

Faith and Politics: (New) Confucianism as Civil Religion

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Abstract

This paper discusses how, in contemporary China, politico-religious narratives that reiterate the country's Confucian tradition serve to create a sense of belonging and sharedness in a community, and provide a way to interpret this community and the contemporary Chinese nation as having a divine mission. As these Chinese foundational myths combine elements of Confucianism with patriotism and nationalism, they can be interpreted as a constitutive element of a "civil religion with Chinese characteristics", and as providing arguments for a "religious" legitimization of the CCP as organization that has to lead the nation on this mission.

Keywords: Confucianism, New Confucianism, civil religion, political rhetoric

Izvleček

Članek razpravlja o tem, kako sodobne kitajskopolitično-religiozne pripovedi, ki vedno znova govorijo o državni konfucijski tradiciji, služijo za ustvarjanje občutka pripadnosti in sodelovanja v skupnosti in tako zagotavljajo način interpretacije te skupnosti in sodobnega kitajskega naroda, kot bi imeli božje poslanstvo. Ker ti kitajski fundamentalni miti združujejo elemente konfucianizma s patriotizmom in nacionalizmom, jih je mogoče razlagati kot sestavne elemente "ljudske religije s kitajskimi značilnostmi", in tako zagotavljajo argumente za "versko" legitimacijo CCP kot organizacije, ki mora voditi narod na tem poslanstvu.

Ključne besede: konfucianizem, novi konfucianizem, ljudske religije, politična retorika

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*Historiography is a form of symbolical representation of the world,
helping us to understand it by (re-)constructing it.*
(Mittag and Mutschler 2009, 434)

The Power of Historical Narratives

In his speech delivered on 28 August 2013 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, President Barack Obama stated:

[...] We hold these truths to be self-evident, that *all men are equal*, that they are *endowed by their creator* with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness [...] And then, on a hot summer day, they assembled here, in *our nation's capital*, under the shadow of the great emancipator, to offer testimony of injustice, to petition their government for redress and *to awaken America's long-slumbering consciousness*. [...] In the face of hatred, they prayed for their tormentors. In the face of violence, they stood up and sat in with the moral force of nonviolence. Willingly, they went to jail to protest unjust laws, their cells swelling with the sound of freedom songs. A lifetime of indignities had taught them that *no man can take away the dignity and grace that God grants us*. [...] And because they kept marching, America changed. [...] Because they marched, America became more free and more fair, not just for African-Americans but for women and Latinos, Asians and Native Americans, for Catholics, Jews and Muslims, for gays, for Americans with disabilities. America changed for you and for me. *And the entire world drew strength from that example*, whether it be young people who watched from the other side of an Iron Curtain and would eventually tear down that wall or the young people inside South Africa who would eventually end the scourge of apartheid. [...] as people of all colors and creeds live together and learn together and walk together, and fight alongside one another and love one another, and judge one another *by content of our character in this greatest nation on Earth*. [...] The March on Washington teaches us that we are not trapped by the mistake of history, that we are masters of our fate. But it also teaches us that *the promise of this nation will only be kept when we work together*. [...] That's where courage comes from, when we turn not from each other or on each other but towards each one another, and we find that we do not walk alone. That's where courage comes from. [...] And *that's the lesson of our past, that's the promise of tomorrow*, that in the face of impossible odds, *people who love their country can change it*. And when millions of Americans of every race and every region, every faith and every station can join together in a *spirit of brotherhood*, then those mountains will be made low, and those rough places will be made plain, and those crooked places, they straighten out towards grace, and we will vindicate the faith of those who sacrificed so much and *live up to the true meaning of*

our creed as one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.¹ (italics mine)

President Barack Obama's call thus is a renewal of Martin Luther King's appeal to the nation, an appeal that, in a context of prevailing segregation, indeed was a milestone in the realization of the "American dream" for all who, regardless of race or faith, live in the United States. The speech contains the elements that incarnate America's promise: America is the greatest nation on earth; those living in America are created by God and have equal and unalienable rights granted to them by this God—a claim that entails a connection between the secular realm and the realm of the divine—; and the Americans have the natural and moral duty to, in a spirit of brotherhood and building on the past, change their country for the better, and to be the model for the entire world to shape their future.

The extant versions of ancient Chinese philosophical and historical works in a similar way testify of the conviction that the inhabitants of the 'Middle Kingdom' (*Zhongguo*) are of divine origin and have a divine mission. Such elements can be traced as far back in history as the *Shijing* (*Book of Odes*).² In the translation by Arthur Waley (1954, 241–43), the ode "*Sheng min*" (The Birth of [our] People) of this classic work (Part III, Book II, 1) that describes the birth of the Zhou people goes as follows:

She who in the beginning gave birth to the people,
This was Chiang Yüan (Jiangyuan).
How did she give birth to the people?
Well, she sacrificed and prayed
That she might no longer be childless.
She trod on the big toe of God's footprint,
Was accepted and got what she desired.
Then in reverence, then in awe
She gave birth, she nurtured;
And this was Hou Chi (Houji; Lord Millet).

Indeed, she had fulfilled her months,
And her first-born came like a lamb
With no bursting or rending,
With no hurt or harm.
To make manifest His magic power

¹ Transcript courtesy of Federal News Service.

² On the nature of the extant *Mao shi* version of the *Odes* and its importance for Confucianism as civil religion: see further in this article.

God on high gave her ease.
So blessed were her sacrifice and prayer
That easily she bore her child.

Indeed, they put it in a narrow lane;
But oxen and sheep tenderly cherished it.
Indeed, they³ put it in a far-off wood;
But it chanced that woodcutters came to this wood.
Indeed, they put it on the cold ice;
But the birds covered it with their wings.
The birds at last went away,
And Hou Chi (Houji) began to wail.

Truly far and wide
His voice was very loud.
Then sure enough he began to crawl;
Well he straddled, well he reared,
To reach food for his mouth.
He planted large beans;
His beans grew fat and tall.
His paddy-lines were close set,
His hemp and wheat grew thick,
His young gourds teemed.

Truly Hou Chi's (Houji) husbandry
Followed the way that had been shown.
He cleared away the thick grass,
He planted the yellow crop.
It failed nowhere, it grew thick,
It was heavy, it was tall,
It sprouted, it eared,
It was firm and good,
It nodded, it hung—
He made house and home in T'ai (Tai).⁴

Indeed, the lucky grains were sent down to us,
The black millet, the double-kernelled,
Millet pink-sprouted and white.
Far and wide the black and the double-kernelled
He reaped and acred;
Far and wide the millet pink and white

³ Waley (1954, 241, note # 2) remarks that "The ballad does not tell us who exposed the child. According to one version it was the mother herself; according to another, her husband."

⁴ Waley (1954, 242, note # 2) specifies T'ai as "South-west of Wu-kung Hsien, west of Sianfu. Said to be where his mother came from."

He carried in his arms, he bore on his back,
Brought them home, and created the sacrifice.

Indeed, what are they, our sacrifices?
We pound the grain, we bale it out,
We sift, we tread,
We wash it—soak, soak;
We boil it all steamy.
Then with due care, due thought
We gather southernwood, make offering of fat,
Take lambs for the rite of expiation,
We roast, we broil,
To give a start to the coming year.

High we load the stands,
The stands of wood and of earthenware.
As soon as the smell rises
God on high is very pleased:
‘What smell is this, so strong and good?’
Hou Chi (Houji) founded the sacrifices,
And without blemish or flaw
They have gone on till now.

This narrative arguably is the first Chinese historical narrative, and to the extent that it connects the origin of the “Chinese” people to the realm of the divine, may also be regarded as the first “religious” narrative. Apart from the connection between the secular realm and the realm of the divine, it shares some more of the concepts that were also present in the above quoted passage of President Barack Obama’s speech: once born through divine intervention,⁵ the Chinese people keep enjoying divine intervention; agriculture—the economic backbone of the “Middle Kingdom”—flourishes through divine intervention;⁶ and the people are grateful for this divinity and bring sacrificial offers to ensure further divine help. By the time of the Zhou dynasty (1046–771/770–256) and Confucius (551?–479 BCE), further, a hierarchical feudal government headed by the “Son of Heaven” (*tianzi*) had become recognized, and this socio-political model had become reflected in religion, as “the spirits of the dead, nature divinities, and political deities like the

5 Schwartz (1985, 30) remarks that the God (*di*) to which the first stanza of this ode refers, is not a deified ancestor, “but the nonhuman high god who engendered the dynasty.”

6 Waley (1954, 242, note # 1) remarks that the sentence “Followed the way that had been shown” is reminiscent of the following line of the ode *Si wen* of Part IV, Book I, 10 of the *Shijing*: “You gave us wheat and barley in obedience to God’s command” (translated by Waley 1954, 160). It may also be reiterated here that some of the sage rulers of antiquity (the *san huang* and the *wu di*), are directly or indirectly related to agriculture.

god of the Land and Grain, were arranged under a supreme god, who [...] was called Heaven (*tian*) or the Emperor on High (*shangdi*). (Shryock 1966, 4–5) This “Emperor on High” (Waley’s “God on high”) thus became regarded as the divine double of the “Son of Heaven”, the secular ruler (*wang*) whose reign was, through its connection with the realm of the divine, conceived as a divine enterprise. This connection between the realm of the divine and the realm of the secular made it possible that the ruler was perceived as the representative of heaven on earth. The concept of “divine rulership” that comes with this perception, was sanctioned with the promotion of Confucianism to the status of official ideology in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), as this development was shaped within the religious-cultural heritage of the Zhou.⁷ According to the philosophers of the New Text School of Han Confucianism, most important exponent of whom is Dong Zhongshu (179?–104? BCE), a major figure in the promotion of Confucianism to the status of official ideology, any change in one of the constituents of the holistic world—consisting of heaven, man, and earth—naturally has its effect on the other constituents.⁸ This explains why Joseph Needham (1958, 281–82) called this type of Confucianism “cosmological Confucianism”.⁹ The politico-religious character of Confucian rule implies that it is the task of the ruler to safeguard the harmony between all constituent parts of the holistic world, and also explains the popular etymology of the character for “*wang*”, ruler (king), that is mentioned in Xu Shen’s (ca.58–ca.147 CE) *Shuo wen jie zi*, the oldest extant etymological dictionary of the Chinese language. Here we read that, according to Dong Zhongshu, it is so that “when depictions (*wen*) were created in olden [times], three strokes that were connected through the middle were called “*wang*”. The three are heaven, earth and men, and the one who connects them is the “ruler” (*wang*)”. (*Shuo wen jie zi* 1988, 7b) The belief that ancestors (belonging to the realm of the divine) are able to intervene in this life

⁷ Dull (1994, 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 official careers”. Yu (2005, 34) remarks that the politico-religious narrative of Confucianism, in fact, builds on the system that was developed already in the Shang dynasty (trad. 1766–1122 BCE), when ancestors were transformed from kin to symbols of divine power.

⁸ The intricate connection between the realm of secular governance and the realm of the divine is also reflected in the references to the *Shijing* in the Confucian *Lunyu* (*Analects*). References to the *Shijing* are: Book I, chap. xv, 3; Book II, chap. ii; Book III, chap. viii, 3; Book VII, chap. xvii; Book VIII, chap. viii, 1; Book XIII, chap. v; Book XVI, chap. xiii, 2, 5; Book XVII, chap. ix, 1, 2. For the significance of the fact that the *Lunyu* refers to the *Shijing* see Shryock (1966, 4).

⁹ Schwartz (1985, 364) defined this type of cosmology as “essentially a belief that political and social irregularities can invoke important disturbances in nature.” See also Dessein (2008).

makes heaven (the collective of forefathers) not only the last example of the ruler, but also his last judge: it is from heaven that the ruler, the “Son of Heaven”, obtains his mandate to rule (*tianming*), and it therefore also is heaven that can, ultimately, withdraw this mandate.¹⁰ Phrased differently, it is through divine approval of his moral virtue—philosophically articulated in the Confucian concept *ren*, “humaneness”—that the “Son of Heaven” maintains his legitimacy to rule.¹¹ This naturally also explains why ruling has to be based on the wise words of the ancestors,¹² and why ancestral worship—an institution that establishes the organization of authority and thus of political alignments and the territorial division that comes along with it—developed to be an essential part of Confucian state cult.¹³ The Confucian installment of an elaborate system of rules of behavior and ritual prescripts that conform to the hierarchical social structure that was inherited from the Zhou was instrumental in perpetuating the Confucian system.¹⁴ The significance of these rituals was further such that they impacted to commoners “a sense of belonging to an ‘imagined community’ of supremely civilized subjects of the realm”. (Nylan 2009, 61) The merging of the indigenous Confucian political ideology and the age-old acceptance of a divine origin of the “Chinese” people, thus created the possibility that the inhabitants of the central plains (*zhongyuan*)—elite and commoners alike—imagined themselves and the territory they inhabited (*Zhongguo*) as fundamentally different from the people, creeds and customs of the regions surrounding the central plains.

Discussing the concept “All-under-Heaven” (*tianxia*), Michael Nylan (2009, 42–43) remarks that the term “initially referred to the lands and activities under the beneficent supervision of the ancestors of the ruling house,” but that “by a fairly easy extension, the term later suggested the imagined community that depended upon the moral ruler’s exemplary consciousness that he held his lands in trust for the ancestors above and the people below”. The unification of China in the 3rd century BCE and the elevation of Confucianism to state doctrine thus have been of crucial importance in the shaping of the Chinese world view and the Chinese interpretation of politics. This new vision of the world is evident from the

¹⁰ See on this Schwartz 1985, 23.

¹¹ For a discussion of *ren* see Schwartz 1985, 75–85.

¹² See Wechsler 1985, 123; Bauer 2006, 37.

¹³ See Lloyd and Sivin 2002, 193.

¹⁴ Yu (2005, 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 descendants’s fulfilment of their ritual duties on behalf of the state betokened their acknowledgement of the regime’s legitimacy.” See also Nylan 2009, 47.

“Prefaces” to the *Mao shi* version of the *Odes* which were, when not authored in the transitional period from Western to Eastern Han (i.e. ca.50 BCE–50 CE), than at least expanded and revised in that period, present the *Shijing* as one single history of the Zhou from its beginning in the 11th century BCE up to 599 BCE, a history of *Zhongguo*, inhabited by the people of Zhou, and surrounded by barbarian peoples. In its historical approach, the *Mao shi* version of the *Odes* not only constitutes a major break with earlier historical works such as the *Chunqiu* (*Spring-and-Autumn Annals*) or the *Shujing* (*Book of Documents*), (see Mittag 2009, 151–53), but has developed a full-fledged politico-religious narrative. Achim Mittag and Fritz-Heiner Mutschler (2009, 439) characterize the impact of the unification of the Chinese territory and the installation of Confucian rulership as follows:

In the Chinese view, the beginning of human civilization coincides with the emergence of the body politic, i.e. *tianxia*, “All-under-Heaven”. Thus already the Yellow Emperor is said to have received and “possessed” (*you*) *tianxia*, followed by the sage emperor Yao, who chose his successor Shun to “confer” (*shou*) *tianxia* upon him. From Shun, *tianxia* was transmitted to the Great Yu, the founder of the semi-legendary Xia dynasty, and thence down to the Shang and Zhou dynasties. To be sure, the political and cultural elites of early imperial China were well aware that *tianxia* did not yet cover all the known “world”. But the key point is their overriding conception that from the very beginning there was a “universal” order which had been established by the Five Emperors (*wudi*) and handed down the ages.¹⁵

In fact, this perpetual character of Confucian rule could already be discerned in the following two passages from the ode “*Sheng min*” quoted above: “Truly Hou Chi’s husbandry/Followed the way that had been shown (*You xiang zhi dao*),” and “They have gone on till now (*Yi qi yu jin*)”. These sentences imply that the model

¹⁵ This is significantly different from the Roman case. For the Romans of the period of expansion, history was a progressive phenomenon, moving towards their domination of the world through expansion. (See Mittag and Mutschler 2009, 439) According to Pirazzoli-t’Serstevens (2009, 302), although the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming*) had not been taken into account before Emperor Chengdi (r. 33–7 BCE) or as full-fledged theory before Wang Mang (r. 5–23 CE), the concept had been operative even before the 1st century BCE. Pines (2009, 78) remarks that “One aspect of Mozi’s (and Confucius’) legacy [...] was adopted by almost all Zhanguo thinkers and their successors: namely, the assertion that a line of sage monarchs presided over the unified realm from time immemorial”.

set by Houji is also the model to pursue in the future. This, of course, also explains why Houji has been bestowed offerings throughout Chinese history.¹⁶

We can thus sum up that in the Chinese view, the beginnings of human civilization came to be equated with the emergence of “*tianxia*”—an event that already applies to the Yellow Emperor—and that while in the Western Zhou period, the term “*tianxia*” exclusively referred to the royal domain, in the Han dynasty it was expanded to include the imagined territory, the inhabitants of which modeled themselves on the culture of *Zhongguo*.¹⁷ As a consequence, in China, politics were always in some sense internal politics. (see Mittag and Mutschler 2009, 440) This explains why, e.g. the *Gongyang zhuan* (*Gongyang's Commentary on the Chunqiu*) presents unification of All-under-Heaven—including “Chinese” and “barbarian” parts—as the ultimate goal of the true ruler. (see Pines 2009, 81)

That the Confucian state is characterized by an intimate and reciprocal relationship between the ruling house, state power, the concept of ‘empire,’ and the realm of the divine is well illustrated in the following declaration Emperor Yuan of the Han (r. 48–22 BCE) made at the beginning of his reign:

We make it a point to establish personally our *ancestral temple*, because this is the ultimate power to build up our *authority*, eliminate the sprouts of rebellion, and *make the people one*. (Ban 1973, *Hanshu* 10: 3116) (*italics mine*)

This brings us to the broader political mission of the Chinese Confucian state. Commenting on the “*Daxue*”, (*The Great Learning*), the 39th chapter of the *Liji* (*Records of Ritual*), a work compiled in the Han dynasty in the 3rd–2nd century BCE, Wing-tsit Chan (1963, 84) says the following:

The importance of this little Classic is far greater than its small size would suggest. It gives the Confucian educational, moral, and political programs in a nutshell, neatly summed up in the so-called “three items”: manifesting the clear character of man, loving the people and abiding in the highest good; and in the “eight steps”: the investigation of things, extension of knowledge, sincerity of the will, rectification of the mind, cultivation of the personal life, regulation of the family, *national order*, and *world peace*. (*italics mine*)

¹⁶ On the importance of the divine origin of Houji and comparisons with other religions see Waley (1954, 239–40).

¹⁷ See Pines (2009, 72), who, in this respect, elaborates on the importance of a Han re-interpretation of the Ode “*Bei shan*” (ode 205) of the *Mao shi*.

For the present discussion, especially the latter two—national order and world peace—are important. On this issue, the original text has the following to say:

The ancients who *wished to manifest their clear character to the world* would first bring order to their states. Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families. Those who wished to regulate their families would first cultivate their personal lives. Those who wished to cultivate their personal lives would first rectify their minds. Those who wished to rectify their minds would first make their wills sincere. Those who wished to make their wills sincere would first extend their knowledge. The extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things. When things are investigated, knowledge is extended; when knowledge is extended, the will becomes sincere; when the will is sincere, the mind is rectified; when the mind is rectified, the personal life is cultivated; when the personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order; and when the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world. (translation by Wing-tsit Chan 1963, 86–87; italics mine)

The importance of this passage for Chinese political philosophy is hard to be overrated. As Confucianism kept its function of state doctrine throughout China's imperial history—viz. to the beginning of the 20th century—generations of political thinkers have commented on the precise meaning of the text. In his appreciation of the “*Daxue*”, the famous Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200) states:

What is meant by saying *that in order to govern the state it is necessary to regulate the family* is this: There is no one who cannot teach his own family and yet teach others. Therefore the superior man (ruler) without going beyond his family, can bring education into completion in the whole state. *Filial piety is that with which one serves his ruler*. Brotherly respect is that with which one serves his elders, and deep love is that with which one treats the multitude. [...] *When the individual families have become humane, then the whole country will be aroused toward humanity. When the individual families have become compliant, then the whole country will be aroused toward compliance*. [...] Therefore the superior man must have the good qualities in himself before he may require them in other people. [...] Therefore the order of the state depends on the regulation of the family. [...] Only when one has rightly ordered his household can he teach the people of the country. [...] Because he served as a worthy example as a father, son, elder brother, and younger brother, therefore the people imitated him. This is what is meant by saying that the order of the state depends on the regulation of the family.¹⁸

¹⁸ Translated by Wing-tsit Chan 1963, 91–92; italics mine.

A ruler is thus presented as having the task to cultivate himself according to the Confucian (divine) moral principles, in order to influence his state and the world at large (*tianxia*). In this lies a politico-religious mission of the “Son of Heaven” and of *Zhongguo*. Fei Xiaotong (1992, 62–63) illustrated the political view that is expressed in the “*Daxue*” with the metaphor of the concentric circles that appear when throwing a rock into the water. For an individual, the concentric circles of his individual moral and social behavior are the product of his potential moral autonomy. When an individual develops his moral potentiality, he can increase his impact on other individuals and, hence, his value in society. Society thus both is the inspiration and the aim of an individual’s existence (Shun 2004, 190–93),¹⁹ and the value of an individual is measured by his value for society (Fei 1992, 67). In the same way as each individual is at the center of the circles produced by his or her own social influence, also each state is at the center of the concentric circles of its moral and political influence. The morality of a state expands to the world at large, to “All-under-Heaven”. Applied to international relations, this viewpoint was traditionally interpreted as that when the ruler, the “Son of Heaven”, successfully safeguards the harmonious (cosmological) relations in his state through his superb Confucian behavior, this influence would extend to the neighboring territories, the so-called “tribute states”, with China, the “Middle Kingdom” at the center.²⁰ The relation between *Zhongguo* and the bordering regions was interpreted as the relation between an older brother and a younger brother, in which China is the older brother and the non-Chinese territories are the younger brothers. As in a family, the older brother sets the moral example for the younger, and the younger brother follows this example. As with individual relations, “All-under-Heaven” is both the inspiration and the aim of China’s existence, and economic and political relations with the so-called “tribute states” were philosophized in similar terms (Fairbank 1942, 137–39). While China interpreted the existence of these tribute relations as a proof that the Chinese emperor excelled in Confucian virtue—which added to the cultural prestige of the empire and thus also served an internal political agenda, for the so-called “tribute states”, these “tribute relations” were primarily of economic importance. For them, engaging in a “tribute relation” with China, the regionally most important political

¹⁹ See also Schwartz 1985, 113.

²⁰ Schmidt-Glintzer (2009, 179) remarks that already in the “*Yu gong*” chapter of the *Shanhai jing* (*Classic of Mountains and Seas*), the world is represented as consisting of five concentric zones: the royal domain, the domains of the princes, the pacification zone, the zone of allied barbarians, and the zone of savagery.

and economic power, was a necessary condition to be able to establish commercial relations. In periods in which the cultural luster of the Chinese Confucian elite in the capital was waning, the “cultural model” based on moral virtue no longer worked. As a result, the Chinese political elite could no longer maintain its cultural authority over the bordering territories and also the “tribute states” no longer had a political, economic or cultural profit in maintaining their relations with China. The more recent and the less thorough the connection with China had been, the easier Chinese culture disappeared again. (Fairbank and Teng 1941, 129–30) It can therefore be argued that Chinese history is a continuous movement of slowly surging and retreating concentric circles of cultural Han influence.

Reconsidering Confucianism—Phase One

Although the intellectual climate of the end of the 19th and the early 20th century is characterized by a profound self-doubt and culture criticism (Jansen 2009, 402), the perception that there is a connection between Confucianism as moral guideline and national power continued to linger on, even after the fall of the Qing Empire in 1911. As remarked by Julia Schneider (2012, 54):

At the same time Han Chinese scholars began to think about the validity of their own historical models based on Confucian philosophy like historical atrophy (*lishi tuihua*), a belief in the great achievements of the so-called Golden Age and the general notion that the past could provide a model for present-day politic²¹ continued.

The ambivalence between the notion of China as model state and the conviction that the traditional Confucian state had to be overturned in order to create a modern nation-state, is also evident from Liang Qichao’s (1873–1929) claim that the new nation-state that had to be built from the rumble of the multi-ethnic Qing dynasty should not mean that “several equally powerful peoples live next to and with each other in One State”, but that “One People (*Eine Nation*)” should take a superior position among them. (Schneider 2012, 61) It is very likely that Liang Qichao was herein heavily influenced by the theories of Johann Kaspar Bluntschli who, in his *Lehre vom modernen Staat* of 1886, had claimed that such a nationalization can only be successful where “die herrschende Nation den übrigen an Bildung, Geist und Macht entschieden überlegen ist” (Bluntschli 1965, 1:

²¹ See also Moloughney and Zarrow 2012, 4.

109).²² Similarly, Liang Qichao ascribed to the Han the same role Bluntschli had ascribed to the “Aryans”, i.e., that they were destined to be the guides for all people around them and lead them to the nation-state. The distinction Liang Qichao makes between “small nationalism” (*xiao minzhu zhuyi*) and “great nationalism” (*da minzu zhuyi*), and his claim that it is “large nationalism” that is to be supported, reveals that he also adhered to the “international” dimension of the Han concept of “All-under-Heaven”. With “small nationalism”, he refers to the sentiment of the Han people towards other ethnicities inside the borders of the former Qing empire (*guonei*), while “great nationalism” refers to the sentiments of all people towards all people outside the borders of the former Qing empire (*guowai*). (Liang 1983b, 75)²³ Reminiscent of the Confucian idea that “China” is the “model” for others to emulate, he here introduces the concept of China’s “assimilative power” (*Zhongguo tonghuali*). This “power” is the power of superior ethnicities (i.c. the Han) to “swallow inferior weak ethnicities and wipe their frontiers” (Liang 1983a, 11).²⁴ He therefore meaningfully appeals to his readers with the following words:

[...] unite Han, unite Manchus, unite Mongols, unite Turkish Muslims, unite Miao, unite Tibetans and form one large nation (*yi da minzu*). Then we will form one third of the world’s population. And we will extend widely about the five continents.²⁵ (Liang 1983b, 76)

And he specifies

If this [unification] is really achieved, then this large nation (*da minzu*) has to take the Han people as their centre (*zhong xindian*). Moreover, their organization has to be formed by the hands of the Han people. About this fact, one cannot argue. (Liang 1983b, 76)²⁶

²² See also Bluntschli 1965, vol.1: 108: “Die Tendenz des Staates, gestützt auf die hervorragende Kultur einer Nationalität, allmählich die anderen nationalen Elemente zu assimilieren und dadurch das ganze Volk zu einer Nation umzuwandeln [...]”. See also Schneider 2012, 61–63.

²³ See also Schneider 2012, 66–67.

²⁴ Bluntschli (1874, 41) gives the simile of casting iron: “The civilizations of the world were all completed through mutual teaching and mutual guidance of all kinds of ethnicities (*zhu zhong minzu*). Regarding the affairs of a single state they are also often achieved and improved through the help and assistance of other ethnicities. [This is] like the casting of coins: one does not only use pure gold and silver, but also mixes and adds one or two cheap metals. Only then the coins are quite complete, and the lines and colours are prettier” (translated by Schneider 2012, 61).

²⁵ Translated by Schneider 2012, 69.

²⁶ Translated by Schneider 2012, 69.

This political ideal is in line with the concept of an “ancestral state” as defined by Anthony C. Yu (2005, 146): a state which “in its demand for total and unconditional submission exists to make the people one (*yi min*) by erasing all differences—whether ethnic, cultural, political, or linguistic” (italics mine). The awareness that Han civilization can serve as a model, and the conviction that ethnicity (*minzu*) is fundamental in the creation of a Chinese nation-state is also apparent in Sun Zhongshan’s (1866–1925) claim that “China has been a state comprised of one people since the Qin and Han Dynasties”; (Sun 1974, 186) and in his understanding that ethnicity (*minzu*) is synonymous with *guozu*, “statism”. When Sun Zhongshan, in his inaugural speech on the first congress of the Nationalist Party in 1912, declared that he no longer wanted to “govern” the state through the Party (*yi dang zhi guo*), but to “establish” it through the Party (*yi dang jian guo*), he gave expression to his conviction that the Nationalist Party had developed from an ideological movement to an instrument of power politics, i.e. in the same way that the Qin and the Han had united the then “*tianxia*”, also now the “Chinese” world had to be “re-united” before it could be governed. (Fitzgerald 1996, 185) As a consequence, nationalist feelings for the state were identified with the Nationalist Party as the incarnation of this new state, a situation that is reflected in the term *dangguo*, “party state”.²⁷ As a result, the only way for the citizens to respond to the nationalist appeal and to contribute to the “establishment of the state” was to become member of the Nationalist Party, viz. the instrument to establish the state and to make the people one.²⁸

Reconsidering Confucianism—Phase Two

Although the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP) had appealed itself to Sun Zhongshan’s Han nationalist ideology in its resistance against Japan, once having come to power in 1949, it turned to Marxism-Leninism to build up a “New China”, now called “*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo*” (People’s Republic of China). In contradistinction to the concept “*Zhongguo*” that essentially refers to the “central plains” (*zhongyuan*), the term “*zhonghua*” in “*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo*” denotes the assembly of the fifty-six ethnic groups that live in the territory of the

²⁷Notice the combination of “*guo*” “(nation-)state” with “*min*,” “people”—the “*min*” of “*minzu zhuyi*”, “nationalism”, in the term “*Guomindang*”.

²⁸ Notice that also Kang Youwei’s (1858–1927) appeal to the Chinese *huaqiao* in Southeast Asia to contribute to the build-up of the national industry reveals his conviction that the primary loyalty of the *huaqiao* was to their native homeland. On the importance of redefining the notion of *huaqiao* in terms of loyalty to the Chinese nation-state, see Harrison 2001, 110.

former Qing empire.²⁹ In a broader sense, building on the concept “*huaqiao*” as it was defined in the Republican period, this new name also comprises the overseas Chinese, and the people of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.³⁰ The choice for Marxism-Leninism was not self-evident: Marx and Engels had anticipated that a workers’ revolution would occur in a highly developed capitalist society, after which a socialist state would be installed whose primary function would be the equalization of wealth rather than dealing with the problem of production. (Chang 2001, 142–43) In 1949, China was far from being a capitalist industrialized nation. Marxism did provide an answer, though, for the apparent insolvable difficulty of “making the people one”, viz., of bringing the Han and the different non-Han peoples of the former Qing empire into one nation-state: the Marxist emphasis on class struggle enabled the equation of all the different ethnic groups of the former empire as, in the class struggle, not the opposition between the various ethnic groups and the Han is highlighted as the most fundamental opposition, but the class differences within each of these individual ethnic groups. In its appeal to the Marxist class struggle, the CCP pictured itself as the representative of the modernistic vanguard that assists the Han and non-Han alike to realize their own liberation within a reunited classless nation state.³¹ In its appeal to the nation, the CCP “party state” (*dangguo*) replaced the Han ethnic party state of the Nationalists.³² The fact that the CCP was (and still is) an above all Han dominated organization gives its vocation to be the vanguard of modernization a flavor of

²⁹ Chang (2001, 45), explains: “‘*Huaxia*’ was the earliest name for the Chinese people until it was supplanted by ‘*Hanren*’ (People of Han). Today, ‘*Huaxia*’ denotes a cultural identity; whereas Han is an ethnic term, differentiating the Han from the other ethnic groups in the People’s Republic of China. As scholars of the People’s Republic of China insist, ‘The Chinese culture, with *Huaxia* as its core [...] includes the cultures of all the members of the big family of the Chinese nation’, but the ‘Han race (*Hanzu*)’ is China’s ‘mainstream or host (*zhuti*) nation’. Contemporary Chinese call themselves *Huaren* (Hua people), and the overseas diaspora Chinese call themselves *Huayi* (Hua posterity). The combination of ‘*Zhongyuan*’ (Central Plains), the word from which the concept ‘*Zhongguo*’ [...] is derived, and ‘*Huaxia*’ produces ‘*Zhonghua*’ (China or Chinese), a word that is also part of the name ‘*Zhonghua Minguo*’ (Republic of China).”

³⁰ Therefore, Fitzgerald 1996, 57, claims that the People’s Republic of China is a state without nation, since, with the unity as state, there is no corresponding uniform nation.

³¹ Chen Duxiu (1880–1942), a founder of the CCP, wrote in *Xin Qingnian* Vol.VIII/1 (September 1920): “I recognize the existence of only two nations, that of the capitalists, and that of the workers;” and “At present, the ‘nation’ of the workers exists only in the Soviet Union. Everywhere else we have the ‘nation’ of the capitalists.” Quoted from Schwartz 1968, 28. See also Fitzgerald 1996, 321, 348.

³² Fitzgerald (1996, 348) remarks: “The question at issue was how to essentialize the national self, which was to be represented by the state and awakened as a mass community”. It has, in this respect, been proven that building one single political party is more efficient for political institutionalization than immediately to proceed to a multiparty system is. See Huntington 1971, 478.

patronism and, in some sense, re-introduces the old culturalist idea that the Han are the older brothers to whom the different ethnic groups stand in an older brother-younger brother relation. Put differently, the degree to which the People's Republic of China becomes a modern state depends on the CCP's success to bring all its citizens to the level of development of the Han. (Nimni 1995, 57–61)

When Mao Zedong died on 9 September 1976, China was not more a fully industrialized nation than it had been when he had come to power. In order to lift the country out of the dire economic state in which it had fallen, Deng Xiaoping (1904–1993) emphasized the concept of “productive forces” as, according to him, it was industrial development that had to make China into a modern nation-state. This new emphasis enabled him to bring economic reforms into a Marxist framework, as “productive forces” encompasses more than only the working class, and gives room for the introduction of capitalist instruments. In order to attract “foreign” knowledge and capital, just as Kang Youwei had done earlier, also Deng Xiaoping appealed to the *huaqiao*. In his claim that: “No matter what clothes they wear or what political stand they take, all Chinese have a sense of pride and identification with the Chinese nation and would want the People's Republic of China to become strong and prosperous” (Deng 1987, 51)³³, he not only focused on their Han ethnicity, but also on their connection to the “Chinese nation”.

Reconsidering Confucianism—Phase Three

Dengist economic reforms that started at the end of the 1970s have led to an unprecedented economic growth of one single country in such a short time span. Capitalist economic development has, however, also increased the wealth gap between different social groups in Chinese society. It is not without importance that those people who have suffered the most from economic reforms and social inequality in the new era, are not seldom precisely those people who were the greatest advocates of CCP rule in the Maoist era. This, combined with the fact that, in China, it is the CCP that is engineering a capitalist economic model, have questioned the communist identity of the Party among some groups of Chinese society. The greater degree of autonomy in the economic domain has also fed ethnic nationalism among some ethnic groups that feel themselves supported in their “uniqueness”. This is especially true for those regions that had enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy also under Qing rule: Xinjiang, Mongolia and Tibet,

³³ See also note # 27.

i.e. regions at the far end of the concentric circles of China's "*tianxia*". This growing ethnic unrest, the fact that the Party increasingly co-operates with the West to achieve its economic goals, and the growing involvement of China in bodies of global governance, have called into question the historical "nationalist" claim of the CCP.

Against the background of growing social disparity and ethnic tension, and a diminished "national(ist)" appeal of the Party, a revaluation of traditional Chinese culture in the People's Republic of China that started with the condemnation of the Gang of Four and of their iconoclastic policies, has become increasingly apparent. (Bresciani 2001, 420) This revaluation is sustained by the fact that while in the Republican period and in the first decades of the People's Republic traditional Confucian culture was portrayed as an obstacle for development, in much of Southeast Asia (the so-called Asian tigers) the presence of elements of traditional Chinese culture, often labeled "Confucianism", is commonly seen as the reason of the success of business and commerce within the Chinese communities in these regions. (Harrison 2001, 262) The fact that, as argued above, Confucian memory has, in fact, never disappeared, helps to explain the success of this revaluation.³⁴ This reappraisal of Confucian values goes hand in hand with the Party's patriotic stance. Patriotism affects the nation-state as a whole, not a single national/ethnic group. In this respect, the Marxist emphasis on class struggle is seen as contrary to Confucianism that is an ideology of harmony. Re-installing a "Confucian" harmonious society (*hexie shehui*) thus entails a renewal of the traditional Chinese values.³⁵ Moreover, as the CCP is, through the concept of "*dangguo*", identified with the People's Republic, patriotism also affirms its position as ruling party and can serve as an instrument to counter the centrifugal powers of ethnic nationalism. Historical memory is an important element in this: it is the CCP that, after the period of Western domination, reunified China. A weakened position of the Party is therefore portrayed as a virtual threat to territorial unity as in these circumstances, China might, once again, fall prey to Western dominance.³⁶ In its

³⁴ It may, here, also be reminded that also during the Maoist years, Confucius was studied assiduously, be it in order to criticize him (Bresciani 2001, 419).

³⁵ Although there is no direct reference to the concept "*hexie shehui*" in the Confucian literature, the concept is generally accepted to be related to the concept "brotherhood" (*datong*) of chapter VII, *Li jun*, of the *Liji*.

³⁶ Already Deng Xiaoping cautioned that if China were to descend into "turmoil", the situation would be far worse than during the Cultural Revolution because the country no longer had "prestigious leaders" like Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai to hold it together. Chang (2001, 163) suggests that this is also the reason why Deng Xiaoping did not completely denounce Mao Zedong,

continued emphasis of its role as binding factor in the Chinese nation-state, patriotism is thus further complemented with nationalism. (Rainey 2010, 181–83) The state’s renewed interest for Confucianism is, e.g. also evident in the term “*xiaokang shehui*” that refers to the economic policy of the Hu Jintao era. While the concept “*xiaokang shehui*” builds on the 7th chapter of the Han dynasty Confucian classic *Liji* (Dessein 2011) the term “*xiaokang*” itself already appears in the ode “*Min lao*” (The People Are Hard Pressed) of the part *Daya* of the *Shijing* (Part III, Book II, 9). In the translation by James Legge (1970, 495), the first stanza of the ode goes as follows:

The people indeed are heavily burdened,
But perhaps a little ease (*xiaokang*) may be got for them.
Let us cherish this *centre of the kingdom*,
To secure the repose of the four quarters of it.
Let us give no indulgence to the wily and obsequious,
In order to make the unconscientious careful,
And to repress robbers and oppressors,
Who Have no fear of the clear will [of Heaven].
Then let us show kindness to those who are distant,
And help those who are near;—
Thus establishing [the throne of] our king. (italics mine)

The message the contemporary concept “*Xiaokang shehui*” thus conveys contains ample elements we also discerned in the Ode “*Min sheng*” discussed in the beginning of this article. In the context of contemporary economic and social developments, these are that (1) the masses of the people resort to a moral leadership (“cherish this centre of the kingdom”) that will (2) guide them to a peaceful era through economic development and social redistribution (“a little ease may be got for them”); that this is (3) modeled on ancient models (“have no fear of the clear will of Heaven”), and that (4) will be the model for the homeland and internationally (“show kindness to those who are distant, and help those who are near”), and, as such (5) be a model for the world at large (“establishing the throne of our king”).

The politico-religious mission of this contemporary emphasis on patriotism and nationalism goes along with a reappraisal of the past—China’s 5,000 years

and why, although he did not seem to object to Western democracy in principle, he rejected it in practice.

long history. This can be seen in the following statement by Liu Qi, then member of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party and president of the organizational committee of the Beijing Olympic Games, done at the occasion of the launching of the Olympic Slogan “One People, One Dream” on 21 April 2006. Liu Qi commented on the Olympic slogan as follows:

It is a slogan that conveys the lofty ideal of people in Beijing as well as in China to share the global community and civilization and to create a bright future hand in hand with people from the rest of the world. It expresses the firm belief of a great nation, with a long history of 5,000 years and on its way towards modernization, that is committed to peaceful development, a harmonious society and people’s happiness.

This comment contains three important claims with respect to the present discussion: (1) the concept of a Chinese nation that has a history of 5,000 years; (2) China’s desire to become part of a peaceful globalized world; and (3) the claim that it is modernization that will lead to a national and international harmonious society. This ideal has, in 2013, been rephrased as the “Chinese Dream” by the present leadership.

New Confucianism as Civil Religion

The three claims contained in Liu Qi’s statement are exponent of two types of “nationalism”: cultural nationalism that is rooted in China’s history, and political nationalism that originated along with the modernization concept in the early 20th century. While, e.g., Tu Weiming (1989) interprets the Confucian revival as a search for cultural roots and thus as a spontaneous event, the reappraisal of Confucianism by the ruling CCP undeniably also is to be explained as a symptom of the necessity for an instrument to boast feelings of nationalism and patriotism.³⁷ Indeed, as claimed by Harvey Nelson (2000, 227), apart from some traditional family values, Confucianism has lost its ability to really rally the contemporary Chinese citizens. Against the background of a faltering Marxism-Leninism, the contemporary revival of Confucianism in China has therefore above all to be interpreted as a deliberate movement by the government to fuse superficial popular sentiments and a longing for “golden pre-Marxist-Leninist times” (Chen 2005, 51) with its official rhetoric. In an increasingly globalized world and its concomitant search for national identity, Han culture is, by the ruling CCP, defined as an

³⁷ On the issue of the difference between bottom-up and top-down political nationalism (Kruithof 2000, 233–34).

essential part of Chinese identity, and, although in the not too far past, Confucius was condemned as a reactionary enemy, he is now increasingly embraced. In this process, further, the CCP's nationalist and patriotic stance and popular nationalism may enhance one another. The recuperation of popular Confucian sentiment by the ruling CCP makes PRC New Confucianism different from its counterpart on Taiwan: despite the fact that also the Nationalist Party had grown out of the May Fourth Movement, Nationalist rule on Taiwan did not comprise the same intense repression of traditional values as they had to witness during the decades of Marxist-Leninist "iconoclastic nationalism".

A highly remarkable cultural site in this respect is the "*Huangdi guli*" (Old site of the Yellow Emperor) in Xinzheng, Henan Province. On the site, the visitor is guided along a series of square pillars on each side of which a short introduction is given to one of the fifty-six officially recognized ethnic groups that live on the Chinese territory, and along a sacrificial vessel in the style of a Zhou dynasty tripod. The route eventually leads to a statue of the Yellow Emperor. This site is, as it were, an incarnation of the traditional Confucian political ideology: all ethnicities in "*tianxia*" merge into the Yellow Emperor. The description of the site on its website reads as follows:

In order to exhalt the *magnificent traditional culture of the Chinese people (Zhonghua minzu)*, to show the magnificence of the culture that has its basis in Henan, and to create *a holy place where the Hua-people of the whole world can search for their roots* and are able to *show respect to their ancestors*, the town of Xinzheng, supported by the highest authorities and the descendants of Yanhuang³⁸ within China and abroad, has created a cultural site in order to vehemently exploit the culture of the Yellow Emperor. After the 90s of the 20th century, enlargement and embellishment projects have continuously been set up in the scenic site of *Huangdi guli*, whereby the present area of the domain is more than 70,000 square meter. [...] The present scenic site *Huangdi guli* [...] is *a holy place where the descendents of Yanhuang from within the country and abroad can show respect to their ancestors and can search for their roots*. It has an enormous appeal on the descendents of Yanhuang, and brings [them] together. It incorporates the spirit of Zhonghua and the roots of the ethnicities. The scenic site *Huangdi guli* is an important national protected cultural unity, a scenic site of the national AAAA-

³⁸ "*Huang*" in the term "*yangyan*" refers to Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor; "*yan*" refers to Yandi: Emperor Yan. According to legend, Yandi and Huangdi ruled over conquering territories. In a battle between them, Yandi was beaten by Huangdi, whereafter the people of both territories amalgamated to the "Huaxia". In this sense, both Huangdi and Yandi are seen as the ancestors of the Huaxia. (See also note # 27)

catégorie,³⁹ *a base for patriotic education of the Chinese huaqiao*, a base for patriotic education of the province of Henan, one of the ten outstanding touristic scenic sites of the city of Zhengzhou, a base for the patriotic education of the youth of the city of Zhengzhou, etc. [...] The ceremony of showing respect in *Huangdi guli* is categorized in the second section of the catalogue of immaterial cultural inheritance of China. *Huangdi guli gradually has become the spiritual cradle of the descendants of Yanhuang within this country and abroad*, a holy place where the ethnic groups search for their roots, and show respect to their ancestors, the *spiritual homeland of the Chinese people*. (Own translation; italics mine) (Huangdi guli)

The text on this site thus connects the mythical origin of the Chinese people—the Yellow Emperor—to the contemporary Chinese nation-state. We can also reiterate here, as discussed above, that the Chinese view is that human civilization started with the emergence of the concept of “*tianxia*”, and that the Yellow Emperor is said to have received and possessed “All-under-Heaven” as, from the very beginning, there was a “universal” order “which had been established by the Five Emperors (*di*) and handed down the ages” (Mittag and Mutschler 2009, 439). Or how, as remarked by Martin Kern (2009, 226): “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”.⁴⁰

In the same way as Han dynasty Confucianism was shaped within the framework of the religious-cultural heritage of the Zhou dynasty and created the idea of a “national” unity and continuity that started with the Yellow Emperor, contemporary political historiography connects the mission of the unified Chinese nation-state to inherited politico-religious narratives. Where, as argued by Michelle A. Gonzalez (2012, 571), politicians in liberal democracies are acknowledging the political functioning of religious believers and have become increasingly aware of it that religion can be manipulated in order to attract voters because voters with religious values vote for politicians of whom they think they share the same religious values, in authoritarian states—the People’s Republic of China being an example in case—political theology is an instrument used by the ruling authorities to ensure the stability of the state through appealing to the

³⁹ The highest category is AAAAA.

⁴⁰ With respect to pre-imperial bronze inscriptions, Kern (2009, 226) remarks that these inscriptions “commemorated and preserved but the sacralized distillate of history, creating a representation of the past that was as radically abbreviated as it was profoundly ideological. [...] the rhetoric of the inscriptions [...] annihilated the multi-perspective records of all the former states and replaced them with the single and central perspective of the universal ruler. They silenced the many voices of history and monopolized memory”.

population's patriotic sentiments for a divine nation. Seen from the other side of the electoral process, where liberal democracies are characterized by the fact that interest groups may elect individuals based on theology with the perception that this will lead to their theological worldview being represented in government, in authoritarian states, the support of the people for the government is a product of the degree to which the people perceive the government to bring its historic mission to a good end. (Bellah 2006, 228) In China, therefore, the contemporary politico-religious narrative appeals on the Chinese citizens as heirs of a divine tradition, and as responsible to bring the divine mission of the nation to a good end. Expressions, symbols, and rituals that are part of a collective "Confucian" memory are used as part of a Confucian "civil religion" that has to affirm, among other things, the CCP's "religious legitimization" as the highest political authority, and, in line with the concept of "cosmological Confucianism", this authority is presented as only being able to fulfill its mission of realizing the "Chinese Dream" with the support of the people, that is, loyalty to the Party. Confucianism thus is an instrument that presents the modern Chinese nation-state and its policies as sacred institutions under the divine rulership of the CCP.

Also on an international level, Confucianism as civil religion can bring the country close to the idea that it serves a divine will—in the same way that civil religion in the American context combines an emphasis on the blessedness of the nation with its role as an agent of good in the world, and, as a result, gives government divine authority and makes the president appear as "the high-priest of the US as blessed nation". (Gonzalez 2012, 572) This perception explains why the revaluation of Confucianism—at least in the minds of some New Confucians—has given rise to the idea that the rest of the world should be convinced of the values of Confucianism, and that a symbiosis between western values and Confucian values is the way out of an alleged 21st century moral and political degeneration. The "Confucianized" CCP nation-state is thus also presented as the legitimate successor to the empire—a model to be emulated (see also Kahn 2011, 2).⁴¹

Through the contemporary politico-religious and historical narratives, New Confucianism can thus be interpreted as a constitutive element of a 'civil religion with Chinese characteristics'. Just as in the American case, civil religion can be used as an instrument to manipulate and change perceptions about how the United

⁴¹ Tamney and Chiang (2002, 74) called this kind of Confucianism a "stripped-down version of Confucianism".

States act as a Christian nation and can come dangerously close to presenting the United States as embodying God's will, for the Chinese case, Confucianism takes this role. The diverse religious makeup of the different people in the Chinese nation-state are erased in this narrative, leaving only the false notion that China *is* a Confucian nation, the same way as the United States would be a Christian nation. As remarked by Paul W. Kahn's (2011: 23), "In a crisis, it remains true today that the secular state does not hesitate to speak of sacrifice, patriotism, nationalism, and homeland in the language of the sacred."

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