Qing dynasty. Rubbing of incised stone tablet. Qing dynasty, 18th c. After E. Chavannes (1909), *Mission Archéologique dans la Chine Septentrionale* (Paris, Leroux), 5: CCCXCVI no. 867. Photograph by author.

the imperial style. Although most of the structures required renovations from time to time, they never fell into serious dilapidation.

The visitor approaches the temple precincts from the south, as he would the imperial palace, passing through a series of ceremonial archways inscribed with appropriate phrases from Confucian texts. Written in monumental calligraphy by various emperors, they herald the entry into the temple precinct along its central axis. Further into the grounds stands the two-storey library, Pavilion of the Star of Literature (*Kuiwen ge*), and a large number of inscribed stone steles, some of them sheltered in pavilions and others set into walls or freestanding. The texts include celebratory inscriptions by emperors, officials, and private scholars; records of temple reconstructions, ritual equipment, and liturgies; and tributes to Confucius and the Way of the ancient sages. Other carved inscriptions identify mundane features attributed to the lifetime of Confucius and his early descendants, such as an old well at his residence and a wall where texts of the Classics had been hidden for safekeeping.

A more elaborate monument, the Apricot Platform (*Xing tan*), commemorates the place where Confucius

had lectured to his disciples. First built in 1022, on the central axis of the courtyard in front of the sacrificial hall, the three-tiered stone pedestal appears disproportionately large in an early diagram of the temple (Figure 9).⁵⁸ A few decades later, under a new

⁵⁸ With the benefit of generous imperial patronage, a 45th generation descendant, Kong Daofu (986–1039), added the trilevel platform during his major reconstruction and enlargement of the temple; Kong Chuan (1134: *xia.2b* (106)).

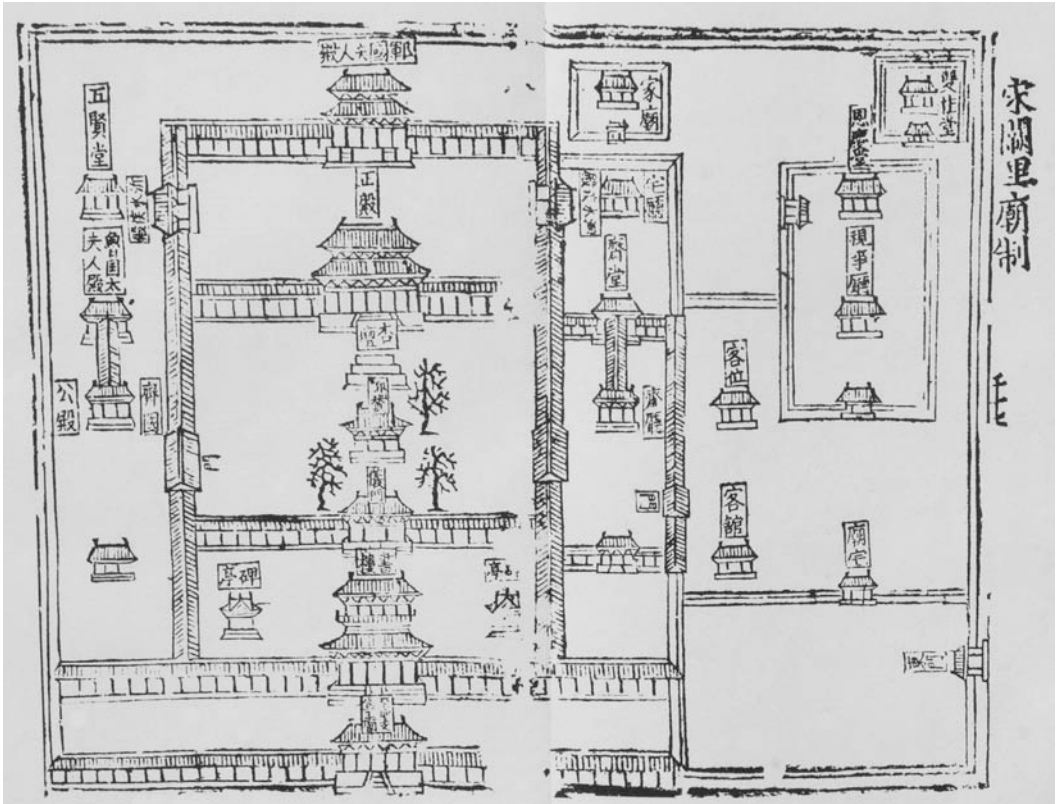


Figure 9. Plan of the Temple of Confucius in Qufu during the Song dynasty, from Kong Yuancuo (1242), *Kongshi zuting guangji* [An Expanded Record of the Kong Lineage]. After *Zhongguo zaizao shanben, Tang Song bian, Shi bu*, v. 82 (Beijing, Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2005), *tuben* 8. Photograph by author.

dynasty, a pavilion was added over the structure, along with a stele carved in the giant seal-script of a scholar-official who refers to himself as Confucius's latter-day pupil (*men sheng*). The pavilion became even grander in the Ming and Qing dynasties (Figure 10), and the Qianlong emperor added a stele inscribed with his own 'Eulogy on the Apricot Platform' (*Xingtian zan*).

The three trees schematically depicted near the Apricot Platform in the temple diagram were also significant relics, as they were believed to have been planted by Confucius himself. All Chinese cypresses (*kuai shu*, sometimes translated as juniper), the trees are rendered in more detail in a separate illustration, which gives them the hieratic appearance of an icon (Figure 11). Likened to the three legs of a tripod, an enduring symbol of legitimate rule, the cypress trees' flourishing, withering, and successive revivals allegedly responded to the moral condition of the polity, particularly as reflected in the status of Confucius's teachings and the welfare of his temple.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The tripod analogy comes from Kong Jifen (1762: 38.13) and is explained in Wang (2003: 212).

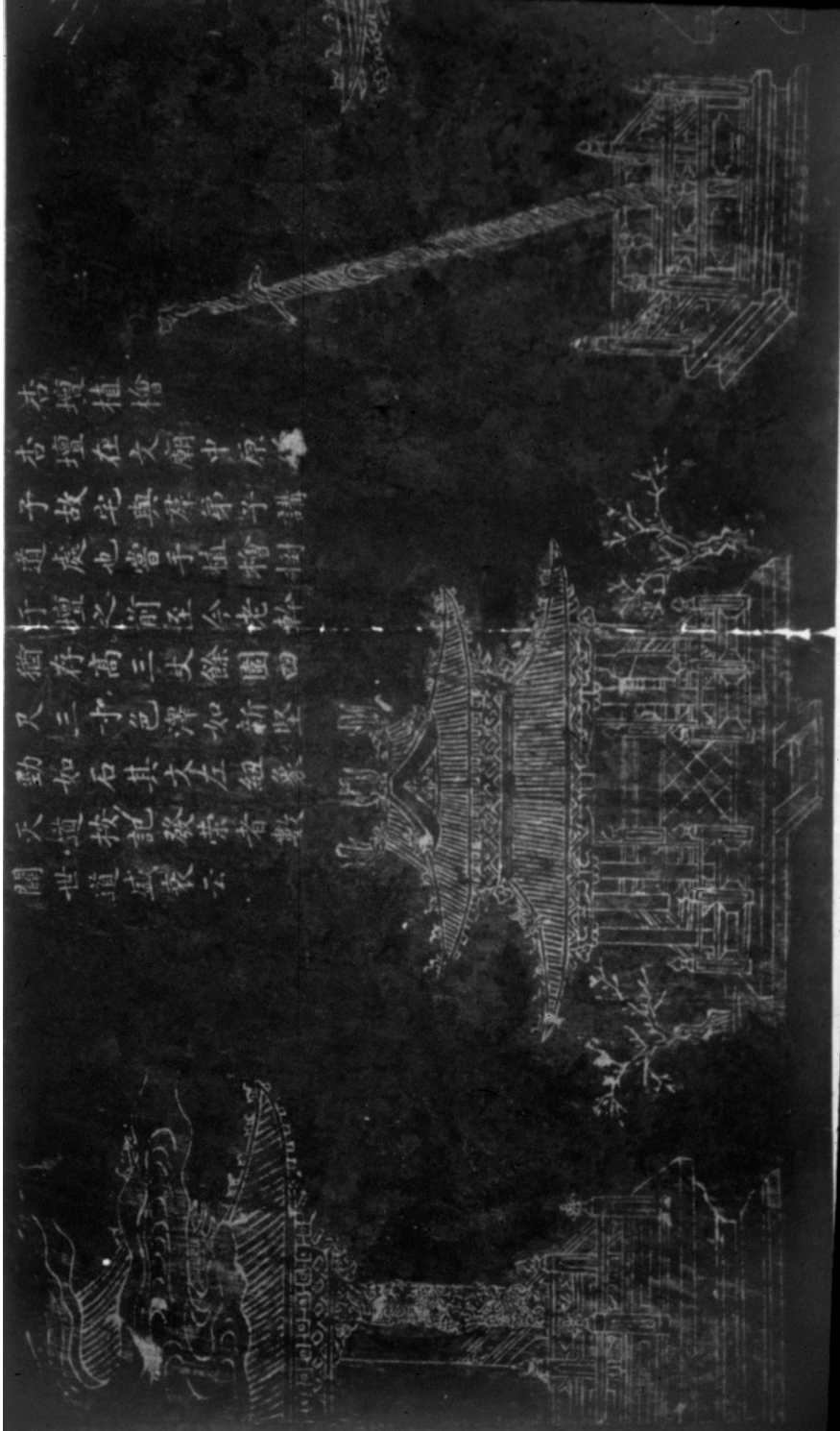


Figure 10. The Apricot Platform and the cypress tree planted by Confucius, from *Shengji tu* [Pictures of the Traces of the Sage]. Rubbing of recut version of incised stone tablet in the Hall of the Sage's Traces, Temple of Confucius, Qufu, Shandong, Ming dynasty, 1592 or possibly later. Marquand Library, Princeton University. Photograph by author.

According to an 8th-century writer, the trees had died in 309 when the heartland of China fell to northern invasion, but they revived in 601 after the resumption of native rule.⁶⁰ Because local people attributed curative powers to the bark, the trunks had to be coated with mud to protect them from being stripped.⁶¹ Later authors note that the trees were again destroyed by fire in 1214, and only one cypress returned to life at the end of the century.⁶² Revered as a direct link to Confucius, it was celebrated for its apparent ability to reflect heavenly principle, and scholar-officials composed panegyrics to it.⁶³ Although it periodically died, the tree repeatedly sprouted anew decades later, usually after a major reconstruction of the temple or demonstration of renewed imperial patronage. Besides being depicted at outsize scale on later temple plans, the cypress also appears in expanded versions of the pictorial hagiography of Confucius (see Figure 10), where it functions as a sign of his continuing presence.⁶⁴ During the turbulent decades of the mid-20th century, the tree again disappeared, but in recent years it is growing there once more.⁶⁵

Just beyond the Apricot Platform stands the main sacrificial hall, the Hall of Great Accomplishment (*Dacheng dian*), the ceremonial heart of the temple. After the ritual reform of 1530, the Qufu temple was virtually unique in having fully three-dimensional and richly painted sculptural icons representing Confucius (Figure 12), the Four Correlates (his four major followers) and Twelve Savants (later Confucian scholars), in whose presence official sacrifices took place. In 1730, with the Yongzheng emperor's

⁶⁰ The 8th-century writer, Feng Yan, probably was referring to older local traditions; cited in Wang (2003: 211).

⁶¹ Feng (8th c.: 8.4–5 (862/452)), implying that the trees' special qualities came from Confucius.

⁶² Kong Jifen (1762: 2.12) chronicles the tree's successive deaths and revivals up to his own time; for a tabulation in English, see Wang (2003: 214).

⁶³ A stele that formerly stood beside the tree bore the great Song calligrapher Mi Fu's 1103-dated 'Encomium on the Cypress Planted by the Sage Confucius' (*Kong sheng shou zhi kuai zan*), incised in his distinctive cursive script; both the stone and a rubbing are reproduced online at <http://qufubeike.com/html/ProductView.asp?ID=22&SortID=128> (accessed 12.3.2014). Perhaps because the stone later suffered damage, it was replaced by a 1600-dated late Ming stele in monumental regular script, which merely identifies the tree; a photograph of the recently refurbished stele beside the cypress is posted at <http://img2.ph.126.net/17jCsGKdXDkyf0IULgTQZw==/564075853346063303.jpg> (accessed 15.3.2014).

⁶⁴ In addition to the tablet in the Hall of the Sage's Traces (i.e. Figure 10; the Hall is further discussed below) and later versions based on it, the tree has its own illustrated entry in the 18th-century expanded pictorial hagiography *Shengji quan tu* [Complete Pictures of the Sage's Traces]; the example in the Harvard-Yenching Library is reproduced online at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:4913404?n=81> (accessed 18.2.2014). The anonymous author concludes that its pattern of flourishing and dying correlated with the rise and fall of dynasties. For a 17th-century temple plan that shows the cypress at exaggerated scale, see Song & Song (1673: 1.8b–9a).

⁶⁵ A Japanese sinologist who lived in Qufu in the 1920s and 1930s described the tree as a dried-out stump, and it is not even visible in his photograph of its enclosure; see Baba (1934: 155). Wang (2003: 211) says that only a dead stump remained in the 1950s. A tall tree stands there now, accompanied by the extensively restored late Ming stele (see above, n. 63).



Figure 11. Cypress trees planted by Confucius, from Kong Yuancuo (1242), *Kongshi zuting guangji* [An Expanded Record of the Kong Lineage]. After *Zhongguo zaizao shanben, Tang Song bian, Shi bu*, v. 82 (Beijing, Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2005), *tuben* 11. Photograph by author.

generous patronage, palace craftsmen fashioned the over-lifesize statues and set them within elaborately decorated niches. Reflecting the successively higher posthumous titles and honours conferred on Confucius over the centuries, his effigy wears formal imperial garb and sits facing south in front of an ornately carved screen, like a ruler holding audience in his palace.⁶⁶ To the sides and overhead, panels in the gilded calligraphy of Ming and Qing emperors pay homage to him with eulogistic quotations from the Classics, and coiling dragons on the coffered ceiling complete the imperial ambiance.

At the north end of the temple's central axis stands a building whose explicit purpose was to collect the 'traces' of Confucius, as indicated by its name, Hall of the Sage's Traces (*Shengji dian*).⁶⁷ In keeping with Confucius's relatively modest status as

⁶⁶ After the ritual reform of 1530, which abolished Confucius's posthumous title as king and designated him Ultimate Sage and Foremost Teacher (see Sommer (2002)), this imperial regalia was anomalous. Perhaps the power of the Kong descendants enabled the Qufu temple to retain it.

⁶⁷ For detailed discussion of the Hall of the Sage's Traces and its pictorial hagiography, see Murray (1996).



Figure 12. Sculptural icon and altar of Confucius in the main sacrificial hall (*Dacheng dian*) of the Temple of Confucius, Qufu, Shandong. 1984 replacement of destroyed Qing original. Photograph by author.

a teacher during his lifetime, it is a single-storey building with a green-tiled roof, in contrast to the grander structures that reflect his posthumous elevation to noble status. An expansive pictorial hagiography dominates the interior of the Hall, with 112 incised stones that portray the events of Confucius's life and milestones in the development of his posthumous cult (e.g. Figure 10). Eight more tablets bear celebratory inscriptions composed as the project neared completion in 1592–3 and identify its many participants and donors, who refer to themselves as the '60th generation of disciples'. One writer states his belief that the pictures will enable viewers to experience an 'audience' with Confucius, even if only by means of rubbings, which could circulate to people unable to come in person.⁶⁸ Three larger incised stones installed at the centre of the north wall reproduce the most venerated portraits of Confucius, transmitted through the generations by his descendants. Above is the Kangxi emperor's monumental inscription honouring Confucius as 'Teacher-Model for 10,000 Ages' (*Wan shi shi biao*), written in 1684 during the first of his six pilgrimages to Qufu, and subsequently carved on stone and disseminated empirewide through rubbings (Figure 13). The east wall displays several massive and ornate steles carved with additional inscriptions, records, and poems composed by the Kangxi and Qianlong emperors on their various visits to the temple. The west wall features additional stone tablets incised with images of Confucius, based on variations of the family heirloom pictures, and some are inscribed with eulogies composed by emperors or cultural luminaries (Figure 14).

'Living relics' of Confucius: the distinguishing presence of Kong descendants

Confucius became in effect the 'patron saint' of learning and governance with the adoption of the teachings of Confucius at the Han imperial court in the 1st century BC.⁶⁹ At the same time, his descendants, members of the Kong lineage, gained official recognition for their roles as caretakers of the cemetery and temple in Qufu, responsible for conducting periodic sacrifices on the emperor's behalf to benefit the entire realm. Men registered in Kong genealogies received noble titles of various levels, stipends, bequests of land, tax reductions, and exemptions from obligatory (corvée) labour service. From 1055 until 1935, the senior male of each generation was honoured with the title and perquisites of Duke for Perpetuating the Sage (*Yansheng gong*). Under the last two dynasties the duke was a powerful figure who lived and worked just east of the Qufu temple, in a grand mansion resplendent with imperial inscriptions and other

⁶⁸ Inscription by Zhang Yingdeng, dated 1592; transcribed in Baba (1940: 2).

⁶⁹ For detailed discussion of Confucius's posthumous honours and the rise of the Kongs, see Wilson (2002b: 45–57, 62).



Figure 13. 'Teacher-Model for 10,000 Ages' (*Wan shi shi biao*), calligraphy of the Kangxi Emperor, carved on stone tablets in the Hall of the Sage's Traces, Temple of Confucius, Qufu, Shandong, Qing dynasty, 1684. Photograph by author.

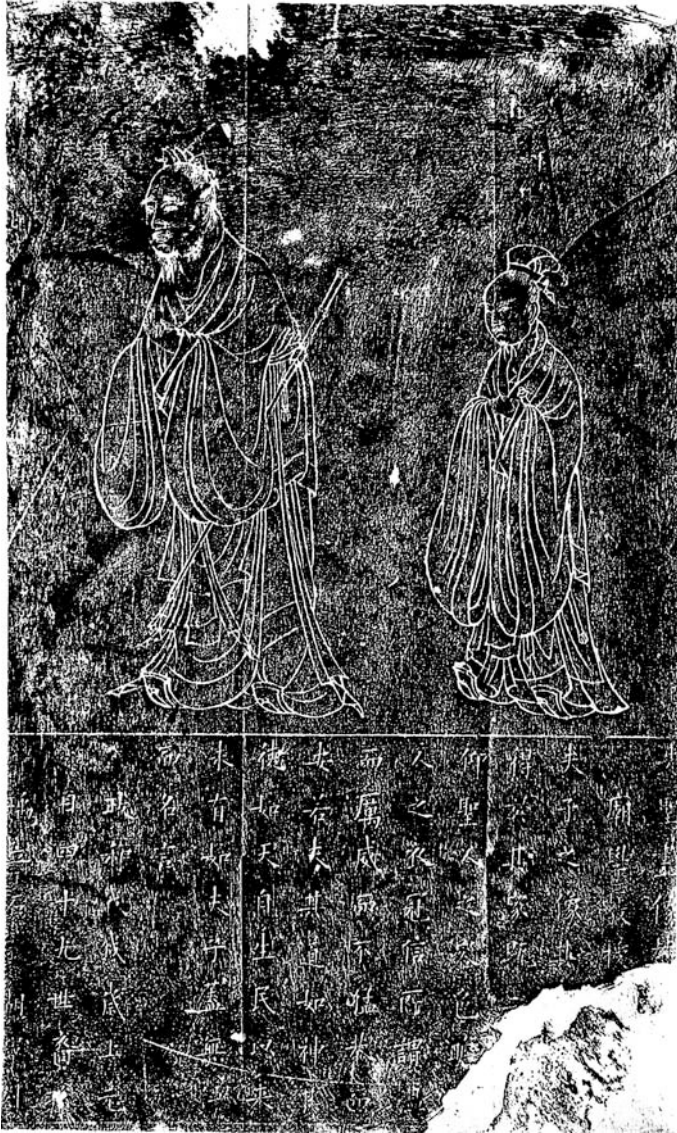


Figure 14. Portrait of Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui, with transcription of Yin Fuzhen's 'Encomium on the Small Portrait'. Rubbing of incised stone tablet erected by Kong Yu, now in the Hall of the Traces of the Sage, Temple of Confucius, Qufu, Shandong. Song dynasty, 1118. After E. Chavannes (1909), *Mission Archéologique dans la Chine Septentrionale* (Paris, Leroux), 5: CCCXCVIII no. 871. Photograph by author.

precious gifts.⁷⁰ The belief that lineage members shared the blood of the ancient sage, making them his ‘living relics’, contributed importantly to the successful perpetuation of their privileged status and to Qufu’s distinction as the Confucian ‘holy land’.

Soon after the fall of the Han dynasty in the early 3rd century, rulers also began offering sacrifices to Confucius at the imperial university in the capital, which was always located some distance from Qufu. In the 7th century, the Tang dynasty established a network of Confucian temples at government-sponsored schools in regional administrative centres, where students and officials were supposed to perform a major sacrifice twice a year.⁷¹ As new administrative districts proliferated in later centuries, schools with temples continued to be added, generally following a standard architectural layout.⁷² Kong descendants were rarely involved with these official temples, which did not include counterparts to the grave and residence of Confucius, nor did these temples claim to possess relics associated with his life. Instead they had libraries and sometimes stone tablets inscribed with the texts of the Confucian classics, his ‘teaching relics’. Moreover, after the 1530 ritual reform, official temples were forbidden to display anthropomorphic icons, but instead had austere rectangular tablets simply inscribed with the names and honorific titles of Confucius, his disciples, and later interpreters and statesmen. If such a temple possessed an incised-stone replica of a lifelike portrait, as many did, it was not installed in the aniconic sacrificial hall, but elsewhere on the premises to inspire students and officials in daily life. Only the Qufu temple was allowed to keep representational images in the sacrificial hall, because of its dual role as both an official and family-ancestral temple.

The existence of numerous descendants of Confucius in the Qufu region and the requirements of their family-ancestral cult caused the Qufu temple to have a number of other features absent from Confucian temples elsewhere, marking it as special. Some of the buildings served as venues for the Kong lineage’s ancestral rituals that were not part of the official cult.⁷³ West of the temple’s main axis were separate buildings dedicated to Confucius’s father and mother respectively, both of whom held posthumous titles of nobility. In the Family Temple (*Jia miao*) east of the central area, the Kongs worshipped distant ancestors of the entire lineage. Besides Confucius as progenitor, the honorees were his son, grandson, and 43rd-generation descendant Kong Renyu, the ‘Restoration Ancestor’, who had saved the family line from extinction in

⁷⁰ Agnew (2006 & 2009) and Lamberton (2002) provide detailed analyses of the Kongs’ acquisition of power and privileges over the centuries. Often called the ‘First Family of China’, the Kongs were unique in maintaining hereditary aristocratic status throughout the dynastic era.

⁷¹ For details of the ritual, which was also followed in later dynasties, see Wilson (1996: 577–8). Versions of it continue to be performed today; for video footage of a 1997 performance at the temple in Tainan, Taiwan, see http://academics.hamilton.edu/asian_studies/home/autumnalsacrifice/pages/videos.html (accessed 20.2.2014).

⁷² For a comprehensive study of Confucian temples, see Kong Xianglin (2011).

⁷³ For details of the Kong family-ancestral cult and further references, see Nylan & Wilson (2010: chap. 6).

the 10th century.⁷⁴ The wives of these men also received offerings in the Family Temple, pointing up a major difference between family-ancestral rites and the official cult of Confucius. Confucius's wife additionally received sacrifices in the Resting Hall (*Qin dian*), the building immediately behind the Hall of Great Accomplishment on the temple's main axis.

Temples of Confucius elsewhere did not have special roles for Kong descendants or provide for observances of the Kong family-ancestral cult.⁷⁵ The ritual reform of 1530 did require official temples to add a building behind the sacrificial hall for the worship of Confucius's father and the fathers of the Four Correlates, in part because the Jiajing emperor wanted to provide his own father with higher ritual status.⁷⁶ Unlike the Qufu temple, where Confucius's mother and wife also received offerings, the new hall in the official temples did not include either woman. Its role was expanded in 1723 to accommodate the worship of five generations of Confucius's own ancestors, all given titles as king (*wang*). The name of the building was also changed from Shrine of the Progenitor of the Sage (*Qisheng ci*) to Shrine of Venerating the Sages (*Chongsheng ci*).⁷⁷ At the Qufu temple, however, Confucius's wife kept her place in the Resting Hall behind the main sacrificial hall, and the separate buildings for the worship of Confucius's father and mother were retained on the western axis. To comply with the order to establish a Shrine for Venerating the Sages, a new building was added on the eastern axis, in front of the Family Temple in which the Kongs worshipped important descendants of Confucius as lineage ancestors. While resulting in some duplication of offerings, these arrangements underscored the differences between the uniquely endowed Qufu temple and official temples everywhere else.

RELICS OF CONFUCIUS AT KONGZHAI

As described above, Confucius received regular sacrifices in the official temples attached to government schools and in the primordial Qufu temple for hundreds of

⁷⁴ Agnew (2009) demonstrates that the legend of Kong Renyu, a now-unchallenged tenet of Kong lineage history, emerged only in the 14th century in the context of legitimating a contender for the title of duke, and the emphasis of the story changed over time to meet new needs.

⁷⁵ The few exceptions were for temples at Kong-family outposts elsewhere. The most important of these is in Quzhou, Zhejiang, where the 48th-generation duke settled in the 12th century, when Song China was divided by invasion, and his heirs chose not to return to Qufu after the 13th-century Mongol reunification; for details, see Wilson (1996: 571–7).

⁷⁶ Nyland & Wilson (2010: 180). The new shrine also included the fathers of the Four Correlates of Confucius (Yan Hui, Zengzi, Zi Si and Mengzi) as attendants upon his father. Huang (2002: 268–70, 281) discusses the Jiajing emperor's motivations for mandating empirewide shrines to the father of Confucius.

⁷⁷ Zhao (1927: 84.2534).

years. In 1904, complementing the seasonal rites, the Qing dynasty also made the birthday of Confucius a national holiday.⁷⁸ His close identification with imperial rule became a liability when the 1911 Revolution toppled the Qing and ended the dynastic system. The new government of the Republic of China initially moved to abandon much of the classical heritage and school-based worship of Confucius in order to modernise the country.⁷⁹ However, President Yuan Shikai revived school sacrifices to Confucius in 1913, and the Confucian Religion Association marked the sage's birthday that year by organising a grand celebration and sacrifice in Qufu. Members from the Shanghai area who attended the fête intended to return the following year for another birthday observance, but an outbreak of fighting made travel to Qufu impractical. Instead, on 16 October 1914 (Min'guo 3/8/27), they performed a great sacrifice (*da si*) to Confucius at Kongzhai, a rural hamlet some 25 miles west of downtown Shanghai.⁸⁰

The very name of the bucolic spot where the devotees gathered for their grand ceremony embodied a longstanding claim that the locality had direct connections with Confucius and his descendants.⁸¹ The place-name Kongzhai, literally 'Kong Residence', was understood to refer to a 22nd-generation descendant who had sojourned there in the 2nd or 3rd century AD. Although situated a long distance from Qufu, the hamlet claimed possession of Confucius's robe and cap, intimate 'contact relics' that in a Buddhist context would signify the transmission of spiritual or doctrinal authority.⁸² According to local traditions that were documented in the 12th century and much repeated in later sources, a 34th-generation descendant had buried these personal articles and a few jade ornaments in 606 AD. The relics themselves were never seen, but their presence was asserted by the so-called Tomb of the Robe and Cap (*Yiguan mu*), for which a stone-faced mound had been built in the 17th century

⁷⁸ Confucius's birthday initially was to be celebrated on the 28th day of the 8th lunar month, but the observance was changed to the 27th day of that month in 1910. The corresponding date in the Western calendar varies every year. In 1952 the birthday was fixed as 28 September, as currently observed in mainland China and Taiwan; however, birthday celebrations in Hong Kong still follow the lunar calendar. For further discussion, see Nylan (2001: 311), Hsi-yuan Chen (1999: 103–4), and Carroll (2006: 124).

⁷⁹ As several scholars have pointed out, earlier stages of this 'de-Confucianization' began in the last years of the Qing dynasty; see Goossaert (2006), Hsi-yuan Chen (1999), and Nedostup (2009).

⁸⁰ Yao Wendong (1915: preface). The circumstances are also described in a letter in English, dated 10 Aug. 1915, from one 'Chen Kuo chüan' to Sir James Haldane Stewart Lockhart, inserted into the Cambridge University Library's copy of the book. The rites for Confucius had been codified at the level of Middle Sacrifice (*zhong si*) from the 7th century until the early 20th (Wilson (2002*b*)); it was raised in 1906 to a Great Sacrifice.

⁸¹ The most comprehensive collection of documents pertaining to Kongzhai appears in the 18th-century edition of its gazetteer, *Kongzhai zhi*, whose compilation by Sun Hong was part of an effort (ultimately unsuccessful) to gain official certification and funding. I am currently writing a book about the site, provisionally titled 'Mysteries of Kongzhai: Relic, Representation, and Ritual at a Shrine to Confucius'.

⁸² Faure (1995: 218–19).

portraits of Confucius, ultimately based on paintings handed down by his descendants in Qufu.⁸³ One of the stones had been brought to Kongzhai after being discovered in a nearby marsh in 1669, allegedly when mysterious lights flashing above it signalled its presence. Other incised stones depicted scenes from the life of Confucius and the beginnings of his cult, under the title ‘Pictures of the Traces of the Sage, Confucius’ (*Kongzi shengji zhi tu*). Appended inscriptions affirmed that the pictures brought ancient events to life and enabled viewers to feel that they had joined the company of disciples in the presence of Confucius.⁸⁴ Yet another set of incised stone tablets represented Confucius through teachings associated with him, in the form of a complete transcription of the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*), purportedly based on a brush-written original by the great Ming calligrapher Dong Qichang (1555–1636).

Many important men from the Shanghai region took part in the 1914 ritual at Kongzhai, and hundreds of people attended the ceremony as spectators.⁸⁵ Joining with members of the local Kong lineage,⁸⁶ they presented various kinds of sacrificial offerings to the spirit of Confucius, including wine, three large animals, vegetables, grains, and silk; as well as prayers, prostrations, music, and dance. Afterwards, the celebrants established the Kongzhai chapter of the Jiangsu provincial branch of the Confucian Religion Association. To commemorate all these events, a founding member of the Association, the retired diplomat and Confucian scholar Yao Wendong (1852–1927), composed three poems, taking his rhyme and metre from an older verse that he found inscribed on a wall at Kongzhai. Yao subsequently circulated his poems nationwide and invited readers to send their own compositions matching the same rhymes. He received over 500 submissions from more than 300 individuals, which he published in three instalments in 1915.⁸⁷ These writings repeatedly affirm that the buried relics had endowed Kongzhai with the efficacious spirit of Confucius, creating an auspicious ambiance and conferring beneficial effects on the region. A couple of

⁸³ Members of the Kong lineage had first reproduced these pictures on incised stone tablets in the 11th and 12th centuries, and these were later installed in the Qufu temple’s Hall of the Sage’s Traces (discussed above). The images circulated through rubbings, facilitating replications and modifications of the original models elsewhere; discussed further in Murray (2011).

⁸⁴ The colophons that were carved on stones following the pictorial scenes are transcribed in Sun (1716: 5.2–6 (333–42)); I discuss them in detail in Murray (2014).

⁸⁵ Yao Wendong (1915) contains several accounts written by participants.

⁸⁶ Although the local Kongs were officially registered as descendants of Confucius, their more recent ancestors had moved to Kongzhai only in the 18th century. After the Duke for Perpetuating the Sage in Qufu recognised Kongzhai’s claim to possess relics, he appointed Kong Yuxing to a hereditary position as Sacrificer at the Shrine and Tomb of the Robe and Cap (*Yiguan cimu fengsi sheng*); see Xiong & Chen (1879: 11.2).

⁸⁷ A fourth instalment was envisioned to accommodate submissions received after the Duanwu holiday (17 June 1915), and its publication was announced in the Shanghai newspaper *Shenbao* on 26 July 1915, but it may never have appeared; I have not been able to locate a copy.

the contributors prefaced their poems with accounts of their own pilgrimages to Kongzhai, in which they reverently described the shrine's architecture, images, and other significant features. Several mentioned the ceremonial archway at the boat landing, which was the main entrance to the shrine's precincts. Erected in the early 18th century, the arch bore an inscription in three large characters that read 'Little Queli' (*xiao Queli*), referring to Qufu. Thus the signboard identified Kongzhai as a microcosm of the premier destination for Confucian scholarly pilgrimage, which lay hundreds of miles to the north.

KONGZHAI AS 'LITTLE QUELI'

Kongzhai represents a rare case in which the presumed presence of contact relics and local lore concerning the sojourn of Kong descendants in antiquity combined to serve as a pretext for constructing a shrine to Confucius. Founded in the 17th century, outside the official temple network, its configuration was unique.⁸⁸ However, the epithet 'Little Queli' signalled that Kongzhai was meant to be a miniature facsimile of the grave, temple, and residence of Confucius and his descendants in Qufu. The alleged (and never verified) possession of clothing relics justified elements not shared by official temples but that imitated features distinctive to Qufu. Kongzhai's Tomb of the Robe and Cap, analogous to the tomb of Confucius, lay to the north of the main sacrificial hall, just as his actual grave was situated north of the Qufu temple. Inside Kongzhai's main hall, as in Qufu's, rituals were performed before sculptural representations, rather than aniconic inscribed tablets. At both sites, the building where five generations of Confucius's own ancestors received sacrifices was east of the main hall, rather than north of it as in official temples.⁸⁹ In another building, offerings were made to the two Kong descendants who were believed to have been active at Kongzhai in antiquity. Although no Kongs still lived in the area when the shrine was being built, lineage members moved there after it gained recognition, first from the Duke for Perpetuating the Sage and then from the Kangxi Emperor. The duke sent a lengthy commemorative inscription after verifying the claims made for Kongzhai, and in 1701

⁸⁸ The legends themselves were documented in the late 12th century but probably originated much earlier, and structures for venerating Confucius at the site existed for brief periods during the 13th and 14th centuries. The shrine where the 1914 sacrifice took place was established in the early 17th century and existed continuously up to the 20th century, although renovations introduced numerous changes during that period. For details of its history through the 1870s, see Xiong & Chen (1879: *juan* 11); an appendix to that history is Zhang & Yu (1934: 11.1–3).

⁸⁹ A separate shrine to Confucius's father also stood on the west side of Kongzhai's precincts until the mid-19th century; see Zhang & Yu (1934: 11.2). It was probably destroyed during the Taiping Rebellion (1851–64).

his text was carved onto a stone stele for prominent display in a pavilion.⁹⁰ The Kangxi Emperor bestowed eulogistic inscriptions, written by his own hand, while passing nearby during his 1705 inspection tour of the South. The large four-character epithet that he composed for Kongzhai, ‘Lingering Emblems of the Sage’s Traces’ (*Shengji yihui*), echoed his 1684 monumental inscription ‘Teacher-Model for 10,000 Ages’ for the Hall of the Sage’s Traces at the Qufu temple (see Figure 13). Kongzhai’s patrons soon built a two-storey Tower of Imperial Calligraphy to house the emperor’s brush-written originals and their reproductions on carved tablets, creating a counterpart to the imperial stele pavilions at the Qufu temple. Kongzhai’s functional counterpart to the Hall of the Sage’s Traces was the Hall of Being at Leisure (*Yanju tang*), where the stones incised with portraits and illustrations of the life of Confucius were installed. One of the accompanying inscriptions called them ‘medicinal stones to awaken the heart-mind’,⁹¹ echoing the Qufu patrons’ belief that pictures could stimulate the viewer to advance in moral self-cultivation.

As in Qufu, trees figured prominently in accounts of unusual occurrences at Kongzhai, which were interpreted as evidence of a numinous presence. A rhapsody composed by a 14th-century local literatus, Cai Tingxiu, celebrated five old sandalwood trees that took turns flowering, such that only one bloomed each year.⁹² His prose preface credited the nourishing beneficence of Confucius for this extraordinary manifestation, which suggests a natural-world counterpart to the Confucian virtue of gentlemanly deference (*rang*). Another story, recounted in the 1631 prefectural gazetteer, claimed that a local man had begun bleeding from his nose and mouth when he tried to cut down one of the trees.⁹³ In the autumn of 1705, after the Kangxi emperor bestowed his imperial calligraphy in honour of the presence of ‘traces’ of Confucius at Kongzhai, a cassia tree produced four branches with auspicious red flowers among the usual yellow ones, a pattern of blooming that continued for a couple of years thereafter.⁹⁴ The occurrence became one of Kongzhai’s ‘Four Auspicious Phenomena’ (*si rui*), which contemporary literati commemorated in suites of celebratory poems.⁹⁵ Several of the participants in the 1914 sacrifice at Kongzhai referred to the cassia’s prodigious behaviour in the poems and prose notes published after the ceremony.⁹⁶ It

⁹⁰ For the text of the stele, see Sun (1716: 3.1–2 (261–4)). Another inscription sent by a later duke was carved on stone in 1849 for similar display; the text is transcribed in Xiong & Chen (1879: 11.3).

⁹¹ The inscription, by the 17th-century literatus Ni Fuying, is transcribed in Sun (1716: 5.3–4 (335–7)).

⁹² Transcribed in Sun (1716: 5.21–2 (371–3)).

⁹³ Fang & Chen (1631: 46.2 (1198)).

⁹⁴ Sun Hong recorded the phenomenon at the time and composed a panegyric to it; see Sun (1716: 5.20 (370) & 5.23–25 (375–9)).

⁹⁵ See examples in Sun (1716: 5.23–41 (375–412), *passim*).

⁹⁶ Yao Wendong (1915: *passim*).

seems somehow fitting that the only visible feature currently surviving at Kongzhai is a pair of 450-year-old ginkgo trees, which gained official protected status in 2002.⁹⁷

Despite stories that attributed supernatural efficacy to Confucius's numinous presence, allegedly brought to Kongzhai by his buried clothing, the relics themselves did not become objects of worship. Nor did people come to Kongzhai seeking his aid or intervention, or hoping to accrue personal blessings by contributing to the shrine's upkeep. Devotees and patrons expected their offerings and material support to stimulate moral cultivation, not just for themselves but also for local residents and sojourners. Some writers expressed the belief that Kongzhai's very existence made its immediate environs superior to other localities within the Jiangnan region and raised the South more generally to a cultural level equalling or exceeding that of the North.⁹⁸ Even though Confucius himself had never come to the area in person, the arrival of his potent relic and lineal descendants had created favourable conditions for social and cultural progress. Later patrons assumed a responsibility for enhancing and perpetuating these spiritual benefits to the community by helping to build, restore, manage, or financially support Kongzhai. These men in turn were commemorated and posthumously received sacrifices in its Shrine for Reporting Merit (*Baogong ci*), east of the main hall.

CONCLUSION

The teachings of Confucius were unquestionably his most important 'relic', transmitted without geographic limit in the texts of the Confucian Classics. As one literatus associated with Kongzhai put it, 'Our Master's Way is manifested in the *Four Books* and *Six Classics*; it is like the sun in the centre of heaven'.⁹⁹ A major mode of veneration was through the proper performance of the sacrifice to Confucius and his canonised followers, which took place in Confucian temples throughout the realm at specified intervals. By fasting and other preliminary activities, the participant prepared himself to perceive the spirits coming down to receive the offerings. Ideally the

⁹⁷ See photograph titled 'Kongzhai—Qingpu de Kongzi houyi juzhu di' on the Qingpu Library blog, at <http://bbs.qplib.sh.cn/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=652&highlight=%BF%D7%D5%AC>, post no. 6 by shanghaiapalm, dated 24.5.2009 (accessed 2.3.2014). Red Guards destroyed the rest of the shrine in 1966, during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76).

⁹⁸ For several such claims, see Zhang Baolian's mid-19th century commemorative inscription; transcribed in Zhang & Yu (1934: 11.2–3). South China was considered somewhat uncivilised until after the fall of the Han dynasty in the third century, which brought an influx of northerners, purportedly including the Kong descendants who figured in Kongzhai's history.

⁹⁹ Quoted by Ni Fuying in his inscription for incised stone tablets depicting the life of Confucius (see above, n. 91).

experience would stimulate him to renew his own commitment to the Way, which he had internalised by learning the Classics and cultivating his moral character. And Confucius himself was a role-model for self-cultivation, accessible through his biography and reported dialogues. The display and circulation of portraits and hagiographical pictures aided in this process, although critics sometimes argued that visual representations fostered only superficial understanding.¹⁰⁰ The ultimate ideal was to transmit and practice the Way.

Physical relics associated with Confucius played subsidiary roles in his veneration and, compared with his teachings, garnered far less attention from the scholars and officials who enacted his cult. Nonetheless, the material aspects of his identification with Qufu endowed his home region with special charisma. Qufu had the grave containing his body, various objects that he had used during his life, and many sites associated with his words and deeds. Furthermore, it harboured the senior line of his flesh-and-blood descendants, 'living relics' who shared his essence and represented an ostensibly continuous connection to him. Charged with maintaining the tomb and temple, the Kongs made themselves an integral part of the Qufu mystique, a phenomenon without obvious counterpart in other religions. For ordinary literati, steeped in Confucian learning, a visit to Qufu offered complete immersion in the master's aura and the potential for spiritual renewal. For emperors, although few made the pilgrimage and more bestowed patronage from afar, attention to Qufu also affirmed political legitimacy and publicly endorsed orthodox principles of governance.

By proclaiming Kongzhai to be a small-scale surrogate of Qufu, its patrons hoped to gain official credentials (*biaozhang*) and more reliable funding for the shrine. With its replication of Qufu's relics and representations of Confucius, validated by reports of supernormal occurrences, Kongzhai purported to offer the visitor a similiar experience as he might have in Qufu. Official recognition of Kongzhai would bring the obscure locality renown and prestige, enhancing its vitality and importance. However, the effort achieved only limited success. Although the Kangxi emperor accepted Kongzhai's claims and bestowed his prestigious calligraphy during the 1705 inspection tour, this one-time interaction did not lead to formal recognition or financial support. His successors, the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors, who were both very generous patrons of Qufu, either ignored Kongzhai or actively suppressed it.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, the Duke for Perpetuating the Sage designated a nearby branch of

¹⁰⁰ This objection is raised even by an author of a commemorative inscription for the Hall of the Sage's Traces in Qufu; transcribed in Baba (1934: 171–3). Shao Yiren clearly worried that the Hall's hagiographical illustrations might lead a viewer astray, but reluctantly concluded that they could be inspirational.

¹⁰¹ Qiao Zhizhong (2006) argues that Yongzheng and Qianlong both opposed unorthodox local shrines in order to assert tighter central control, and that the latter tried to destroy all copies of Kongzhai's gazetteer in order to conceal evidence of Kangxi's gullibility.

Kong descendants to tend the shrine and helped Kongzhai gain a hereditary Sacrificer position (*fengsi sheng*) from the Ministry of Rites in 1746 for the senior male.¹⁰² The last incumbent, Kong Fanbang, officiated at the 1914 sacrifice and directed a planning office in the Jiangsu branch of the Confucian Religion Association. Over the intervening period, local activists occasionally donated land or made monetary contributions to Kongzhai, mounted campaigns to restore its facilities, performed sacrifices, held literary gatherings, and composed poems celebrating its distinctive features. Nonetheless, Kongzhai rarely aroused more than local interest, suggesting that unseen relics, assorted images, and obscure descendants could not create a fully persuasive aura to attract wider attention to a place where Confucius himself had never come.

Epilogue

Despite their numinous qualities as surrogates for Confucius's presence, his relics were not to be worshipped directly nor approached for aid with private concerns. As suggested above, appropriate ways to venerate them included erecting protective structures, heraldic archways, and commemorative steles; composing poems, panegyrics, and documentary records; writing calligraphy for monumental signboards and decorative couplets; copying hallowed images and circulating rubbings; and contributing to facility maintenance and renewal. Even more important and pervasive was the perpetuation of Confucius's teachings by disseminating the texts of the Classics, initially in sets of rubbings made from carved stone tablets and later in books produced with woodblock-printing technology.

Perhaps there was always a need to guard against attempts to treat Confucius like a boon-granting popular god, whose relics possessed special powers that supplicants could invoke for their own benefit. The 8th-century writer Feng Yan made this point with two colourful anecdotes about inappropriate behaviour at the Qufu temple. One was his account of how the tree planted by Confucius had to be plastered with mud, to keep people from stripping off the bark to use as medicine.¹⁰³ The other was a more lurid story describing how women would go into the main hall, remove their clothes and climb up on the dais, in hopes of conceiving a son who would grow up to become a high official. This egregious activity stopped only after an imperial edict of 472 barred women from entering the temple.¹⁰⁴ The underlying assumption is that only highly educated and disciplined males could approach the spirit of Confucius properly

¹⁰² Wang Chang (1788: 17.1); however, unpublished documents in the Kong archives in Qufu indicate that negotiations for the position started as early as 1705.

¹⁰³ See above, n. 61.

¹⁰⁴ Feng (8th c.: 1.3 (862/422)).

and engage with the Way on an exalted level. For virtually the entire imperial era, access to Confucian temples was limited to men.

The dramatic upheavals of the 20th century displaced the cult of Confucius and Confucian learning from their central roles in Chinese governance, and Maoist persecution rendered Confucian temples completely defunct. After post-Mao changes of policy permitted temples to reopen in the 1980s, the long rupture enabled new practices to develop. The sacrificial ceremony has undergone numerous contemporary revivals, with some that deliberately modernise it for touristic purposes, as well as others that attempt to recreate the traditional liturgy. Most notably, monumental statues of Confucius and sometimes his disciples have been added at many of the restored temples in recent years, and visitors of both sexes make offerings, burn incense, hang votive placards, and pray for personal blessings.¹⁰⁵ Because Confucius historically was closely identified with learning, and arduous examinations dominated the traditional path to a prestigious career, it is not surprising that supplicants initially sought his aid in passing university entrance examinations. But Confucius and his disciples now receive appeals for the full array of traditional concerns, such as having sons, getting rich, advancing in a career, enjoying good health, and living to old age. These once exclusive figures have become almost interchangeable with the Buddhist, Daoist and popular gods who have also returned to the arena of public religious expression. The modes of venerating Confucius are continuing to evolve.

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¹⁰⁵ See Billidou & Thoraval (2007) and Wang-Riese (2012).

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