

The
S A G E
and the
P E O P L E

The Confucian Revival in China



SÉBASTIEN BILLIoud



JOËL THORAVAl

The Sage and the People

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The Sage and the People

Introduction

THE SPECIFIC AMBITION of this book crystallizes in its very title—*The Sage and the People*. In recent years, the “revival of Confucianism” in China has generated an impressive literature. However, whereas normative works or commentaries of discourses are many, studies dedicated to the reappropriation or reinvention of popular practices remain much more scarce. They precisely constitute the core of this book, itself the product of both a question and a surprise.

The question resulted from a previous phase of our research dedicated to the impressive creation in twentieth-century China of a modern philosophy inspired by Confucianism.¹ Whereas in the 1990s discourses claiming a Confucian identity still largely remained confined to academia, it was nevertheless clear that such a specialization and transformation of an ancient and multifaceted tradition in pure “thought” was only the consequence of a recent—and maybe only temporary—historical evolution. It was also clear that after the loosening of state grip in the post-Mao era the Confucian tradition would necessarily generate new developments within the Chinese population. The mere perception of such an objective trend clearly demanded a switch in disciplinary approach. In brief, philosophical questioning had to be complemented with sociological and anthropological fieldwork.

¹ See Joël Thoraval, “Idéal du sage, Stratégie du philosophe: Introduction à la pensée de Mou Zongsan,” in Mou Zongsan, *Spécificités de la philosophie chinoise*, 7–60 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2003); Sébastien Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity: A Study of Mou Zongsan's Moral Metaphysics* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2012); Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval, eds., “Regards sur le politique en Chine aujourd’hui,” special issue, *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 31 (2009).

The surprise came with one of the specific forms of these recent developments, when in 2007 we met in Shandong province ordinary people attempting to collectively reinvent practices and words that would enable them to directly interact with ancient sages. In Zoucheng, not far away from the city of Qufu, homeland of Confucius and his lineage, workers, technicians, craftsmen, former peasants, primary school teachers, and low-ranking cadres attempted to reconstruct in a deserted temple—and far away from political and academic authorities—elements of sacrificial rituals. Two chapters of this book (8 and 9) are dedicated to this micro event and its intertwinement with a broader context.

In order to understand the originality of this direct relation, “in the space of the people” (*minjian* 民間), to the figure of Confucius and his disciples and, by the same token, to assess the novelty of the very idea of a “popular Confucianism” (*minjian rujia* 民間儒家), one needs first to underscore why such a phenomenon shares little with the many previous discourses that also pointed to a return of “Confucianism.”² The phenomena that we intend to study here are neither schools of thought, nor mere reconstructions of previously existing social structures, nor local manifestations of official ideology or politics.

Differences with Previous Debates about the Return of Confucianism

It is well known that the collapse of the imperial order in 1911 translated in the name of a modernizing nationalism into a century of destruction, marginalization, and radical transformation for whole segments of Chinese cultural tradition. The action of political elites of both the nationalist (Guomindang) and Communist parties combined to give to Western observers the feeling that Confucian tradition had gradually died

2 The very category of Confucianism generates numerous difficulties. The Western word primarily results from the European science of religion that developed from the nineteenth century onwards: Confucianism was understood as a philosophical or religious doctrine of an eponymous figure, in the same vein as Christianity, Mohammedanism, or Buddhism. This notion does not correspond to the Chinese word *ru* 儒 (and its derivatives: *ruxue* 儒學, *rujia* 儒家, *rujiao* 儒教, etc.). It gives to this tradition a definition that is either too vast—since Confucius commented on a number of ancient Chinese texts “Confucianism” is sometimes mixed up with classical culture—or sometimes too narrow—when one forgets that *ru* and “*ruism*” existed before Confucius. See Nicolas Zufferey, *To the Origins of Confucianism: The Ru in Pre-Qin Times and During the Early Han Dynasty* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2003).

out: Despite the persistence of symbols emptied of their original significations, Confucianism would be primarily relegated to the museum.³ Such a pessimistic diagnosis, formulated among others by American historian Joseph Levenson, was contested on several occasions between the 1950s and the 1990s when developments taking place first in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore (and the United States) and then in the mainland itself reflected a certain vitality of the Confucian legacy. However, one needs to underscore here that the encounter between the sage and the people observed in the 2000s does not share much with the different kinds of hypotheses formulated so far in order to explain the perpetuation or the resurgence of Confucianism in China.

First, it is not a school of thought whose ultimate promoters would be scholars or public intellectuals. The most impressive reaction to the aforementioned thesis of an ineluctable demise of Confucian tradition was the development of a philosophical movement called “contemporary neo-Confucianism” (*dangdai xinrujia* 當代新儒家). It emerged in China during the republican era and developed after 1949 in Hong Kong and Taiwan, where it translated into a remarkable philosophical production. A manifesto signed in 1958 by prominent figures such as Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995) and Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978) asserted strongly the vitality of Confucianism. Philosophical systems were elaborated in a clear opposition to Western philosophy in order to emphasize the ethical dimension of the Confucian legacy understood as a way of wisdom and a life doctrine (*shengming de xuewen* 生命的學問). However, it is noteworthy that these new metaphysical discourses largely inspired by Song- and Ming-dynasty neo-Confucianism were primarily produced by scholars employed in modern universities. Thus, this novel thought was somewhat cut off from its former material basis. The language game of modern philosophy took precedence over ancient collective and bodily practices (meditation, rituals, etc.). Historian Yu Yingshi spoke about these neo-Confucian thinkers—and of contemporary Confucianism in general—as a “lost” or “wandering” soul (*youhun* 遊魂), severed from the institutional body to which it was previously intimately linked.⁴ In a way,

3 Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965).

4 Yu Ying-shih 余英時, “Xiandai ruxue de kunjing 現代儒學的困境” [The Predicament of Modern Confucianism], in *Xiandai ruxue lun* [On Contemporary Confucianism], (River Edge, NJ: Global Publishing Co., 1996), 159–164. This text generated numerous objections. In a new foreword, Yu attempted to clarify the meaning of the expression to avoid

practices studied in this book may be considered to be forms of “reincarnation” or “reincorporation” of such a soul. However, bodies that become again both individually and collectively vehicles for this ancient thought are neither bodies of former scholar-officials nor of modern intellectuals: Ordinary people are appropriating the teachings of the sage and their ambition is not doctrinal, but primarily practical. Whereas some of the activists acknowledge masters and feel the need to insert themselves into spiritual genealogies, whether real or imaginary, most of the developments of the 2000s are in both their intention and their concrete realizations extremely different from the philosophical Confucianism prevailing in previous decades.

Second, these new developments, despite their popular dimension, cannot be mixed up with another broad phenomenon that began to affect the countryside after the end of the Maoist era: The reconstruction of traditional structures and practices still existing in pre-Communist China. Such a reconstruction became possible at the end of the 1970s thanks to Deng Xiaoping’s reform and opening policy. It started quickly, though with strong geographical differences. The ancient lineages that were traditionally well developed in Southeast China attempted to reestablish part of their common legacy: Ancestral temples (*citang* 祠堂), lineage cemeteries, genealogies (*jiapu* 家譜), and so on. At the same time, villagers revived cults of all kinds of local deities. However, the reconstruction of lineage practices remained partial and sometimes fragile (lineages and their properties normally cannot have any legal status) in a social context where striking differences between cities and the countryside were still maintained by the administrative residence-permit (*hukou* 戶口) system.⁵ This revival was remarkable enough to be documented by detailed anthropological fieldwork focusing on the transformations of the kinship structures or popular religion.⁶ From the

possible misunderstandings (*ibid.*, i–ix). Makeham also used the expression as a title for his detailed overview of Confucianism in academic discourses: John Makeham, *Lost Soul, “Confucianism” in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

5 The revival of lineages continues to take place in the 2000s and the 2010s, sometimes in a striking way; see chapter 9.

6 The situation of the 1980s presented specific features due to the radical changes of state policy after the Maoist period. In a context characterized by the lack of legal framework and some degree of liberalization leaving enough room to all kinds of initiatives, changes in religious behaviors went along with the emergence or reemergence of new collective groups, whether associated with ethnicity (nationalities) or with kinship (lineages); Joël Thoraval, “Religion ethnique, religion lignagère: sur la tentative d’islamisation d’un lignage Han de Hainan,” *Études chinoises* 10, nos. 1–2 (1991): 9–75.

end of the 1990s it was nevertheless affected by the development of the market economy and its consequences in terms of migrations. At a time when the urban population started to increase swiftly at the expense of village life, kinship relationships and religious practices also needed—and still need—to adapt to this new context.⁷

The encounter that takes place in the 2000s between the sage and the people sharply differs from this situation, in at least two ways. First, villagers involved in ancestor cults or in the revival of lineages do not necessarily feel any need to claim a Confucian identity. Values such as “filial piety” or rituals to dead ancestors belong to a broader and more composite whole that is none other than Chinese culture.⁸ To the contrary, for new Confucian activists, affiliation to a tradition reconstructed around Confucius and/or the tradition Confucius symbolizes has a special meaning that we later try to analyze. Second, the social context in which these activists operate is extremely different from the one of Deng Xiaoping’s era: Mobility within society has increased tremendously. Some of the activists recall their rural background while sharing the way of life of new urbanites. Whereas their projects are carried out in the name of Confucius or the Confucian tradition, this is often done far away from their local roots, whether of kinship or local territory. Generalization is impossible and counterexamples exist, but this new brand of Confucianism is partly deterritorialized and uprooted. In spite of its modest origins, it is also part of the Internet age and some of the initiatives are based on the construction of potentially boundless networks.⁹

7 Michael Szonyi, “Lineages and the Making of Contemporary China,” paper presented at the conference “Modern Chinese Religion: Values Systems in Transformation, 1850–Present,” December 13, 2012, 9–14.

8 Such a situation impacted the visibility of Confucianism at that period of time. See Joël Thoraval, “The Anthropologist and the Question of the ‘Visibility’ of Confucianism in Contemporary Chinese Society,” *China Perspectives* 23 (1999): 65–73.

9 This relative deterritorialization or even dematerialization of new national networks is not contradictory or incompatible with the existence, at the same time, of multiple local traditions about the way to approach the Confucian legacy. Fieldwork provided us with the opportunity to observe how Confucian commitments—though national in the scope of their projected activities—are also often well rooted in local territories and history. Some activists from Shanxi province could participate in activities organized in Shandong, but they tended to introduce the characteristics of their specific brand of Confucianism. China’s largest temple dedicated to Guandi, god of war but also of merchants (among other meanings), is located in Xiezhou in the southern part of Shanxi province. Local Confucian activists insist on that point and on the fact that their province is also the birthplace of Xunzi and of ancient general Guan Zhong: “Our spirit is more ‘martial’ (*wu* 武) than the ‘civil’ (*wen* 文) spirit of Shandong, birthplace of Confucius”; Field observation, Shanxi, 2010.

Last, “popular” Confucian movements of the 2000s cannot be analyzed as if they were simply the result of an ideology imposed from the top. They are not the consequence of a discourse promoted by the party-state and its representatives in elite circles. A good example of official ideology emphasizing the benefits of “Confucian ethics” was the discourse on so-called Asian values that appeared in the 1980s and the 1990s in East and Southeast Asia. It is necessary to give a short explanation about this context to show how little it shares with the current situation. Based on an experience of economic growth and political stability, for instance in Malaysia and Singapore, these discourses originated from officials, journalists, and scholars questioning the relevance of applying to their own societies values perceived as “Western” ones, such as the philosophy of human rights or the principles of democratic individualism. In that context, and contrary to a popularized version of Max Weber’s sociology, “Confucianism” was introduced not as an obstacle but as a beneficial factor illuminating the rise of an Asian brand of capitalism.¹⁰ In retrospect, the impact of such an ideological discourse on Mainland China was limited: It contributed to disseminating the idea of a new type of modern authoritarianism among political Chinese elites of the Deng Xiaoping era. It also stimulated reflections about global ethics among neo-Confucian philosophers. Finally, it facilitated the reception of the work of Max Weber in academia, with the ambition to go beyond dogmatic Marxism.¹¹ However, the theories that emerged at the periphery of the Chinese mainland played only a somewhat marginal role and China was not really impacted by a discourse that aimed at “reimagining Asia.” The reason was in fact simple: When modernizing models celebrating Asian values flourished, China’s development was not sufficient to take part in this trend; by contrast, after its economic growth began to skyrocket, China no longer needed these explanatory models. It was thanks to its own resources and within itself that it could shape a “Chinese model.” Between a nation now confident in its own power—if not in the universal validity of its own model—and a global stage on which

10 There is a huge literature on the topic. See for instance David Camroux and Jean-Luc Domenach, eds., *Imagining Asia: The Construction of an Asian Regional Identity* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Mizoguchi Yuzō 溝口雄三 and Nakajima Mineo 中嶋嶺雄, *Jukyō runessansu wo kangaeru 儒教ルネッサンスを考える* [Reflections on the Confucian Renaissance] (Tokyo: Daishūkan shoten, 1991).

11 On the reception of Max Weber in China, see Liu Dong, “The Weberian View and Confucianism,” *East Asian History* 25–26 (2003): 191–217.

it can exert its influence, there is little room left for a modern version of “asiatism.”¹²

Therefore, it is within a national framework that an official ideology with a seemingly traditional accent emerged in the 2000s.¹³ In fact, there is an obvious simultaneity between a kind of discourse emanating from the party-state and the expansion of grassroots initiatives. However, inferring too much from such a coincidence might be ill founded. Projects launched by the authorities to cherry-pick and rehabilitate specific aspects of the cultural tradition (that could for instance serve as resources for moral and educational indoctrination) only very partially overlap with the objectives and activities of Confucian activists.¹⁴ Those activities do not relate to any abstract ideology but consist in practical projects in which the properly Confucian ideals play a pivotal role. Enterprises carried out in the name of popular Confucianism share indeed little with official projects. Nevertheless, they might anticipate future evolutions in society considering a rather new phenomenon—the increasing involvement by part of the elites in the Confucian revival of the 2010s. In any case, before questioning the link between politics and popular Confucianism—which will be done later in this work—the latter must be understood in its own spirit and dynamics.

What Is So New about “Popular Confucianism”?

The starting point of this study of “the sage and the people” is not a general reflection about contemporary China or Confucianism but concrete field experience and observation of the encounter of individuals coming from

12 See the volume edited by Pan Wei, one of the main theoretician of a “Chinese model” (*Zhongguo moshi* 中國模式) at the end of the 2000s. Pan Wei 潘維, ed., *Zhongguo moshi: jiedu renmin gongheguo de liushi nian* 中國模式, 解讀人民共和國的 60 年 [The Chinese Model: Decoding 60 Years (of History) of the People’s Republic] (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi, 2009).

13 This situation became particularly blatant during the 2000s. However, some scholars already emphasized that this trend existed in the 1990s. See Jean-Philippe BÉja, “The Rise of National-Confucianism?” *China Perspectives* 1995, no. 2 (1995): 6–12.

14 For a detailed analysis of these issues and of the program of cultural development included in the eleventh five-year plan see Sébastien Billioud, “Confucianism, ‘Cultural Tradition’ and Official Discourses in China at the Start of the New Century,” *China Perspectives* 2007, no. 3 (2007): 50–65.

popular backgrounds with the figure of Confucius or, beyond him, with a Confucian life ideal that they attempt to appropriate and put in practice.

Three preliminary questions had to be raised for this research: (1) What does the often-claimed label of “popular Confucianism” really mean? (2) In which historical continuity is it possible to understand a movement that is first and foremost striking because of its novelty? (3) In which directions of experience could this movement develop?

One should immediately mention the reason why the very notion of “popular Confucianism” may seem unusual or even paradoxical. In this book, this expression is the translation of a notion, if not a slogan, that activists often claim for themselves: *minjian rujia*, that is, Confucianism “in the space of the people.” The very notion of *minjian* combines in an ambiguous way two different dimensions: The first one is administrative, since *minjian* may designate nonofficial activities carried on outside the party-state apparatus—which does not mean out of its control. The second one is more sociological and refers to ordinary people. Therefore, according to the context, the notion of *minjian* might be alluded to in reference or opposition to the state or in reference or opposition to the elites. To some extent, this book is also, at least implicitly, a reflection on this issue that is discussed again overtly in the epilogue.

Beyond the specific context of the 2000s, the very idea of “popular Confucianism” may sound surprising for at least two sets of reasons. To begin with, the emergence of such a movement is not without a link to all the destructions that took place after the demise of the empire. If the very idea of ritual celebration of Confucius by workers may sound odd, it is also because Confucius temples (or Temples of culture, *wenmiao* 文廟) used to be the preserve of scholars-literati. They were an institution that maintained tight relationships with the examination system and a ritual system characteristic of the imperial order. Commoners did not have access to those temples. The very fact that technicians, employees, workers, or peasants may now take possession of Mencius or Confucius temples in order to carry out rituals therefore constitutes some sort of transgression. And the fact that some of them still perpetuate—in spite of their dreams to restore an ancient tradition—a symbolic and bodily language typical of the Maoist era simply reinforces the visibility of such a paradox.

However, the existence of a “popular Confucianism” may seem counterintuitive for another reason, namely the importance of modern scientific categories and disciplinary fields. Thus, religious anthropology that now needs to deal with a Chinese space deeply affected by political

transformations of the twentieth century sometimes prefers to ascribe a “popular” dimension to representations and practices perceived as independent from an orthodoxy that used in the past to be embodied by the state and a cast of scholars-literati. Daoism in particular has been celebrated as a, if not *the* popular religion in China, thus opposing a Confucian order itself associated with a bureaucracy and an elite eager to impose their values upon society.¹⁵ From this perspective there is a perception that Confucianism should not “by essence” be considered “popular.” There is no room here for a detailed discussion of this issue, which would require prior clarifications concerning the use of modern Western categories.¹⁶ However, one can only notice the extent to which practices traditionally associated with Confucian classics—such as ancestor cults—have for centuries permeated the whole of the social structure, from the elites to the villagers. A differentiation between “the people” and the elite can be contemplated only if one takes into account a common, that is, shared cultural background that challenges rigidly imposed categorizations. In any case, it is noteworthy that recent anthropological fieldwork carried out in Taiwan in the realm of religious practices contributed to a more general reflection about the forms and meaning of a possible “popular Confucianism.”¹⁷ How could recent movements developing in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the 2000s be linked to these phenomena and thus reinscribed in certain forms of historical continuity? Answering this question requires that one turns to a second pivotal issue: The link with history and memory but also the invention and the creativity of these movements.

15 For a well-argued example of such a perspective, see John Lagerwey, *China: A Religious State* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 1–17. The book opposes in Chinese history—though with nuances—on the one hand a horizontal and spatial perspective focusing on Daoist masters, local gods, and the people and, on the other hand, a vertical and temporal perspective centered upon the relationship to ancestors, Confucian elites, and imperial bureaucracy. A kind of essential precedence, logical or historical, is accorded to the first perspective. In such a view, ordinary people, at the grassroots level, are seen to have kept, up to now, special affinities with the religious universe of Daoist masters (even though the latter have their own esoteric teaching). By contrast, natural heirs of “rationalistic” scholars-literati in today’s society are identified with communist bureaucrats. Be that as it may, this is not to deny, beyond its popular roots, the existence of a more elitist tradition of Daoism embodied by a specific bureaucracy that disappeared at the end of the imperial era. On Daoist elites, see Vincent Goossaert, “Bureaucratie, taxation et justice: Taoïsme et construction de l’État au Jiangnan (Chine), XVIIe–XIXe siècle,” *Annales Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 4 (2010): 999–1027.

16 Chapter 5 encompasses a discussion about modern categories.

17 See for instance Philip Clart, “Confucius and the Mediums: Is There a Popular Confucianism?” *T’oung Pao* 89 (2003): 1–38.

This broad issue can be tackled from two sides, taking into account both the specificities of the sociological context of the 2000s and the recollection and reinterpretation of collective memory.

One could first wonder to what extent social circumstances of the 2000s could have contributed to fashion this “popular Confucianism.” The aforementioned encounter in Zoucheng involved people from a variety of backgrounds gathering for a common ritual project. Inquiring into the initiatives taken by these protagonists also means questioning the status ascribed to individuals in an overall social situation that differs from both the Mao and the Deng Xiaoping eras.

To put things bluntly—maybe taking the risk of oversimplification—the effect of what could be called the Maoist project was to coercively organize the passage from one type of collective life into another type: The individual, though formally acknowledged in his rights, was torn up from ancient (“feudal”) communities so as to be assigned to new (socialist) collectives. One could simply give an example that is not without impact on the transformation of “Confucian” ritual practices: The 1950 marriage law intended to abolish former patriarchal links of the “old society” and promote the individual choice of spouses supposed to be free and equal in rights. However, the objective was also to reinsert them, without further delay, into new collective control structures (work unit, collectives, production teams, etc.). Any form of individualism was reined in before it could develop. Of course, such a narrative should not be taken too literally since it downplays both the emancipation processes that had already begun during the republican era¹⁸ and the capabilities of initiative and negotiation of individual behaviors, whether in traditional communities (families, lineages, local communities) or in the new collectives implemented under communist rule.

Contrary to the Maoist period, it is well known that Deng Xiaoping’s reform policy translated into massive decollectivization, an opening to international influences and some degree of market economy. During the 2000s, it is possible to follow anthropologist Yan Yunxiang and posit that processes of “individualization” of behaviors became stronger; however, in a social environment that became increasingly mobile and uncertain, they went along with new forms of association and the creation of a number

¹⁸ On the evolution of individual behaviors—between legal codes and reality—in the context of weddings, see Philip Huang, *Code, Custom, and Legal Practice in China: The Qing and the Republic Compared* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 180–200.

of interpersonal networks.¹⁹ During this decade and up to now, popular Confucianism has developed in a context often described—both in official discourses and within the population—as a time of moral crisis driven by egoism and its manifestations: the cult of money (*baijinzhuyi* 拜金主義), selfishness at the expense of justice (*jian li wang yi* 見利忘義), neglect of the common good and development of private desires (*sun gong fei si* 損公肥私), and so on. Recurrent scandals (avian flu, contaminated milk, gutter oil, sales of all kinds of fake goods, etc.) as well as increasing distrust between people have been perceived as manifestations of a growing anomy in Chinese society.²⁰ However, these destructive tendencies have also been somewhat counterbalanced by a reverse trend focusing on the promotion of “things collective,” for instance exemplified by the religious revival or the development of voluntary and disinterested commitments in society.²¹ People and projects associated with Confucianism are also part of this countercurrent.

But which resources and historical precedents can they mobilize in order to fuel their hopes for the creation of a new collective body and, by the same token, a new communion with ancient sages and reinvigorated solidarities between people? In the 2000s the scope of collective memory has been considerably enlarged compared to previous decades, successfully integrating entire strata of a past previously forgotten or marginalized. The period is no longer the same as the 1980s, when one could for instance observe in scholarly circles an opposition between Western-inspired “modernity” and a “tradition” (*chuantong*) considered dark and confused. Before 1989, “tradition” represented both an imperial past, deemed immobile and despotic, and the authoritarianism of the Maoist era, often denounced as a great leap into new forms of “feudalism.”²² By contrast, from the 1990s onwards people’s perception of the

19 Yan Yunxiang, *The Individualization of Chinese Society* (London: Berg, 2009). Yan’s book provides a number of highly stimulating studies about many aspects of post-Maoist society, from kinship to economic behaviors. This book has a strong methodological orientation—it consists of a discussion, from a Chinese perspective, of sociologists Beck and Giddens’s theses about the issue of “individualization.” This orientation constitutes both its strength and its limits.

20 A stimulating anthropological reflection based on avian flu and behaviors in the context of a “catastrophe” can be found in Frédéric Keck, *Un monde grippé* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010).

21 On these themes see Arthur Kleinman et al., *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person. What Anthropology and Psychiatry Tell Us about China Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

22 A famous documentary of the time, *River Elegy* (He Shang 河殤), inspired by a book by Su Xiaokang 蘇曉康, introduces a country with sharp contrasts: A “blue,” coastal, dynamic,

imperial past changed and became endowed with a much more positive meaning. This situation could be observed in all segments of society, far beyond scholarly circles. It gave birth to a phenomenon of reappropriation of strata of the past that could be encountered in mass culture, official discourses, and academia, with a rising interest in “national studies” (*guoxue* 國學).²³ For the Chinese population, reference to tradition ceased to be something abstract: “Cultural tradition” was no longer a dream but translated into a repertoire of very concrete objects, symbols, or ways of behaving that were reappropriated or reinvented—from traditional arts to vestimentary fashion—within a much more opened and consumerist daily culture.

This being said, it will only be possible in this book to emphasize the partial and fragmented dimension of historical resources mobilized in the 2000s by Confucian activists. Moreover, the recollection and reinterpretation of collective memory is far from consensual and often remains highly disputed. Of course, the broadening of people’s “horizon of expectations” compared to the Maoist period and its political grip on society also impacts the “field of experience” of new generations rediscovering various strata of the past.²⁴ But the whole process remains fragmented and selective. A good example of this unequal treatment or reappropriation of memory is the republican era of the 1920s and the 1930s. Whereas the work of famous Confucian intellectuals of this period such as Liang Shuming or Xiong Shili are published and commented on in scholarly circles, the history of “redemptive societies” that gave Confucianism of the time a massive popular dimension remains largely neglected. However, we shall see later that the various popular dimensions of Confucianism in the republican era may help to anticipate some of the undertakings carried out “in the space of the people” in the 2000s and that they sometimes also echo the activities of organizations developing in Taiwan. Transformations of historical perception take place in an ongoing and quick way. They also affect more recent

and opened China was opposed to a “yellow” country, since the yellowish color of loess, so typical of inner China, was associated with things backward, traditional, and conservative. The “blue” China was the one of necessary economic and political reforms, whereas the yellow one implicitly pointed to “conservative” communism. See Joël Thoraval, “La tradition rêvée: Réflexions sur *L’Élégie du fleuve* de Su Xiaokang,” *L’Infini* 30 (1990): 146–168.

23 See Arif Dirlik, ed., “The National Learning Revival,” special issue, *China Perspectives* 2011, no. 1 (2011), dedicated to national studies.

24 These concepts are borrowed from Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft, Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, 349–375.

periods such as the Maoist era that becomes increasingly severed from lived experience of part of the population and thus generates new reconstructions and new veils of amnesia.²⁵ Let us add that historical memory is of course a disputed realm that is also impacted by debates within Chinese society: After a century of antitraditionalist nationalism it would have been surprising not to see—in reaction against the reappearance of references to the sage—concurrent revival of new types of anti-Confucianism.²⁶

What are the main orientations of the new “popular Confucianism”? In this study, we focus on three dimensions that also constitute the three parts of the book. To avoid feeling constrained by Western categories and the implicit meanings they convey, at least for a Western readership, we have chosen to turn to Chinese categories. Part I is called *jiaohua* 教化. This notion is made up of the two characters “educate” (*jiao*) and “transform” (*hua*). It does not simply point to the acquisition of knowledge but to a deeper transformation and shaping process of the self, but above all, of the others, thanks to education. Chapters 1 to 3 explore the meaning and the evolution of educational enterprises launched by Confucian activists as well as their specific relationship to classical texts.

25 For Republican China, see Zhang Qiang and Robert Weatherley, “The Rise of Republican Fever in the PRC and its Implications for CCP Legitimacy,” *China Information* 27, no. 3 (November 2013): 277–300. For Maoist China, Sebastian Veg, ed., “Mao Today: A Political Icon for an Age of Prosperity,” special issue, *China Perspectives* 2012, no. 2 (2012).

26 A symptom is the debate that opposed in 2007 liberal advocates of a “cultural renaissance” (*wenhua fuxing* 文化復興) and traditionalist—and Confucianism-inspired—promoters of a “moral reconstruction” (*daode chongjian* 道德重建). See Liu Junning 劉軍寧, “Zhongguo, ni xuyao yi chang wenyifuxing! 中國,你需要一場文藝復興” [China, You Need a Renaissance!], *Nanfang Zhoumou* 南方週末, December 7, 2006, B15; Shu Qinfeng, “Zhongguo zhen de xuyao yi chang wenyifuxing 中國真的需要一場文藝復興” [China Really Needs a Renaissance], *Liaowang Zhoukan* 瞭望周刊, December 28, 2006, 74–76; Qiu Feng 秋風, “Zhongguo xuyao wenyifuxing hai shi bie de yundong? 中國需要文藝復興還是別的運動?” (Does China Need a Renaissance or Another Movement?), *Nanfang Zhoumou* 南方週末, December 21, 2006, 15B; Qiu, “Zhongguo xuyao daode chongjian yu shehui jianshe yundong 中國需要道德重建與社會建設運動” [China Needs a Movement of Moral Reconstruction and Social Construction], *Nanfang Zhoumou*, February 8, 2007, 15B; Qiu, “Daode chongjian, shehui jianshe yu geti zunyan 道德重建,社會建設與個體尊嚴” [Moral Reconstruction, Social Construction and Dignity of the Individual], *Nanfang Zhoumou*, January 18, 2007, 29D; Cui Weiping 崔衛平, “Women de zunyan zaiyu yongyou jiazhi lixiang lixiang 我們的尊嚴在於擁有價值理想” [Our Dignity Stems from the Fact that We Have an Ideal in the Realm of Values], *Nanfang Zhoumou*, January 11, 2007, B14; Li Jing 李靜, “Geren de jingshen chengshu yu Zhongguo wenyi fuxing 個人的精神成熟與中國文藝復興” [Spiritual Maturity of the Individual and Chinese Renaissance], *Nanfang Zhoumou*, January 25, 2007, B15; “Wenyifuxing haishi daode chongjian? 文藝復興還是道德重建?” [Renaissance or Moral Reconstruction?], *Zhongguo xinwen zhouban* 中國新聞週刊, January 22, 2007, 2 [op-ed].

Anshen liming 安身立命 has been the notion that we have selected to encapsulate the array of issues discussed in part II. The expression designates a quest for inner peace and, at the same time, the concern for individual or collective destiny and this, in reference to ultimate values. It is a particularly interesting category since it makes it possible to encompass a large spectrum of activities: Whereas some of them are openly “religious,” others refuse or are simply indifferent to such a label. Starting with the description of specific itineraries our study attempts afterwards to show the relative fluidity of categories originally borrowed from the West and often used to describe new Confucianism-inspired projects. Finally, we discuss the possibility of institutionalizing brands of Confucianism explicitly claiming a religious dimension.

Part III of the book addresses the “teaching of rites”, that is, *lijiao* 禮教, and enables us to discuss a number of issues ranging from religion to politics. Our departure point is the local situation in Shandong province mentioned above and the organization in the city of Qufu of ceremonies in order to celebrate Confucius’s birthday. The main issue that we address is the fate of Confucian ritualism today, between the ancient legacy of local rituals and the creation of new “popular” practices (chapters 7 to 9).

Exploring the multifaceted phenomena emerging in the 2000s obliged us to adopt a cross-disciplinary approach, using the tools and insights of sociology, anthropology, history, and even, to a lesser extent, political science. The initial orientation of this work, however, was anthropological and we therefore felt the need to complement our core enquiry with a more general and anthropological question (chapter 10). Considering that the tradition labeled Confucianism belongs to a vast shared Chinese cosmology that gradually contributed to shaping Chinese culture, how could our research on Confucianism contribute to analyzing the contemporary fates of this cosmology that used to integrate the visible and invisible dimensions of a same universe? This ultimate question is discussed by exploring state-sponsored cults both in the PRC and in Taiwan. It ends with a few hypotheses about transformations of the relationship between the religious and the political—or, in other words, about the “politico-religious” or “theologico-political” questions—in two different societies of the vast sinicized world.

We started this research project in the middle of the 2000s. Considering its relatively long time frame, a number of people, projects, and activities we initially began to study evolved over time. An epilogue briefly introduces the situation in 2014 and suggests possible evolutions for the years ahead.

PART I

Jiaohua (教化)

The Confucian Revival in China
as an Educative Project

I

Confucian Education during the Twentieth Century

A RETROSPECTIVE OUTLOOK

EDUCATION UNDOUBTEDLY CONSTITUTES one of the realms where the revived reference to Confucianism is particularly visible. Among the many symptoms of this new situation, it suffices to mention the development of a large “classics reading movement,” the rediscovery of ancient educational institutions, or the enrollment of scores of business people in so-called *guoxue* classes.

The phenomenon at stake here has two main dimensions that are well reflected in the traditional expression *jiaohua* 教化. This conveys a meaning of both “education-transformation” of the self and “shaping of the other.” Beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge, all sorts of projects—realistic and utopian—crystallize in this idea and aim at asserting the future role in China of a reappropriated traditional culture.

This reactivation of a *jiaohua* associated with a Confucian *ethos* needs to be recontextualized, taking into account the general fate of Confucian education since the end of the empire.

In 1905, China abandoned the appointment of scholars-literati to official positions based on an examination system that had turned the mastery of Confucian classics into a tool of imperial ideology. This small revolution actually completed a long-lasting process that had been promoted by reformers within the imperial system since the end of the nineteenth century and that had already led to the suppression of the *shuyuan* 書院 or traditional

Confucian academies.¹ It was then considered that the emergence of a “rich and powerful” country required the integration of a number of features of Western modernity, including a more utilitarian and technical approach to education. The 1911 revolution brought about an overall transformation of the educational system and the new republican government immediately decided to suppress the study of classical texts within the curriculum.²

The demise of the imperial system was a watershed in the history of education in China and brought about an irreversible rupture to the centrality of Confucianism. The significance of this rupture is sometimes overlooked by Confucian revivalists today. However, while they look for pedagogical inspiration in traditional practices, their concrete projects also remain in continuity with the history of the republican era. Indeed, contrary to a classical antitraditional narrative that prevailed during the twentieth century, due to specific features of Chinese nationalism, the modern transformation of the educational system encountered some significant degree of resistance, including within the modernizing camp. One of the benefits of the current emergence of “traditional” forms of education is precisely that it enables a more sophisticated retrospective on a period that was certainly more complex and full of potential developments than what a certain progressive narrative used to expound. Many projects took place from the end of the empire in order to preserve classical learning and self-cultivation traditions. They translated into attempts to perpetuate ancient institutions or to preserve certain ways of studying classical texts. Of this somewhat “minor” history it is now necessary to provide a brief overview since it illuminates the genealogy of the current “Confucian revival” in its educational dimension.

The Paradoxical Fate of Traditional Institutions during the Twentieth Century

The restructuring of the educational system at the end of the empire and during the republican era did not completely put an end to the promotion of Confucianism-inspired *jiaohua*. Some established institutions such as

1 For a detailed overview of educational reforms at the end of the empire, see William Ayers, *Chang Chih-tung and Educational Reform in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

2 Suzanne Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform in Twentieth-Century China: The Search for an Ideal Development Model* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61.

sishu 私塾 (traditional schools) continued to operate out of sheer necessity, since a full-fledged transition toward a modern educational system was practically impossible during the first half of the twentieth century. Other projects aimed at perpetuating institutions such as Confucian academies while adapting them to a changing time. Finally, *jiaohua* activities could also become integrated within new types of organizations.

Traditional Schools or *Sishu*

The label “traditional schools,” or *sishu*, makes it possible to encompass a group of extremely diverse institutions promoting forms of teaching primarily based upon the inculcation of Confucian classics to children (and above all, to young boys). By the end of the empire, attending a *sishu*—which could have been operated by a scholar, by one or several families, or by a lineage or in a village—was considered a preliminary step in order to be accepted in academies that were themselves some sort of preparatory school for the imperial examination system. Such traditional schools existed both in cities and in the countryside. A 1923 survey carried out in Nanjing indicates the presence of around 500 *sishu* in the city. Another survey carried out at the beginning of the 1930s in the countryside underlines that around 66.5 percent of educated males had been schooled in *sishu*.³ All in all, educational reforms of the republican era proved unable to put an end to the traditional schooling system and replace it with modern-style institutions.

No specific qualification was required to teach in or operate a *sishu*. Teachers—generally one per school—often came from the ranks of candidates who had been unsuccessful in imperial examinations or, after 1905, from those of the sacrificed generation that had prepared in vain for the abolished examinations.

An oral-history work carried out by Stig Thøgersen in Zouping (Shandong province) and based on a collection of interviews with people who attended *sishu* in the pre-1949 period provides some insight into the way these traditional schools were operated.⁴ Probably like in most Chinese *sishu* at that time, teaching methods relied heavily on rote memorization

3 Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform*, 77.

4 Stig Thøgersen, *Country of Culture. 20th Century China Seen From the Village Schools of Zouping* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

by pupils of primers and other classical texts. In general, teachers started with ancient primers such as the *Classic in Three Characters* (*Sanzi jing*), the *Name of the One Hundred Families* (*Baijia jing*), or the *Text in One Thousand Characters* (*Qianzi wen*) that had largely been used since the Song dynasty (960–1279).⁵ Then, they could use the Four Books and even sometimes the Five Classics.⁶ In rare cases, some lessons were also dedicated to arithmetic. Pedagogical methods were rudimentary and seemingly homogeneous across different *sishu*: In the morning, the teacher would read a text without providing complementary explanations. More often than not, pupils would not understand its meaning but would repeat it over and over again during the rest of the day in order to be able to recite it the day after. In sum, learning mainly meant memorizing. Those who could not manage to do so underwent harsh physical punishments—and cases of beaten students are mentioned.⁷ The general “children-shaping scheme” was largely inherited from the social-control scheme of the late empire. This being said, interviewees do not necessarily keep bad memories of their *sishu* education. Some mentioned that they learned how to behave properly (*zenme zuo ren* 怎麼做人), whereas others underscore that they became mature and responsible persons. More generally, considering that many of those who would later become educators were originally trained prior to 1949 in *sishu*, this type of education—at least formally—was not without influence later on in the People’s Republic of China.⁸

Confucian Academies or Shuyuan

Whereas *sishu* education could endure in republican China due to the difficulty of modernizing the educational system, the few Confucian academies still operating at that time generally resulted from the deliberate will

5 For a detailed historical overview of primers, see Bai Limin, *Shaping the Ideal Child: Children and Their Primers in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2005).

6 The Four Books and Five Classics are fundamental texts of literati culture and of the examination system in China. The Five Classics are: *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), *The Book of Odes* (*Shijing*), *The Book of Documents* (*Shujing* or *Shangshu*), *The Book of Rites* (*Liji*), and the annals of *Spring and Autumn* (*Chunqiu*). In the twelfth century, four texts (the Four Books) were extracted: *The Analects of Confucius*, the *Mencius*, the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*), and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*). Commented upon by scholars like Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), they played an important role in Song-dynasty neo-Confucianism.

7 Thøgersen, *Country of Culture*, 20–26.

8 Thøgersen, *Country of Culture*, 19–20.

of their initiators to perpetuate a model different from the new university system.

Academies played a fundamental role in education in China for more than a thousand years. They were strongly developed during the Song dynasty, especially under the influence of neo-Confucian scholars such as Zhu Xi.⁹ They were established by lineages to educate their members and train them to sit for imperial examinations, by Confucian masters, and, especially starting with the Ming dynasty, by the authorities.¹⁰ In the sixteenth century, under the influence of scholars such as Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), academies also had an objective of promoting a more general access to education. All through their history they experienced tensions between the ideals of self-cultivation and preparation for official examinations, between integration in the public sphere and resistance against the authorities during times of crisis.¹¹ By the end of the nineteenth century there were about four thousand academies at various administrative levels, from districts to prefectures.¹²

The end of the academies was the result of the modernization of education at the end of the empire, of the demise of the examination system, and, more generally from 1911 onward, of the emergence of a new political

9 For a synthetic overview of the history of academies, see Li Hongqi (Thomas H. C. Lee) 李弘祺, “Shuyuan, chuantong xueshu de zhongxin 書院, 傳統學術的中心” [The *Shuyuan*, Centres of the Traditional Academic World], in *Zhongguo wenhua de zhuan Cheng yu Chuang Xin* 中國文化的傳承與創新 [Innovation and Transmission within Chinese Culture], ed. Wang Shouchang 王守常 and Zhang Wending 張文定, 355–364 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2006). For the relationship between state policy and private initiative, see Alexander Woodside, “The Divorce between the Political Center and Educational Creativity in Late Imperial China,” in *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600–1900*, ed. Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside, 458–492 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). See also Chen Wenyi 陳雯怡, *You guanxue dao shuyuan* 由官學到書院 [From Official Schools to Academies] (Taipei, Lianjing, 2004). Chen’s book provides a good overview of the state of research on academies. There have been many discussions and divergences regarding the creation of the first *shuyuan*. See for instance Li Caidong 李才棟, *Zhongguo shuyuan yanjiu* 中國書院研究 [Research on the Academies in China] (Nanchang: Jiangxi gaoxiao chubanshe, 2005).

10 Lee reports that during the Ming dynasty 60 percent of the academies were established thanks to government initiative. Thomas H. C. Lee, “Academies: Official Sponsorship and Suppression,” in *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, ed. Frederik P. Brandauer and Chun-chieh Huang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 126.

11 Ibid., 119. This was for instance the case of the Dongling academy in the seventeenth century. See also Jacques Gernet, *L’intelligence de la Chine: Le social et le mental* (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1994), 112.

12 Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform*, 51.

system. However, and contrary to the situation that prevailed for official examinations, academies were never criticized harshly, and abandoning them was not the consequence of much deliberation.¹³ During the 1920s, at a time when the bulk of these institutions was already dismantled, academies became the focus of what would nowadays be called a slight “fever” (*re* 熱), that is, some sort of temporary enthusiasm for a given topic.¹⁴ Paradoxically, a number of Westernized intellectuals who had fiercely fought against the ancient order openly lamented their demise. In 1923, Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), one of the most influential figures of the May 4th Movement, explained that “abandoning the academies was actually very unfortunate for our country. The voluntary spirit of study perpetuated for around one thousand years will not reappear again.”¹⁵ There were many, like him, who hoped that some form or other of the spirit prevailing in academies would remain in the new Western-inspired university system.¹⁶ The young Mao Zedong himself expressed some nuanced viewpoint about academies, emphasizing their positive sides. He obviously did not think about the Confucian content of the teachings but rather about formal aspects, especially the knowledge transmission methods that could not be separated from relationships being built between masters and students and that favored an atmosphere of freedom and enjoyment of things studied.¹⁷

Beyond formal aspects, a number of attempts to revive academies and Confucianism-inspired education took place during the first half of the

13 Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, *Daxue hewei* 大學何為 [Why the University?] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2006), 5.

14 *Ibid.*, 3.

15 *Ibid.*, 12.

16 *Ibid.*, 6.

17 Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform*, 98. Mao's interest in the academies as institutions, as well as “socialist self-cultivation” advocated by Liu Shaoqi, has been considered by some Chinese intellectuals as the manifestation of a so-called sinicization or confucianization of Marxism, that is, the pervasive continuity of a number of intellectual, behavioral, or organizational schemes inherited from the imperial past. On this topic, see Li Zehou 李澤厚, *Makesizhuyi zai Zhongguo* 馬克思主義在中國 [Marxism in China] (Hong Kong: Mingbao chubanshe, 2006), 44, or Jin Guantao 金觀濤, “Dangdai Zhongguo Makesizhuyi de rujiahua 當代中國馬克思主義的儒家化” [The Confucianization of Marxism in Contemporary China], in *Rujia fazhan de hongguan toushi* 儒家發展的宏觀透視 [Overall Perspective on the Development of Confucianism], ed. Tu Wei-ming 杜維明, 152–183 (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1988).

twentieth century. The so-called three great *shuyuan* of republican China, opened by representatives of the contemporary Confucianism movement at the end of the 1930s, were probably the most emblematic of these enterprises.¹⁸ Institutions established by Ma Yifu 馬一浮 (1883–1967) and Zhang Junmai 張君勱 (1886–1969) can be taken as examples in that they reflect a different conception of the possible role of academies in postimperial China.

Probably the most traditional of these new institutions, the Return to Nature Academy (Fuxing shuyuan 復性書院), was opened in 1939 by Ma Yifu in Leshan, Sichuan province. This project was implemented within the context of the Sino-Japanese war that started in 1937 and of the withdrawal of the nationalist government in Chongqing. Ma Yifu's path is representative of a period of transition, doubts, and of complex and changing relationships to Confucianism.¹⁹ Considered a child prodigy, Ma became at fifteen a laureate of the provincial examinations. Because of his proficiency in several foreign languages, he was assigned for a while to the Qing Embassy in the United States before advancing his studies in literature and philosophy in Germany and Japan. Back in China, he chose for a while to live a somewhat secluded life, writing and translating, delving into Daoism, Buddhism, and art (he is actually still remembered as a famous calligrapher). He also befriended prominent figures of the time such as Li Shutong 李叔同 (1880–1942) and Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898–1975). Without participating in the 1911 revolution he nevertheless supported Sun Yat-sen. In the same way as many intellectuals of the time, it was China's difficult situation that prompted him in the 1920s to turn to Confucianism and to open a traditional-style academy.²⁰

In a society that he considered first and foremost to be governed by utilitarianism, Ma Yifu's project was to train a group of young people. The emphasis was not simply on their intellectual developments but primarily on a path of self-cultivation supposed to enable everyone to return to their innate nature. This aim was to revive an ideal of wisdom traditionally central in academies, even if it was often neglected due to the preparation for the imperial examination. His teaching was primarily based on "national

18 The three "great *shuyuan*" were those opened by Ma Yifu and Zhang Junmai (discussed later in this chapter) and by Liang Shuming in Beipei (Chongqing area).

19 On Ma Yifu's career, see Chen Rui 陳銳, *Ma Yifu yu xiandai Zhongguo* 馬一浮與現代中國 [Ma Yifu and Contemporary China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007).

20 Ibid., 168–171.

studies" (*guoxue* 國學)—that is, on Chinese disciplines—and more specifically on the study of “six arts” (*liu yi* 六藝) or “six classics” (*liu jing* 六經).²¹ Sciences and foreign languages were excluded from this curriculum. This academy was apolitical and governed according to regulations inspired by Buddhism. Ma Yifu’s ambition was to try to reach a financial balance while preserving its independence. This was far from easy considering that Ma largely relied on Chiang Kai-shek’s personal financial support. Ma tried to attract to his academy some prominent intellectual figures of the time, such as neo-Confucian thinker Xiong Shili, master of well-known scholars Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi. However, fundamental divergences between the two men regarding their conceptions of education made this collaboration impossible. In Xiong’s opinion, Ma Yifu’s exclusive emphasis on students’ moral nature (*dexing* 德性) did not really take into account the country’s real needs: training a generation of students able to contribute to social reform by means of virtuous action.

It was a somewhat different conception of the role of a Confucian academy for modern times that Zhang Junmai and philosopher Zhang Dongsun 張東蓀 (1886–1973) had in mind when they set up their National Culture Academy (Minzu wenhua shuyuan 民族文化書院) in 1938 in Dali, Yunnan. Zhang Junmai was also a representative of “contemporary Confucianism” and an original figure of republican China’s intellectual and political life. Deeply involved in important intellectual debates,²² he also established with Zhang Dongsun a political party that was supposed to emerge as a “third force” between the Communist Party and the Guomindang. In their academy, they had the ambition of reviving

21 After the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 BC), the six arts were assimilated with the Six Classics, that is, with *The Books of Documents, Odes, Changes, Rites, and Music* (the last disappeared under the Qin dynasty, hence the usual reference to Five Classics), as well as the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. These texts are interpreted and referred to by Ma Yifu in the metaphysical and speculative spirit of what is being called “Song studies” and not from a “Han studies” approach. The latter tends to emphasize a more accurate (and rigid) exegetic perspective. On Ma Yifu and the six arts, see Deng Xinwen 鄧新文, *Ma Yifu liu yi yi xin lun yanjiu* 馬一浮六藝一心論研究 [Research on Ma Yifu’s Theory of Heart/Mind and the Six Arts] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008).

22 In 1923, Zhang Junmai initiated a debate on “science and life” and was opposed to scholars such as Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), the latter one of the founders in 1921 of the Chinese Communist Party. Against what he considered to be an idolatrous embrace of science, Chen asserted the primacy of a *Weltanschauung* likely to provide individuals and society with an ethical orientation. See Lee Ming-huei, *Der Konfuzianismus im modernen China* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2001), 34–37.

the classical *shuyuan* institution while adapting it to combine what they believed to be a Western focus on knowledge with a Chinese concern for self-cultivation and morals. Molding students' character and instilling virtues in them were means enabling them to take enlightened decisions. However, the philosophy behind the academy was to promote an open institution engaged with the modern world. Therefore, the curriculum also included the study of major European thinkers. Beyond Confucianism, promotion of morality also meant advocating a patriotic spirit and its attributes: Knowledge of Chinese history, understanding the rule of law, and the meaning of citizenship.²³ Devoted to a cultural renaissance project (*wenhua fuxing*) the academy would thus draw inspiration from a variety of resources.

All in all, the few academies that were reconstructed in republican China had only a very limited impact. The dramatic situation of the country did not make it possible for them to endure, develop, or inspire other projects, and in the end they could manage to train only a handful of students. After 1949, it became necessary to turn to China's margins to observe the perpetuation of a humanistic spirit of self-cultivation based on Confucian classics. New Asia College (Xinya shuyuan 新亞書院), founded in 1950 in Hong Kong by Qian Mu 錢穆 (1889–1990) and Tang Junyi, preserved for a while the ideal of an academy in tune with modernity. Acquisition of knowledge and development of the individual were thus equally encouraged. However, with its integration in 1963 within the Chinese University of Hong Kong it would gradually lose its identity and comply with the university model of the British colony.²⁴ Most of the projects that were ambitious to revive traditional academies were initiated by scholars usually associated with the so-called contemporary Confucianism movement. Whereas the movement is often remembered as a purely intellectual

23 These elements are introduced in Roger B. Jeans, *Democracy and Socialism in Republican China: The Politics of Zhang Junmai* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), 83–87.

24 See for example Cheung Chan Fai, "Tang Junyi and the Philosophy of General Education," in *Confucian Tradition and Global Education*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007), 59ff. On the early history of the New Asia College, see Qian Mu 錢穆, *Shiyou zayi* 師友雜憶 [Remembering Teachers and Friends] (Taipei: Dongda tushugongsi, 1983). A volume of articles and speeches provides some insight into Qian Mu's enterprise as an educator at the head of the college. Qian Mu, *Xin Ya yiduo* 新亞遺鐸 [Past Echoes of the Xinya Academy] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2004). See also Grace Ai-ling Chou, *Confucianism, Colonialism and the Cold War: Chinese Cultural Education at Hong Kong's New Asia College* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2011).