

The Confucian Body

Thomas A. Wilson, editor. *On Sacred Grounds: Culture, Society, Politics, and the Formation of the Cult of Confucius*. Harvard East Asian Monographs 217. Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002. xvi, 424 pp. Hardcover \$45.00, ISBN 0-674-00961-4.

There was a time, as late as the first half of the twentieth century, when Western academic readers were likely to come across the statement that Buddhism was not a religion but rather a secular system of philosophy or mental cultivation. Such a claim would be based on a very selective reading of Buddhist texts; an absence of other kinds of investigation, such as observation of Buddhist practices other than meditation; and a set of assumptions about what constitutes religion that was based on a Western, primarily Christian, standard. When religion is defined as the belief in a supreme being, for example, Theravada Buddhism clearly falls outside that category—especially if one limits investigation to normative religious texts. (Asking ordinary lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka what they believe might yield different conclusions.)

Those days are, happily, over. The Western understanding of Buddhism has grown broader and deeper, while implicit theological agendas informing scholarship, when they exist at all, are no longer as simplistic as they once were (although they will probably seem so to our successors). But to those scholars who consider Confucianism to be a religious tradition (and I am one), the current state of scholarship may still seem like the dark ages. Precisely the same conditions that gave rise to the misunderstanding of Buddhism in the past are today continuing to reinforce old notions of Confucianism as merely a socio-ethical-political system of thought. We occasionally find this even in sophisticated sinological scholarship on Chinese religions.¹ Further reinforcement often comes from Chinese from the People's Republic—where there are five officially recognized religions, and Confucianism is not one of them—many of whom have grown up under a regime that had very specific things to say about Confucianism.

There are two ways of examining this question, one falling roughly under the humanities disciplines and the other under the social sciences. The humanities approach often starts by proposing or choosing a definition of religion and then proceeds to demonstrate that Confucian writings—not limited to the *Analects* or the Classics—display the necessary characteristics of a religious tradition. An example of this kind of approach is Rodney Taylor's collection of essays, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990). Taylor, relying primarily on Frederick Streng's definition of religion, shows convincingly that

Confucianism can usefully be analyzed as a “means of ultimate transformation,” the goal of which is Sagehood, defined with reference to the transcendent realm of Heaven. This approach relies primarily on phenomenology and hermeneutics to analyze and interpret the religious meanings of Confucian texts and to situate them in the discursive framework of the cross-cultural study of religion.

The majority of the essays in *On Sacred Grounds* address the question of the religious dimensions of Confucianism from a social science perspective. Four of the contributors, including the editor, are historians; the others represent the fields of anthropology, journalism, history of music, history of art, and religious studies. The general aim of the collection is “to return ritual (as theory and practice) to our thinking about Confucianism” (p. 35) and to “draw attention to Confucianism’s corporeality and religiousness” (p. 36), and in these respects it succeeds admirably. As the title suggests, the central focus of the book is really the Confucian temple as the chief ritual site. The cluster of specific topics around this focus includes the music that always accompanies Confucian ritual; the mythic and iconographic figure of Confucius, who is the chief recipient of ritual sacrifice; his flesh-and-blood descendants (the Kong family), who during Imperial times were responsible for keeping the cult alive (in exchange for extraordinary state-mandated favors and wealth); and the politics surrounding the temples, especially in the Ming dynasty and the early years of the People’s Republic. By fleshing out these aspects of the history of Confucianism, *On Sacred Grounds* demonstrates in very concrete ways that the tradition has all the characteristics usually associated with religions, and it does so without relying on any specific definition of religion. In other words, it demonstrates that Confucianism is religious by anyone’s definition. In this respect it may turn out to be more convincing than a more theoretical or phenomenological approach—especially to historians, many of whom, in excluding Confucianism from the category, uncritically assume a commonsense, Western-based definition of religion that automatically excludes other models.

Thomas Wilson, the editor of this collection, is a historian who is a notable exception to the generalization above. Although he doesn’t explicitly discuss the category per se, he clearly understands that Confucian religiousness differs from the Western model. In his Introduction Wilson correctly identifies the roots of the “problem” of Confucian religiousness as the Western tendencies (1) to privilege the *Analects* instead of reading a wider corpus of Confucian texts, starting with the *Shijing* (Classic of odes) and the *Liji* (Record of ritual), (2) to read the *Analects* “in the service of Western philosophical and theological agendas,” and (3) to ignore or fail to recognize the centrality of Confucian ritual theory and practice, such as liturgical song and sacrifice (pp. 12–13). Wilson nicely captures the moral and philosophical implications of this perspective in pointing to “Confucius’s acute sense of the breakdown of the cosmic (as well as the social)

order of things as he witnessed the degradation of the rites that he lamented in Book 3 of the *Analects*” (ibid.). It would be difficult to argue that such a reaction (assuming for the moment that the *Analects* accurately represents Confucius’ thinking) was based on an understanding of ritual as merely a means of enforcing social order. Confucius’ innovation was not a turn from religion to philosophy but rather a philosophical deepening of a fundamentally religious worldview.

Wilson briefly unpacks the history of the misperception of Confucius as a kind of rational skeptic by focusing on the theological agendas of the early translators of the Chinese Classics, such as the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries, and the nineteenth-century Protestant missionary James Legge. Legge considered Confucius to be a skeptic, but he also believed that the imperial sacrifices to Heaven preserved “vestiges of an underlying monotheism” (p. 6). In other words, the Chinese had been early recipients of a divine revelation that had nearly been lost, so it was appropriate that the missionaries restore to them their own ancient tradition and its later (Christian) developments. Understanding the origins of the Western heritage of Confucian scholarship obviously sheds light on the “conventional wisdom” that prevails today. One point that Wilson omits is the use of the word “classic” to translate *jing*—the same word rendered (in Sanskrit) in a Buddhist context as *sūtra* and in a Chinese-Christian context as “scripture” (e.g., the title of the Bible, *Shengjing*, “Holy Scriptures”). The so-called Confucian Classics are sacred scriptures, and it is indeed unfortunate that “Classic” has become so entrenched that even scholars who should know better—such as myself—continue to use it.²

Wilson’s chapter, “Ritualizing Confucius/Kongzi: The Family and State Cults of the Sage of Culture in Imperial China,” is a very thorough history of these cults, although he does not continue the story into the Taiwan phase of the Republic of China. (Taiwan does not even appear in the book’s index, although it is treated in Joseph S. C. Lam’s chapter and mentioned in a few others.) The “family cult” refers to the worship of Confucius as an ancestor by his lineal descendants, primarily at his home town, Qufu, in Shandong Province. This was not simply a family affair, as it was supported and largely regulated by the state. The story is a long and very interesting one, which I will not try to summarize here. The state cult was regulated by the Ministry of Rites as part of its authority over the entire imperially sanctioned pantheon of deities. In addition there were temples and shrines to Confucius at private academies, whose scholars worshipped Confucius as something like the patron deity of their profession (much as printers, shoemakers, and other professions had their own patron deities).

The establishment of Confucianism as “orthodoxy,” as Wilson demonstrates, was a multidimensional process that developed and was refined continuously over a two-thousand-year period, in constant dialogue with religious, political, and social factors. The dimensions of this process included ennoblement (the

granting by the state of mostly posthumous titles of nobility), the granting of other official titles (e.g., Confucius as “Supreme Sage and First Teacher”), enshrinement in the state-supported Confucian temples, regulation of the forms of enshrinement (e.g., with statues or name plaques), regulation of the forms and liturgies of sacrificial ritual at the temple, the development of the civil service examination curriculum, and the printing of classics and commentaries by the state. Ennoblement and enshrinement, in particular, went through so many changes that a tabular presentation might have been easier for the reader to digest than the story in prose. Confucius, his disciples, his later followers, his descendants, and his ancestors were all, at various times, given official titles (which were frequently changed), installed in and sometimes removed from the temples, had their locations in the temples changed, and so forth.

Following Wilson’s “Ritualizing Confucius” is Deborah Sommer’s “Destroying Confucius: Iconoclasm in the Confucian Temple,” which focuses on the Ming dynasty debate over whether the sages (*sheng*), correlates (*pei*), wise ones or servants (*zhe*), and worthies (*xian*) in the imperial Confucian temples in the capital and provinces should be represented by sculpted images, as they had been, or by simple “spirit plaques” (*shenwei*)—painted wooden plaques, usually about three feet high and eight inches wide (my estimate), giving the currently official posthumous title of the person in question. The Ming emperor decided in 1530 to have the images destroyed, and to this day only spirit plaques are found in Confucian temples—except for the one at Qufu, where Confucius is worshipped by his descendants as an ancestor.

Sommer, whose field is religious studies, focuses on the phenomenological elements of the debate, and this chapter nicely complements the one by Huang Chin-shing, who covers some of the same ground from a political perspective. Sommer also has the sharpest focus on the “corporeality” of Confucianism, in the very literal sense of beliefs concerning the blood and *qi* connection between Confucius and his descendants; the “liminal status of images (both imagined and concrete)” (p. 97), standing between the world of living human bodies and the invisible world of the spirits; and the mediating function of sacrifice as communication across the “continuum between the living body of flesh and bones and the body transformed by the passage into death and beyond, into the spirit world” (p. 98). She outlines three ritual modes of representation of this liminal phase: visualization of the deceased by filial descendants; the “personator” of the dead—“a young descendant of the deceased who temporarily adopted the identity of the recently departed and participated as a guest of honor in a commemorative funerary meal” (p. 101); and the painted or sculpted image. The continuity of the psycho-physical-spiritual body across the life-death continuum, as descendants communicate with and later become ancestors, embodies the all-important continuity of the family line through the generations.

The nonduality of body and spirit (or mind), which is the fundamental concept in Chinese “natural philosophy,” does not mean that no distinctions are made between the two. Sommer shows that intellectuals as far back as the Song dynasty, such as Su Shi and Cheng Yi, had noted that representational images could never capture the spirit of a deceased ancestor as well as an imagined image. Since representation, along with sacrifice, was a means of communication between the realms, an inaccurate representation would be a note of disharmony that would not only show disrespect for the dead but could also have concrete repercussions for the living. This argument was taken up and developed further in the Ming by Qiu Jun, a high official whose views were influential during the culminating phase of the debate under the reign of the Jiajing emperor (r. 1521–1566), who ordered the destruction of the images. The exemption of the images at the ancestral temples in Qufu was based on the notion that Confucius’ descendants embodied the Sage in their very blood and *qi*, and so the sculpted images there did not need to serve as the medium of communication.³

Joseph S. C. Lam’s chapter, “Musical Confucianism: The Case of ‘*Jikong yuewu*’ [music and dance of the sacrifice to Confucius],” elaborates on the tension between the prescriptive or normative theory of music, in which there is a high level of continuity between the Ming and Qing dynasties, and the more individualized, distinctive performances of particular music masters. The normative theory, based on such texts as the Music section of the *Liji* and the *Lülü xinshu* (New treatise on music theory) by Cai Yuanding of the Song dynasty, presents music as the “sonic embodiment” of natural principles, the human mind/heart, the humane ruler, the ideal society, and Confucianism itself (pp. 134, 146). As the sonic counterpart of ritual (*li*), music is a “means of governance and self-cultivation” (p. 134). Proper sacrificial music corresponds with the season, the location, and the type and rank of deity. Its variables include melody, text, mode, number of singers, dancers, and musicians, the arrangement of players, the types of sounds, and the materials used to produce them.

Lam demonstrates the range of variation possible in individual performances of *jikong yuewu* by analyzing written accounts of performances by four Ming-Qing music masters (in 1618, 1622, 1719, and 1840), a revival during the Republic in the 1930s, and the versions performed in the 1990s in both Qufu and Taipei. The Qufu performance, which was revived in 1984, uses professional actors, plaster sacrificial animals, and modernized music, and is directed primarily at tourists, who are predominantly Chinese. The Taipei version, performed since 1968, is more traditional and less flamboyant. Curiously, Lam doesn’t mention that such distinctiveness also has classical sanction: the preface to the *Shijing*, spuriously attributed to Confucius, which claims that the purpose of music/poetry is to express human feelings.

For non-musicologists, a nice feature of Lam's chapter is the text and music (in four versions) of the song of welcome, performed in the first of the six stages of the sacrificial ritual: (1) welcoming the deities; offerings of (2) silk, (3) wine, and (4) food; (5) clearing the offerings; and (6) bidding farewell to the deities and burning the sacrificial articles (pp. 138–139). He also reproduces four versions of the sequence of choreographic poses struck by dancers in the first-offering song—again emphasizing the corporeality of the Confucian tradition.

Lionel Jensen's chapter is titled "The Genesis of Kongzi in Ancient Narrative: The Figurative as Historical." His argument (similar to that of his 1997 book, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* [Durham: Duke University Press]) is that the paucity of hard evidence concerning Confucius' life and the mythological nature of most of what we "know" about Confucius should fundamentally alter our conception of the Confucian tradition. In addition, he calls into question the validity of the Kong family's claim to be descended from the Sage, based on some inconsistencies in the dating of Confucius' grandson, Kong Ji (also known as Zisi, the reputed author of the *Zhongyong* or "The Mean in Practice"). This part of the argument is rather weak, since he assumes, based solely on the inconsistencies in the dating available to us at this great distance in time, that Kong Ji did not live to adulthood and leave progeny.

Jensen's general conclusion is as follows:

The normative narratives and apocrypha, when juxtaposed in this manner, reveal the fugal quality of the early accounts and make it virtually impossible to determine the earliest source of the story of Kongzi.⁴ Evidence of this sort undermines any effort at coherent recollection. The entanglement of the apocryphal (*wei*) and canonical (*jing*) accounts, much like the coincidence of memory and forgetting, suggests that there is no origin, only a relationship of supplementarity.⁵ The genealogical, biographic, philological, phonological, and mythic material assembled above . . . must be treated as fragments of competing forms of representation. . . . (p. 214)

The best part of Jensen's chapter is his treatment of a cluster of mythic themes found mostly in the apocryphal (non-canonical) sources on Confucius. These include the mythic associations with his personal name (Qiu, or "hill"), his appearance (especially the protuberance on his head, mentioned even in the canonical sources), the circumstances of his conception and birth, his reputed genealogical connection with the royal family of the Shang dynasty, the possible connection of the name Kong with a type of bird, and the fact that Confucius' father died early.

There is much here that contributes to the argument that Confucianism is truly a religious tradition. But Jensen's deconstructive method and conclusions fail to do justice to the material. He views the rich complex of mythic material with the eye of a historian, and rather than using his excellent findings to flesh out what Confucius *means* to the tradition, he uses it to argue that it is not objectively verifiable history.

From the perspective of religious studies, to find that there is a body of myth surrounding a religious founder, and that myth is not history (although the same story can be both mythic and historical), is not news. Jensen seems uncomfortable with the category of myth—indeed, he frequently uses the term “legend” instead—and he occasionally seems surprised when it turns out to be something other than empirical data:

At once these explicit godlike traits of Kongzi, those of singular transformation, make one suspicious of these accounts because Kongzi was never included in the mythic pantheon of culture heroes. (p. 207)

The last part of this statement is highly debatable, since Kongzi did in fact enter the pantheon (as the rest of this book demonstrates), although in a category different from that of the sage-kings of high antiquity. In any case, whether he did or did not is irrelevant to *our* decision to classify the lore surrounding him as myth, which is a category belonging to the second-order discourse of modern scholarship.

After a discussion of the birth stories of Confucius, Jensen partially contradicts the statement just quoted, and again evinces something like surprise that stories of religious founders typically fall into certain patterns:

The parallels with the tales of miraculous birth of China’s culture heroes and the founding of the Shang and Zhou houses are remarkable. These tales may well have served as a narrative skeleton for the Kongzi legend. (p. 211)

And earlier, in a discussion of the alleged dimpled protuberance on Confucius’ head, Jensen reveals the positivistic underpinnings of his approach and a certain naïveté in dealing with religious materials:

Yet it is difficult to conceive of the magical, prophetic quality of a face that was, according to *Han’s Illustration of the Didactic Use of the Book of Odes* (*Hanshi waizhuan*), “sunken,” or “hollowed out” (*wa*), and that, for Xunzi, resembled the animal mask of an exorcist.

I am not arguing that there is no point at all in the quest for the historical Confucius. But it is not enough simply to throw up one’s hands in disbelief in the face of religious symbolism. And I am not aware of a prevailing literalist interpretation of Confucius in modern scholarship that needs to be deflated. Most scholars today acknowledge the scarcity of evidence about Confucius, just as they do for the Buddha and other religious founders. But that has little bearing on how the founder was interpreted and reinterpreted—or constructed and reconstructed—by succeeding generations.⁶ The attempt to reconstruct the origins of the tradition and the biographical details of its founder is laudable, but there are other forms of “coherent recollection” besides the literal description of objective facts. I personally find it much more interesting to examine what Confucius meant to people in later eras, and to take it for granted that even history (*l’histoire*) is a story (*l’histoire*).

Julia K. Murray's chapter, "Varied Views of the Sage: Illustrated Narratives of the Life of Confucius," examines the development of the genre of *Shengji tu*, "Pictures of the Sage's Traces" (including several variations on that title) from the Ming period onward, although the bulk of the detail covers the Ming. She distinguishes illustrated biographical narratives from "iconic" portraits of the Sage, which predominated from the Han through the early Ming, but mainly after the Tang, when they were used in the growing number of official Confucian temples. The narrative illustrations depict certain stock events in both the canonical and the non-canonical accounts of Confucius' life, such as Confucius' mother praying for a son and Confucius meeting Laozi. The genre was also used to depict the lives of other Confucians (e.g., Mencius) as well as prominent Daoist figures (Laozi and Lü Dongbin) and popular religious figures (Guan Yu and Mazu) (p. 230). Like the myths about Confucius' life covered by Jensen (and similarly unmentioned by Murray), these illustrated narratives fell into the pattern of the "hero" myth:

miraculous events are associated with the individual's conception and/or birth; he or she exhibits extraordinary conduct as a child; adulthood brings hardships and obstacles that are successfully overcome; and the individual acquires some degree of preternatural power or wisdom. (ibid.)

During the Ming the illustrated narratives of Confucius in effect replaced the iconic images that were removed from official temples in 1530, but the narrative illustrations, which were published and widely circulated, were seen by many more people than the "officials and other select individuals allowed access to the temples of Confucius" (p. 256). One version of this type of series, including 112 scenes inscribed on stone tablets, was placed in the Hall of the Sage's Traces (*Shengjidian*), which was constructed on the grounds of the Confucian family temple in Qufu in the early 1590s. This building,

[p]ositioned on the main axis of the temple, . . . also functioned analogously to the buildings dedicated to the lives of cult deities or founding patriarchs in some Buddhist, Daoist, and popular-cult temples. (p. 247)

This is yet another piece of evidence suggesting that Confucianism functioned as a religious tradition in China. As Ninian Smart used to say, if you're playing in the same league (or in this case playing by the same rules) you must be playing the same game.

Murray surveys the development and transformations of this genre, showing how the selection of scenes reflected social and political factors, including competition with Buddhism (from which the genre of illustrated biographical narrative was undoubtedly borrowed), conflict between scholar-officials and court eunuchs, and implied criticisms of the emperor. She devotes several pages to "the case of the vanishing women," arguing that the partial disappearance of Kong family women in successive versions of the series during the Ming reflected "the percep-

tion that women were breaking out of their proper bounds” in Ming society (p. 252). In her briefer coverage of the Qing and the twentieth century she points out that the more supernatural episodes (such as Confucius’ mother receiving an inscribed jade tablet from a *qilin* or “unicorn” before his birth, Confucius being born with five auspicious characters on his chest and five spiritual beings playing music in the air, and a rainbow extending from the Big Dipper to the Sage) were eliminated in the PRC versions; Confucius is now portrayed as a “great man from ancient history” and “a model citizen of a secular society” (p. 251).

“The Cultural Politics of Autocracy: The Confucius Temple and Ming Despotism, 1368–1530,” by Huang Chin-shing (translated by Curtis Dean Smith), is a detailed and sobering examination of how the Ming emperor Shizong (r. 1521–1567), later known as the Jiajing emperor, “drew on the political resources of the ruler to weaken the morale of the scholar-officials and thereby strengthen despotism” (p. 267). The previous emperor, Wuzong (r. 1505–1521), had died in 1521 without leaving an heir; Shizong was a cousin. Huang places Shizong’s iconoclastic reforms of 1530 in the context of his “desire to worship his own natal father in the imperial ancestral shrine as a deceased sovereign rather than have himself adopted into his cousin’s line, as precedent dictated” (*ibid.*). This was just one part of a broader reform of the rites (called the “Great Rites Controversy”—not to be confused with the later “Rites Controversy” involving the Vatican and Jesuit missionaries during the Qing), all designed to strengthen his power and the status of his natal family. He wasted no time in getting up to speed as a despot: in 1524, when court officials objected to his changing the official title of his natal mother, he had sixteen of them beaten to death and imprisoned another 143 (*ibid.*).

Huang argues that the Confucian temple reforms were originally ordered by Shizong himself, although scholars have claimed that they originated in a set of proposals by the Grand Secretary, Zhang Cong. The underlying theme of the proposals was to conflate the “succession of the Way” (*daotong*), a term popularized by Zhu Xi during the Song, with the “legitimate succession” (*chentong*), referring to the dynastic line. During the Song, the claim by the Cheng-Zhu school⁷ to represent the true teachings of the Dao had been not only an implied criticism of Buddhism and Daoism; it was also a source of social legitimacy and moral authority that was independent of imperial authority, which derived from the “mandate of Heaven” (*tianming*). This gave the Song Confucians the moral standing to criticize the emperor. Huang argues that Shizong was trying to strip the scholar-officials of this source of independent authority and power. Although he doesn’t clearly spell out how the removal of images from the Confucian temple contributes to this (actually it had originally been proposed by the dynastic founder, Taizu, and Shizong’s argument was based mainly on that precedent), other provisions of the reforms can certainly be explained in this way. For example, titles of nobility, such as king and duke, were removed from the sages and

worthies enshrined in the temple, since they were not actually of noble blood. This was an especially sensitive issue for the Ming emperors, for Taizu himself had originally been a commoner.

Huang concludes with an interesting comparison with the Kangxi emperor (Shengzu) of the Qing (r. 1662–1722). The Manchu Qing, of course, had a potentially weaker position vis-à-vis the bureaucratic establishment than the Ming rulers: they were foreigners. Yet Shengzu was more successful, in the end, than Shizong in strengthening his power, because he did so by promoting Confucianism; he “used the Confucian cultural heritage as means of reinforcing his political legitimacy” (p. 293).

In “The Kongs of Qufu: Power and Privilege in Late Imperial China,” Abigail Lambertson examines how the Qing emperors “gained the moral right to play . . . a prominent role in the interpretation of the teachings of Confucius” (p. 298). She is referring here to the cooperation of scholar-officials in disseminating imperial edicts and the support of the emperors for disseminating Confucian moral teachings to the masses. The emperors cultivated this cooperation, she argues, by establishing close relations with the Kong family in Qufu. The Kongs, of course, benefited enormously from this relationship in terms of power, wealth, and influence.

State recognition of the Kongs had begun with the founder of the Han dynasty, Gaozong (r. 206–195 B.C.E.)—another commoner—who had journeyed to Qufu and performed a “great sacrifice” to Confucius. From this point on, Confucius’ descendants were enfeoffed with various hereditary titles, grants of income-producing land, and tax exemptions. The establishment of Confucianism as the state ideology by Emperor Wu of the Han (r. 140–87 B.C.E.) made it necessary for the state to recognize “the Kong family’s ancestral worship of Confucius and the central role of the temple to Confucius in the state’s efforts to maintain its legitimacy” (p. 304), although most emperors did not actually sacrifice in Qufu. There is a certain irony in the power wielded by the Kong clan:

In a supposed meritocracy [based on Confucian principles], with positions open to all based on individual merit, the Kongs did not need to compete. They could guarantee official positions for their members without recourse to the examination system. No other lineage retained unrestricted hereditary titles and honors over more than one dynasty. . . . Thus, the Kongs stood alone among the class of educated elite. (p. 314)

Perhaps a corollary of this absence of competition is the fact that, through two millennia, the Kongs produced only a small handful of eminent scholars. By the middle of the Qing dynasty, the Kongs had acquired, through imperial grants, about 256 square miles of land. The quid pro quo, according to Lambertson, was that “their ambitions remained safely confined to the role of loyal ministers” (p. 328).

Jun Jing's chapter, "Knowledge, Organization, and Symbolic Capital: Two Temples to Confucius in Gansu," is an offshoot of his dissertation and the resulting book, *Temple of Memories: History, Power, and Morality in a Chinese Village* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996). It tells the fascinating story of a branch of the Kong clan descended from a solitary man, Kong Jiaying, who migrated from Guangdong to Gansu during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). His descendants now number over twenty thousand. Their claim to legitimate Kong descent was certified in 1937 in a new genealogy published by the Kong clan in Qufu.

Jing focuses on the different strategies employed by two villages in Gansu—Dachuan and Xiaochuan—to establish the legitimacy and prestige of their respective temples to Confucius. The temples had both been destroyed during Mao Zedong's "Campaign Against Lin Biao and Confucius" during the 1970s. Not surprisingly, members of the clan were also treated very badly in those days. But in 1985, during the period of liberalization under Deng Xiaoping, they received permission to rebuild their temples; Dachuan's was completed in 1991 and Xiaochuan's the following year. Without going into the differences between the two, I will simply mention that Jing uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic capital" to discuss the strategies used by the two villages to distinguish their respective temples and thereby draw visitors to them. Whether this is a bit of over-theorizing to explain a rather simple phenomenon is a question that I have not been able to decide for myself. Perhaps there is a meta-story here involving strategies of establishing legitimacy in the world of contemporary American scholarship.

Finally, the journalist Wang Liang tells the story of "The Confucius Temple Tragedy of the Cultural Revolution." This took place at the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, when, as part of the campaign against the "Four Olds" (ideology, culture, customs, and habits), a band of Red Guards from Beijing, against serious but ultimately unsuccessful opposition by local Qufu officials and residents, destroyed a key stone plaque next to the main gate of the Kong Mansion and ransacked the mansion, the temple, and the Kong family cemetery (the "Three Kong Sites"). The official plaque stated that the three were "key cultural relics under protection of the State Council" (p. 379). The local officials put up a surprisingly good, nonviolent fight, but in the face of certain defeat they eventually retreated on all their points of opposition. Many priceless objects were destroyed, the statue of Confucius was burned, and his tomb mound was leveled. Fortunately, plans to destroy the temple and mansion were never implemented. Today, of course, the whole complex has been restored and is a very popular tourist attraction.

Wang's account is based on numerous interviews he conducted with participants on both sides of the dispute. Although he is actually from Qufu, it is not clear whether or not he was present at the time. In any case, this richly detailed

story provides another sobering account of despotism, this time of the proletariat. The event was a key battle of the Cultural Revolution, which was, as Wilson puts it in his Introduction, “quite literally a war over cultural icons” (p. 34).

On Sacred Grounds is very well produced, with only a few typographical errors. Chinese characters, thankfully, are provided in the text, in the footnotes (not endnotes), and in the lists of works cited after each chapter. The book includes one table, two maps, four examples of music, and forty-four well-documented figures (photographs and reproductions). In addition to the iconic image of Confucius on the frontispiece, the title page of each of the four parts of the book (“Rites and Music,” “Imagining Confucius,” “Politics and Society,” and “The Past in the Present”) contains a well-chosen picture. The level of writing is probably a bit technical for most undergraduates, although the more advanced ones could certainly make use of it for research papers. This book is a major contribution to Confucian studies and Chinese historical and cultural studies.

Joseph A. Adler

Joseph A. Adler is a professor of religious studies at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, specializing in Neo-Confucian studies.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001), p. 244 n. 15.

2. I promise to make a sincere effort to reform.

3. There is one factual error in Sommer’s chapter, in the first line of page 105, where “Zhu Xi’s pupil Yang Shi” should read “Cheng Yi’s pupil Yang Shi.”

4. The “normative narratives and apocrypha” are what Wilson, in chapter 1, calls the “canonical” and “non-canonical” accounts of Confucius. The former, such as Sima Qian’s biography of Confucius in his *Historical Records* (*Shiji*, ca. 100 B.C.E.), portray him as a humane and sagely teacher. The latter, which include the *Gongyang Commentary* to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*), tend to portray him in deified and cosmicized forms. The canonical sources mostly correspond to the “Ancient Text” (*guwen*) tradition, which predominated in scholarship after the fifth century C.E., while the non-canonical sources are part of the “Modern Text” (*jinwen*) tradition that was accepted by the court from the third century B.C.E. to the fifth century C.E. (see Wilson’s chapter, pp. 45–49 and n. 24).

5. “Supplementarity” is a term from Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, but Jensen does not explain it.

6. The “quest for the historical Jesus” is a partial exception because of the extent to which Christian theology hinges on Jesus’ historicity. Even the claims of legitimate descent by the Kong family do not depend on historical validity to the same extent, for it is perfectly plausible that *someone* is descended from Confucius, and since the privileges accorded the Kong family were in exchange for their keeping up the sacrifices to him (as Wilson and Abigail Lamberton show in this book), it arguably doesn’t matter whether that family truly has Confucius’ genes in their chromosomes.

7. So-called after Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200), whose teachings formed its core.