

RELIGIONIZING CONFUCIANISM AND THE RE-ORIENTATION OF CONFUCIAN TRADITION IN MODERN CHINA

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Around a century ago, the first republic in Asia was established in China and allegedly ushered in a new anti-monarchist political order. As the main ideological pillar of the imperial system for centuries, the fate of Confucianism was inextricably intertwined with that of the fallen Empire. Accordingly, Confucianism inevitably faced a struggle for survival in Republican China.

In reaction to the unprecedented crisis, the Association for Confucian Religion (孔教會 Kongjiaohui) was established in the year Republican China was founded. Its inaugural meeting was deliberately held on the 2463rd anniversary of Confucius' birthday (the twenty-seventh day of the eighth month in the traditional lunar calendar) on 7 October 1912 and soon became the bastion of Confucian Religion.¹

The Association for Confucian Religion was neither the only nor the first society established in the name of defending Confucianism. Numerous societies in the name of Confucius were formed in the year the Republic of China was established. These were notably the Association for Worshipping the Sage (宗聖會 Zongshenghui) in February; the Association for the Confucian Way (孔道會 Kongdaohui) in July; and the Association for Sustaining the Confucian Way (孔道維持會 Kongdao weichihui) in October, among many other small and locally oriented societies.²

¹ In their own publications, the name of this association is simply translated as the Confucian Association. Yet in order to avoid any confusion with other similar societies at that time, I hereby employ the term Association for Confucian Religion to designate *Kongjiaohui*. The first serious study on this association was conducted by Hajime Abumiya, "Kokyōkai to kokyō no gokyōka: mingoku shoki no seijitōgō to rinrimondai."

² *Kongjiao shinian dashiji* (hereafter *KJSN*), vol. 7, 65. There might have been clandestine competition among these groups to win over one another's supporters, but at least on the surface they maintained friendly relationships. After all they were sharing the same aspirations in the name of Confucius. There were cases where some members had joined more than one of these societies. To name a few, Yan Fu (1854–1921), a well-known translator of Western scholarship, and Liang Qichao (1873–1929), a multi-talented man and political activist, became members of the Association for the Confucian Way, and later they also joined the Association for Confucian Religion.

However, after the Association for Confucian Religion was established, it immediately won the support of many prominent literati and became the most illustrious and influential of all the organizations. For example, the Worshipping the Sage Association established sixty-four branches in its Shanxi base, but had only ten branches in the other seven provinces. In sharp contrast, the Association for Confucian Religion, though established a few months later than the other Confucian societies, developed so rapidly in size that in less than two years it had set up 130 nationwide and overseas branches. Some lawless elements even tried to solicit contributions by assuming its name or a similar one to confuse its supporters. Consequently, the Association for Confucian Religion issued a special notice that they had no relationship with societies by the name of Chinese Association of Confucianism (中國儒教會 Zhongguo rujiaohui) or Global Association of Worshipping Confucius (寰球尊孔會 Huanqiu zunkonghui).³

What made the Association for Confucian Religion the most influential of all the Confucian societies? In terms of their professed purposes, theoretically there was only one notable difference between the Association for Confucian Religion and other Confucian groups: it firmly and fiercely claimed to uphold Confucianism as a religion. As they claimed, Confucianism had long been enshrined as the state religion of the old dynasties and should continue to be worshipped as the national religion of the new Republic.

Confucianism's Early Association with 'Religion'

Linguistically, the modern Chinese equivalent of *religion* (宗教 *zongjiao*) did not exist until the end of the nineteenth century. The Chinese cognate *jiao* had been widely used for centuries to designate Buddhism (佛教 *Fojiao*), Taoism (道教 *Daojiao*), and Islam (天方教 *Tianfangjiao* or 回教 *Huijiao*). When Christianity was first introduced into China through Nestorius's followers during the seventh and eighth centuries, it was termed *jingjiao* (景教) in Chinese, presumably denoting a teaching that embraced the "bright and vast Way".⁴ Later Christianity was reintroduced

³ *Kongjiaohui zazhi* (hereafter *KJHZZ*), vol. 1, no. 9.

⁴ A Nestorian tablet with abstruse inscriptions was first found in an excavation of 1625. Emmanuel Diaz (1574–1659), a Portuguese Jesuit, and his Chinese contemporary Yang Tingyun, one of the earliest Christian converts, had endeavored to decipher this tablet

into China and was rendered with various names, all with the suffix *jiao*. Nonetheless, the meanings of *jiao* did not necessarily correspond to those associated with *religion*. This untranslatable term *jiao* might be interpreted as “a teaching of value system”. More significantly, the traditional discourse on *jiao* was defined mainly by Confucianism instead of other religious traditions. Among the majority of the Chinese literati, Confucianism was not only viewed as the archetypal *jiao* but also the orthodox *jiao*. The status of Confucianism as a *jiao* had never before been questioned. In contrast, most of the other *jiao* in the past had strived to secure their legitimate status in the realm of *jiao*, or they might have been adjudged to be heterodox or evil teaching (邪教 *xiejiao*).

Notably when the modern Chinese equivalent of *religion* was denominated through the Japanese loanword *shūkyō*, it took time for it to be acknowledged as a new conceptual category signifying ‘religion’ and differentiated from the traditional usage of *jiao*. At first, this Chinese usage of *zongjiao* was not regarded as an alien concept, but instead as a fashionable binomial term for the traditional cognate *jiao*. Thus, this compound was even adopted in the official documents to promote Confucianism.

Like most of their predecessors in other dynasties throughout Chinese history, the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty also assumed the role of patronizing Confucianism. As their political authority was weakened by continuing domestic troubles and foreign invasions, manipulating the symbolic power of Confucianism became an expedient means for consolidating their regime. During the last seventy years of the Qing dynasty, from 1840 to 1911, about twenty Confucian scholars were canonized with imperial approval to join the Subordinate Worship (從祀 *congshi*) in the Confucian temple, which was instituted from central to local level on each and every administrative tier. This number was unusually large, given that, beside Confucius’ alleged seventy-two renowned disciples, only about one hundred Confucian scholars had been canonized since the Subordinate Worship system was initiated in the Late Han dynasty.⁵ Even when the traditional Civil Examination system was gradually replaced in the beginning of the twentieth century by the modern educational system, Confucianism

and determined its relationship to Christianity. They interpreted the connotation of *jing* as “vast, illustrious, and bright.” See Emanuel Diaz [Manuel Dias; Yang Manuo], *Jingjiao beiquan*. See also Xu Zongze, 85.1.

⁵ For the significance of the Confucian Temple and its political implication, see Huang Chin-shing, *Youru shengyu*. Huang also has a concise discussion on Confucian Canonization in English: see Huang Chin-shing, “The Confucian Temple as a Ritual System.”

still maintained its predominant position as the official ideology. In 1903, the official Guiding Principles on Education (學務綱要 *Xuewu gangyao*) was formulated for the newly installed school system, which was intended as the eventual replacement of the Civil Service Examination. It clearly stipulated that “foreign teachers are forbidden to preach their religions (*zongjiao*) in class,” but it also required that the study of Confucian classics should be emphasized in both elementary and high schools in order to preserve “the Sage’s teaching” (聖教 *shengjiao*). To stress the significance of studying Confucian classics, they even adopted the neologism *religion* (*zongjiao*) and stressed that

In foreign countries schools all have a curriculum concerning ‘religion.’ In China the [Confucian] Classics are our Chinese ‘religion.’⁶

Furthermore, Venerating Confucius/Confucianism (尊孔 *zunkong*) was clearly stipulated as one of five Educational Objectives (教育宗旨 *jiaoyu zongzhi*) in 1906. In the official memorandum on the Educational Objectives, the emphasis on the significance of Venerating Confucius was made by drawing an analogy with the Western educational system:

In the education systems of the [Western] nations, their own languages, history, customs and religions (*zongjiao*) are all honored and preserved. Therefore, in their schools they all have concrete measures to worship their ‘national religion’ (國教 *guojiao*).⁷

In this regard, it was suggested that the study of the Confucian classics should be compulsory, and, furthermore, the ceremony of worshipping Confucius should be held in schools on the birthday of Confucius and at the beginning of each spring and autumn term.⁸ It concluded that

The more the ‘national religion’ is revered, the more popular support is secured. This is exactly what we intend by Venerating Confucius.

Among the five Educational Objectives, Venerating Confucius was placed second after Pledging Loyalty to the Sovereign (忠君 *zhongjun*). It evidently suggested that the throne was still by all means superior to

⁶ Shu Xincheng, *Jindai zhongguo jiaoyu shiliao*, vol. 2, 12.

⁷ *Daqing faqi daquan xubian*, 1:1a–3a. There were five objectives stipulated in the imperial policy of education: Pledging loyalty to the Sovereign (*zhongjun*), Venerating Confucius (*zunkong*), Cultivating Militancy (*shangwu*), Cultivating Public Spirit (*shang-gong*), and Cultivating Practicality (*shangshi*).

⁸ Traditionally it was called the Sacrificial Rites of Spring and Autumn (*chunqiu shicai*) where certain vegetables served as sacrificial offerings, according to the *Book of Rites*.

Confucianism. However, at a time when the regime was in danger of collapse and Confucianism was needed to win the support of the literati, the relationship between the throne and Confucianism became more fragile and complicated. Shortly after the official Educational Objectives were promulgated, it was proposed at court that the worship of Confucius be promoted from a Secondary Sacrificial Rite to a Grand Sacrificial Rite. Now, Confucius could symbolically enjoy the highest status parallel to Heaven and Earth which was even above the throne, given that in the Grand Sacrificial Rites the emperor should lead all of his subjects and perform prostrations.⁹ Yao Darong (姚大榮 1860–1939), the initial petitioner, formulated his arguments exactly upon the Five Educational Objectives:

We traced the origins of these five Educational Objectives: the significance of Pledging Loyalty to the Sovereign, Cultivating Public Spirit (尚公 *shang-gong*), Cultivating Militancy (尚武 *shangwu*), and Cultivating Practicality (尚實 *shangshi*) is in all cases derived from Confucian doctrines, which are implied here and there in the Confucian classics. The more we studied these classics, the more these notions were revealed. Hence to observe these principles is to observe Confucianism.

Yao also used Western religion as his supporting evidence by arguing:

In the West, people of the entire country worship religion as if placing it in the 'host seat.' Once the 'host seat' is settled, it would never be altered no matter how many various kinds of arrangements [surrounding it] would be adopted. In China, Confucius was treated as if being situated in the 'guest seat.' Even though he was honoured as 'the Greatest Sage' or respected as the 'Grand Master,' yet in terms of the state cults, [the worship in] the Confucian temple was merely placed among the 'Middle Sacrifices.'¹⁰

Yao's petition was immediately granted by the throne. It was proclaimed in an imperial edict that "Confucius is the Greatest Sage, His virtue parallel to Heaven and Earth and He is the paragon for all generations. The Worship of Confucius certainly should be promoted to a Grand Sacrifice".¹¹

Ostensibly it seemed that Yao's reasoning was well-founded and the Qing government readily accepted this sound proposal and hence was

⁹ For the system of sacrificial rites in the Qing, see *Qing huidian shili, juan* 415, pp. 634–647.

¹⁰ *Lidai zunkong ji*, 24–25.

¹¹ This imperial edict was issued by the Empress Dowager Cixi who assumed real power then. See *Qing Shilu: Dezong, juan* 566, p. 496. For the detailed changes concerning the ceremony of Confucian Worship after it was elevated to a Grand Sacrifice, see the memorial by the Board of Rites on the deliberation of ceremony, *Daqing fagui daquan, juan* 1, 1a–2b.

willing to accept Confucianism as the national religion and even place it symbolically above the throne. However, the truth was that Confucianism was patronized by the throne and in return the throne utilized Confucian ideology to justify its continuation in power. In the past, assigning the worship of Confucius merely as a Secondary Sacrifice had been a deliberate decision which implied the superiority of the throne over Confucianism. The Qing court's consent to elevate the worship of Confucius to a Grand Sacrifice indicated that the weakened sovereign was in desperate need of Confucianism to reconfirm its legitimacy and win the support of the masses, or at least the majority of the Confucian literati. It is safe to assume, however, that Venerating Confucius and Pledging Loyalty to the Sovereign became more closely intertwined, a direction the tottering Qing regime pursued.

By the late Qing, the status of Confucianism was promoted to its highest level in Chinese history, but at the same time the highest price ever would be paid in the future. The parallel drawn between Christianity in the West and Confucianism as the national religion in Qing China gave official affirmation to the affinity between the traditional Confucian teaching and the foreign neologism *religion*. In a way Confucianism enjoyed an unprecedented peak of glory just before it fell into an unprecedented abyss of misery.

A Marriage on Trial: Confucian Religion versus Republican Education

This interdependence between Confucianism and the Qing regime reached its peak as the last dynasty in China came to an end. The parallel drawn between Christianity and Confucianism and the neologism *zongjiao* adopted in official proposals strongly suggested that Confucianism had been elevated to the extent that Christianity appeared to be worshipped in the West.

Yet after Republican China was established, most of the imperial rituals were believed to go the way of the doomed emperorship, except for the official ceremonies for worshipping the Heaven and Confucius. In regard to the educational system, which was supposed to be the cradle for the nation's new generation, it also became problematic whether schools should keep the study of the Confucian classics as part of the compulsory curriculum and whether students should continue to perform the ceremony of worshipping Confucius in schools.

The first Minister of Education Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培 1868–1940), who had passed the Metropolitan Examination in the Qing dynasty and who later converted and joined the revolutionary force, published an article in 1912 entitled “Opinions Regarding Modern Education,”¹² in which he proposed a new set of Educational Objectives. Cai Yuanpei claimed that modern education should comprise (1) military training, (2) technical training, (3) moral education, (4) aesthetic education, and (5) cultivation of a *Weltanschauung* (世界觀 *shijieguan*), an idea he had presumably acquired during his scholarly sojourn in Germany (1907–1911). In contrast to the previous set of five Educational Objectives issued by the late Qing court, the Minister of Education of the new Republican China argued that Pledging Loyalty to the Sovereign contradicted the principle of the Republican regime; and Venerating Confucius violated the principle of ‘religious freedom’ (信教自由 *xinjiao ziyou*). Accordingly, these two objectives were no longer applicable to the new educational system.

In his argument regarding the conflict between Venerating Confucius and ‘religious freedom,’ Cai Yuanpei evidently assumed that Confucianism was, or had become, a religion. In fact, just two years previously, when he was working on the *History of Ethics in China*, Cai had argued that since the Han dynasty Confucianism had manifested certain characteristics of a *national* religion in terms of rituals. He also noted that it was the efforts of scholars in the Song and Ming dynasties who had endeavoured to disseminate Confucianism among the populace that made this state Confucianism become a real ‘popularized religion.’¹³ What worried Cai Yuanpei was that once Confucius was worshipped as a ‘religious founder’ and his teachings were regarded as sacred and inviolable ‘religious tenets,’ then all later intellectual endeavours were strictly measured and censored by Confucius’ doctrines. Consequently, hardly any new ideas were initiated.¹⁴

Although Cai assumed that Confucianism was, or had become, a religion, at the same time he also tried to draw a distinct line between Confucius’ doctrines and Confucian Religion. In his 1912 article Cai Yuanpei emphasized that “Confucius’ scholarship” should be distinguished and thus treated

¹² Cai Yuanpei, *Duiyu xinjiaoyu zhi yijian*, (hereafter *CYPQJ*) Vol. II, 130. This influential article has been published in several newspapers and journals, such as *Minli Bao* (February 8–9, 1912), *Jiaoyu Zazhi* 3:11 (February 10, 1912), *Dongfang Zazhi* 8:10 (April 1912).

¹³ *CYPQJ*, Vol. II, 1–107. This work was originally published in 1910 by Shangwu Press. It was translated into Japanese by Nakajima Tarō as *Shina rinri gakushi* (Tokyo UP, 1941).

¹⁴ *CYPQJ*, Vol. II, 75.

differently from either the so-called *rujiao* (儒教) or *kongjiao* (孔教), which both might signify Confucian Religion.¹⁵ This point was later elaborated in his 1916 lecture at the Association for Religious Freedom. Here, Cai argued that Confucius had pondered upon the issues concerning education, politics and morality, but not religion. Cai affirmed that

Confucius is Confucius, religion is religion; Confucius and 'religion' are irrelevant to each other.¹⁶

In short, if Confucianism was Confucian Religion, then Confucius himself was not a Confucian at all.

In this regard, Cai Yuanpei suggested in his article of 1912 that "educational circles should have a special deliberation on the treatment of Confucius and Confucian Religion respectively". This deliberation took place in July 1912 when the Provisional National Conference on Education was convened in Beijing at the invitation of the Ministry of Education. In his opening remarks to this conference, Cai Yuanpei argued that "education was to be solely for the purpose of the future" and that modern education should serve as the pivotal instrument to cultivate the new generation of Chinese intellectuals. Evidently, according to his Educational Objectives, Cai Yuanpei envisioned that in the future the 'religious' concern about the other world should be completely replaced by the 'aesthetic' appreciation of the mundane world.

Before this 1912 conference on education, the fourteen-article Provisional Regulations of General Education had already been issued, in which the study of Confucian classics was to be abolished in primary schools.¹⁷ This order was reaffirmed and formally stipulated in May when the Ministry of Education published an open telegram to all provinces.¹⁸ Evidently, Cai Yuanpei had already determined to carry out the abolition of the study of the Confucian classics in curricula.

It would be incorrect to infer that Cai Yuanpei intended to negate the value of the Confucian classics. As a holder of the Metropolitan Graduate degree in the late Qing (1892), Cai's familiarity with the Confucian classics was beyond question. Besides, it is easy to find various citations from the Confucian classics in his writings to support his arguments. Even his essay "Opinion Regarding Modern Education" contains several quotations

¹⁵ *CYPQJ*, Vol. II, 130.

¹⁶ Cai Yuanpei, "Zai xinjiao ziyouhui zhi yanshuo," *CYPQJ*, Vol. II, 491.

¹⁷ "Putong jiaoyu zhanxing banfa" (January 19, 1912), *Jiaoyu Zazhi*, vol. 10.

¹⁸ Wu Yanyin and Weng Zhida, 15.

from Confucius and Mencius which were adopted to argue for the significance of ethics as one of his new Educational Objectives. What Cai really opposed was to regard Confucian classics as well as Confucianism as the only sacrosanct authority. For him, it was the monopoly of the Confucian classics, rather than the classics *per se*, in the former educational system that should be held responsible for Chinese cultural megalomania.

Along with the abrogation of the study of the Confucian classics, the abolition of the worship of Confucius was regarded as another major way to get rid of the monopoly of Confucianism in the educational system or, as it were, to 'secularize' Confucianism in the educational system. Reportedly, this was initiated by Xiao Youmei (蕭友梅 1884–1940) who represented Zhong Rongguang (鍾榮光 1866–1942), the Director of the Department of Education in Guangdong Province, at the 1912 conference. Zhong Rongguang suggested in a motion that all kinds of religious idols and deities' tablets should not be worshipped in public schools. Since 'religious freedom' had been granted by the Provisional Constitution in March, Confucian Religion should cease to be practiced in public schools. He explained that for those students who were believers of other religions, "Confucian followers could pray in Confucius' temples. Likewise, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims could do so in their own temples respectively".¹⁹

During the conference, the retention or abolition of the worship of Confucius in schools became a topic of heated debate. Although the conference was almost evenly divided, it ultimately reached consensus that Confucian worship should no longer be stipulated in the regulations for school administration. It concluded that

Confucius is not a religionist and there shall be a proper way [other than worship] to honour him. 'Education' and 'religion' should not be lumped together. Moreover, 'religious freedom' is generally stipulated in the [Provisional] Constitution, hence it is inappropriate to set up an absolute authority.²⁰

Evidently, for the majority of delegates, the ceremony of worshipping Confucius could misleadingly suggest that Confucianism was a religion. Thus, under the principle of 'religious freedom,' they had to root out all activities suggesting that Confucian Religion was preached and worshipped in schools.

¹⁹ KJHZZ Vol. 1, no 1. "News concerning Confucianism," *if*.

²⁰ Shu Xincheng, *Jindai zhongguo jiaoyu shiliao*, vol. 3, 220f.

As previously discussed, Confucianism was closely associated with the neologism *religion* in the late Qing period; it was not merely bias on the part of Cai Yuanpei and others to treat Confucianism as Confucian Religion. In contrast to the official assertion by the late Qing government that “the Confucian classics are the religion of China” and thus the study of the Confucian classics should be compulsory in school, Cai Yuanpei followed its assumptions to a certain extent but argued that any educational regulations suggesting that Confucianism was a religion should be avoided in the new school curriculum. By the same token, once the Qing court drew analogies between Western religion and Confucianism and promoted the worship of Confucius in the name of ‘national religion,’ it was almost inevitable for those at the conference to associate the worship of Confucius with religious significance.

Consequently, a verdict on Confucianism was reached: the charisma of Confucius as a religious founder was negated and he should from then on be regarded as a philosophical thinker, an educational advocate or a political theorist. As for the Confucian classics, they were no longer treated as a holistic set of sacred and inviolable ‘bibles’ but as separable ancient texts with certain philosophical ideas, literary value, and historical references. The marriage of Confucianism and ‘religion,’ if it existed, was condemned.

Chen Huanzhang: the Man behind the Association

Ostensibly there were thirteen initiators responsible for the establishment of the Association for Confucian Religion, but it was the youngest one, Chen Huanzhang (陳煥章 1880–1933), who really took charge of matters.²¹

Chen Huanzhang, a native of Guangdong, had studied in Kang Youwei’s (康有為 1858–1927) Wangmu academy in Guangzhou at the

²¹ According to its official mouthpiece, the *Confucian Association Monthly* (*Kongjiaohui zazhi*), the idea of organizing the Association for Confucian Religion was initially raised in spring by Shen Zengzhi (1850–1922) at a gathering in his house in Shanghai. These thirteen initiators were, in the order of signature, Shen Zengzhi, Zhu Zumou (1857–1931), Wang Renwen (1863–1941), Liang Dingfen (1859–1919), Chen Sanli (1852–1937), Zhang Zhenxun (1841–1916), Mai Menghua (1875–1915), Chen Zuolin (1837–1920), Yao Wendong (1853–1929), Shen Shoulian, Yao Bingran, Shen Engui, and Chen Huanzhang. Most of them had degree of either Metropolitan Graduate (*jingshi*) or Provincial Graduate (*ju ren*) of the past dynasty. Zhang Zhenxun was an influential figure in the overseas Chinese society in Nanyang; he was appointed by the Qing government to serve as first consul in Penang, Malaysia and later as consul general in Singapore.

age of fifteen. Arguably enlightened and inspired by Kang Youwei, the earliest Confucian thinker who endeavored to promote the religiosity of Confucianism to strengthen China, Chen had organized the Society for Advocating Confucian Religion (昌教會 Changjiaohui) in his home village at the age of nineteen. The memorial tablet of Confucius was placed alongside with those of Chen's ancestors in his clan hall and worshipped by his clansmen, both male and female.²² Encouraging female public participation was a significant part of Chen Huanzhang's lifelong advocacy of spreading Confucian Religion. At the beginning of 1900 Chen taught at the Shimin school, where he and others initiated not only the worship of Confucius at the beginning of each semester and every first day of the lunar month, but also a grand ceremony which included special lectures on Confucianism to celebrate Confucius' birthday.²³ In 1904 Chen received the Metropolitan Graduate degree and the following year went abroad to study political economy at Columbia University.

During his stay in New York City, Chen Huanzhang did not confine his life to the campus of Columbia University. Note that he had already obtained the most competitive Metropolitan Graduate degree before he came to the States. This academic achievement gave him a privileged social status in the Chinese immigrant communities in New York. He was treated more like a quasi-mandarin than merely a PhD hopeful. Chen also organized the Society for Advocating Confucian Religion in Chinatown, which became one of the overseas branches of the Association for Confucian Religion after 1912. Many means of spreading Confucianism were first experimented with there and later put into practice in republican China. For example, Chen designed a special religious (Confucian) banner for Chinese stores to fly on Confucius' birthday.

On Sundays he gave lectures to overseas Chinese students and guest scholars on the teachings of Confucius. Arguably Chen Huanzhang was imitating Western methods in his promotion of Confucianism, since Sunday was usually observed by Christians as a day of rest and worship in commemoration of Christ's resurrection. The cycle of seven days, recognized in the Jewish calendar and then adopted in the calendars of Christians and Muslims, was never officially adopted in China until Republican China was established. However, many late Qing scholars had

²² See Chen Huanzhang, *Gaoyao xianzhi*.

²³ Wu Qingshi, *Dongzhai Zazhi*, (1928) 1:7a. For a general history of the Shimin school, see Huang Yanpei, "Qingji gesheng xingxue shi," *Renwen yuekan* 1:8.

already argued that the 'week' system was not foreign to China but in fact of Chinese origin, since a cycle of seven days (七日來復 *qiri laifu*) was already mentioned in the *Book of Changes*. *Sunday* was intentionally introduced into Chinese as the Day of Coming Return (來復日 *laifuri*). Therefore to worship Confucius and to study Confucian classics on every seventh day was believed to revive the original Confucian way of regulating days.

In 1911 Chen Huanzhang finished his dissertation, *The Economic Principles of Confucius and His School*, which was later published in the series of *Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law* (no. 112–113) by Columbia University. Although his dissertation dealt mainly with Confucius' doctrines on various economic issues, Chen took pains to argue against the resounding thesis by the noted Scottish classicist and Sinologist James Legge (1815–1897) that Confucianism was the ancient state religion of China and that Confucius was merely a transmitter. In both his lengthy introduction and conclusion, Chen repeatedly argued that Confucianism was the new religion founded by Confucius to replace the old worship of polytheism. Chen wrote,

Confucius frees all mankind from supernatural power, and lays stress on the independent cultivation of one's own personality. Any individual, who has reached the highest standard of the means and harmony, can fix the Heaven and Earth and can nourish all things. In fact, such a religion not only was new to China in ancient times, but is also new in the Western World today.²⁴

Accordingly, Chen believed "Confucianism is a religion of the highest development, so we must not think Confucius unreligious". Evidently, the religious nature of Confucianism had already concerned him before he went back to China.

When Chen returned to China, Kang Youwei's connections and support would help him set up the Association for Confucian Religion, and the news of Cai Yuanpei's proposal to abolish Confucian Religion might also prompt the literati to support the Association for Confucian Religion. However, considering Chen's enthusiasm and devotion to the Confucian Religion movement before 1912, it was likely that he would continue to promote Confucian Religion as his vocation.

²⁴ Chen Huanzhang, *The Economic Principles*, 39–51, 717–730.

Undoubtedly Chen Huanzhang's aspiration to promote Confucian Religion was mostly inspired by Kang Youwei. Unlike Kang Youwei, however, who was ambivalent about defining his role whether in the political arena (政 *zheng*) or in religious enterprise (*jiao*), Chen Huanzhang openly demonstrated his promotion of Confucian Religion. For Kang Youwei, *zheng* and *jiao* were two crucial means of equal significance through which to exert his influence and to realize his ideal. Thus, he wrote to Chen Huanzhang asking him to devote himself to the enterprise of 'religion,' while his other disciple, Liang Qichao cultivated his influence through the channel of 'politics.' Kang expressly hoped that Chen and Liang would eventually become two key players in the arenas of 'religion' and 'politics' respectively. He recognized that these two arenas were not separate at all and, in fact, Kang was always inclined to make use of one to influence the other. Thus, for example, he suggested that Chen Huanzhang should take advantage of the situation that many literati were offended by Cai Yuanpei's decision to abolish Confucianism, because, he believed, it would be "very easy to agitate people and would not be offensive to any political parties". Kang envisioned further that

If our members prevail in Parliament and nine-tenths of members in Parliament are our allies, then we can control both the political Parties and the Cabinet. Thereupon we will have plenary power to save China. Who else then could compete with us? It is a so-called short cut to a long-term end.²⁵

It appeared that Confucian Religion was not the ultimate concern *per se* but rather a political agenda for Kang Youwei to realize his goal, no matter how lofty and just it might be. After all Kang Youwei never gave up exerting his influence through political channels and he was eventually involved in the scandalous attempt to restore the Qing regime in 1916.

It might be true that no organization, religious or otherwise, in Republican China or elsewhere, has ever been able to avoid entanglement with politics, and the Association for Confucian Religion was no exception. It would be fair, however, to conclude in the case of Chen Huanzhang that the enterprise of Confucian Religion was his ultimate concern. Throughout his life, he consistently and exclusively devoted himself to promoting Confucian Religion. It was his lifelong calling.

²⁵ This letter is included in *Kang Youwei yu Baohuanghui*, 369f.

The Manifesto of the Association for Confucian Religion

Chen Huanzhang was arguably the only Chinese student ever to receive both the Metropolitan Graduate degree from the traditional civil examination system in China and a doctoral degree from the modern school system in the West. After he returned to China, his new foreign PhD degree along with his old *jinshi* title enabled him not only to mobilize support from the old generation of the Chinese literati, but also to attract attention from the new generation of intellectuals.

A month before the Association for Confucian Religion was officially established, Chen Huanzhang was invited by Gilbert Reid (1857–1927) to deliver two lectures at the International Institute of China in Shanghai in September of 1912. These two lectures, which comprise his main arguments concerning Confucian Religion, were later incorporated into his *Instruction to the Association for Confucian Religion* and released under the title *On Confucian Religion* (孔教論 *Kongjiaolun*). It was published and immediately reprinted six times in the following three years and more than ten thousand copies were sold. In fact, most of the major points he made in this book could be traced back to his PhD dissertation, which should be carefully examined not only as Chen Huanzhang's personal interpretation of the religiosity of Confucianism but also as the manifesto of the Association for Confucian Religion and its official stand on Confucian Religion.

The 'Religiosity' of Confucianism

Chen Huanzhang was certainly aware of the controversy initiated by his fellow disciple Liang Qichao, who published an influential essay in 1902 to renounce his previous position and now insisted on the distinction of Confucius' teachings from religion. It might be part of the reason why Chen took pains to affirm the religiosity of Confucianism in his Columbia dissertation, although Confucian economic principles were his proclaimed topic. Thus, at the very beginning of his two lectures at the International Institute of China, he noted that "in the past ten years there have been certain arguments refuting the idea that Confucius is a religionist". His first lecture was therefore intended to prove Confucianism as a religion and Confucius as the founder of a religion. In this regard, he aimed to solve three major issues: first to clarify the definition of the putative term *zongjiao* corresponding to the Western term of *religion*; second, to firmly

establish the relationship between Confucius and Confucianism, namely, Confucius as the very founder of the Confucian Religion; third, to prove that Confucianism fits perfectly into the definition of 'religion.'

Chen recognized that the two-character Chinese *zongjiao* was originally a Japanese translation of the Western term *religion*. However, he insisted that "in Chinese, the one-character *jiao* was enough [to denote the idea of religion]". Chen quoted several passages from the Confucian classics to argue that there were generally two kinds of *jiao*. One was based upon the 'Human Way' (人道 *rendao*) and focused on human relationships; the other was based upon the 'Divine Way' (神道 *shendao*) and centered on the world beyond. Although Confucianism, he argued, laid particular emphasis on the 'Human Way,' it bore elements concerning both the 'Divine Way' and the 'Human Way.'

Chen admitted that in Western literature most definitions concerning 'religion' "lay particular stress on the Divine Way". He even pointed out that in its narrow sense, the closest correspondence to the Western concept 'religion' should be *li* (禮) in Chinese, because, according to the classical definition, *li* was originally associated with sacrificial rituals to pray for blessings from the gods. However, he also reminded his audience that even the ritualistic dimension of *li* was incorporated in the connotation of *jiao*. As the compound term *lijiao* was widely used in reference to Confucian norms on human relationships, *li* was equivalent to a kind of *jiao*. What Chen Huanzhang was trying to achieve here was to redefine the Western concept of 'religion' by the traditional Chinese meaning of *jiao*. To be more specific, Chen Huanzhang insisted that the Chinese neologism *zongjiao* should be interpreted exactly like conventional *jiao*; *jiao* was thus perfectly interchangeable with *zongjiao*/*religion*. He even stated that

It is not necessary to inquire what the Westerners meant by *religion*/*jiao*, we should only ask ourselves what we Chinese meant by *religion*/*jiao*. It is not necessary to inquire what other religious believers meant by *religion*/*jiao*, we should only ask ourselves what the Confucian followers meant by *religion*/*jiao*.

Once Chen adopted the connotation of traditional *jiao* to define, or redefine the neologism *zongjiao*, there was no need for him to prove Confucius to be a religious founder or Confucianism to be a religion. If the modern terminology *zongjiao* could correspond perfectly with the conventional *jiao*, then Confucianism as *rujiao* or *kongjiao* could be perfectly interpreted as Confucian Religion or Confucius' Religion.

Chen Huanzhang, however, still felt the need to address the speculation, notably proposed by Cai Yuanpei and others, that in the course of history Confucianism might have become a religion, but that Confucius himself had nothing to do with it. Chen went on in detail to draw evidence to argue that not only Confucius himself, but his disciples, his contemporaries, people of later generations, including foreigners, all regarded him as a religious founder. Obviously, as the classical term *jiao* could be interchanged with modern *religion* in its broad sense, as Chen had already defined, his arguments for Confucius as a founder of Confucian Religion were little more than tautological.

Intriguingly, even though Chen clearly defined ‘religion’ in terms of *jiao* and explained that Confucian Religion was a “religion centring on the *Human Way*” rather than a “religion based upon the *Divine Way*,” he was still inclined to demonstrate the religiosity of Confucianism by fitting Confucianism into the Western definition in terms of the ‘Divine Way.’ In the third part of his lecture, Chen Huanzhang listed twelve attributes pertaining to the religiosity of Confucianism and discussed each of them accordingly. These twelve attributes can be summarized as following:

- 1) The Confucian Religion had a specific designated name: *ru*
- 2) There was a specific “Confucian robe and cap” (儒服 *rufu*) designed by Confucius for his followers to wear
- 3) The Confucian classics, which Chen Huanzhang insisted were authored by Confucius, served as the ‘bibles’ of Confucian Religion
- 4) The Confucian creed, also stipulated by Confucius, was stated in the “Code of Confucian Conduct” (儒行 “Ruxing”), a chapter originally included in the *Book of Rites*
- 5) Confucianism had systematic rituals and ceremonies for serving both humans and deities
- 6) Confucius asserted the existence of ghosts and deities
- 7) The Confucian theory of the immortality of the soul
- 8) The Confucian idea of retribution (報應 *baoying*; one inevitably reaps what he sows)
- 9) The spread of Confucianism: ‘proselytizing’
- 10) The ramification and lineage of Confucian schools
- 11) Confucian Temples served as places for both study and worship
- 12) Holy Land: The tomb of Confucius in Qufu, Shandong Province.

The attributes listed above in fact reflected Chen’s understanding of the common characteristics of ‘other’ religions in general. Hence, when he

argued that Confucianism has its own attire, sacred scripts, rituals, temples, and even its own Holy Land, he was trying to draw certain analogies between Confucianism and 'other' religions, notably Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and even Taoism.

Of these twelve attributes, Chen spent most of his time elaborating on the Confucian concept concerning 'ghosts and deities.' Chen first clarified that Confucius was not an agnostic, but that on the contrary, Confucius asserted the existence of spirits and even embraced the idea of God (上帝 *Shang Di*). Chen stressed that:

In the religion of Confucius, there is not only one god. There is, however, God (*Shang Di*) above all those hundreds of gods. The idea of 'God' is surely not an exclusive possession of certain religions.

Several passages from the orthodox Confucian *Classic of Odes* were thus quoted by Chen to demonstrate that the worship of *Shang Di* was practiced very early in the Confucian tradition. Note that Chen did not distinguish the Chinese term *shangdi* from the Christian *god*, which had already been adopted by James Legge, the first Oxford professor of Sinology, in his innovative translation of the Confucian classics.²⁶ In order to prove a similar perception of *god* in both Confucianism and Christianity, Chen Huanzhang even cited a quotation of Confucius from the work by Wang Chong (王充 27–ca. 96), a versatile Confucian thinker in the Han dynasty: "the relation between Heaven (天 *tian*) and man is like that between father and son." Chen Huanzhang thus inferred that the way Confucius

²⁶ It was in fact a heated debate among Western missionaries in China whether *di* or *shangdi* in Chinese should be translated by *god* and vice versa. When James Legge made the translation of the Confucian classics as part of the project of *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East* organized by Max Müller, the leading scholar of comparative religions, he decided to render *shangdi* by *god*. In 1880 many bishops and missionaries in China wrote a letter of protest to Max Müller concerning James Legge's translation. They suggested that the name *Shang Di* should either have been left untranslated, or that it should have been rendered by *supreme ruler*. In his reply, Max Müller argued that from an historical point of view *god* could be called "of many names the one person." He also suggested to these missionaries that they might slowly cut down the rank growth of mythology that has choked so many names of *god*. However, they should also be advised that "in tearing up the roots, they kill the stem on which alone their new grafts can live and thrive." For the letter and Max Müller's response, see Max Müller, "On the Chinese name for God" in his *Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution in February and May, 1870*. Indian Reprint (1970): 260–272. For James Legge's explanation, see Legge, *An Argument for 上帝 (Shang Te)*. For a vivid and captivating biography of James Legge as a pioneering translator of Chinese culture, see Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*.

venerated God as Father “tallied perfectly with the idea of the Heavenly Father in Christianity”.

It seems that Chen was trying to make a precarious interpretation or drawing farfetched analogies of the Confucian classics in order to fit Confucianism into the category of ‘religion.’ Of course, he still paid some attention to the differences between similar notions employed in Confucianism and in other religions. When he explicated Confucian theory on the immortality of the soul, he noted that the Confucian classics mention no concept of ‘hell’ but only ‘heaven.’ It is fair to say, however, that Chen was trying to argue that Confucian Religion has whatever ‘religious elements’ other religions might have in order to be confirmed as a religion. Even if all the evidence Chen drew from the Confucian classics or other works served to demonstrate that the notions of ‘soul,’ ‘Heaven’ or even ‘God’ were mentioned in the Confucian classics, these notions never constituted a systematic Confucian theology in the development of Confucianism through history. In fact, Confucian theology, if any, never became the centre of Confucianism.

On the one hand, Chen insisted on the uniqueness of Confucianism in contrast to other religions. He stressed that Confucianism was a religion of the ‘Human Way,’ the most advanced form of religion. However, on the other hand, in order to prove that Confucianism was in the same category as other ‘religions,’ he argued that Confucianism also encompassed the attributes of the religion of the ‘Divine Way.’

‘Human Way’ versus ‘Divine Way’

A week after his first lecture Chen delivered his second one titled “Confucian Religion should be promoted in present China.” He started out by defending why Confucianism should not be held responsible for China’s stagnancy. Chen claimed that the reason for the weakness of China in the past hundred years was that Confucian ideas had not really been realized. He contended that the rise of the Western powers was precisely because the European countries and America had actually put into practice the fundamental tenets of Confucianism, such as “to nourish people,” “to protect people,” and “to educate people”.

Note that when he tried to defend Confucianism in the light of its applicability to the past, to the present or even to the future, Chen seemed to shift his focus from Confucianism as a “religion of the Divine Way” to Confucianism as a “religion of the Human Way”. All of his arguments on the applicability of Confucianism were made to prove that Confucianism

was equipped with the best political, social and economic doctrines. For example, in regard to the applicability of Confucianism in the present Republican era, Chen argued that Confucianism provided specific doctrines concerning each of the five concentric realms of inter-human relationships, namely, individual, family, nation, society and, ultimately, the world. Thus, his discussion was divided into five parts:

- 1) Confucian Religion is applicable to the individual: self-cultivation
- 2) Confucian Religion is applicable to the family
 - i) The ethical relationship between husband and wife
 - ii) The ethical relationship between father and son
 - iii) The ethical relationship among brothers
- 3) Confucian Religion is applicable to the nation
 - i) The ethical relationship between ruler and subject
 - ii) The principle of valuing people
 - iii) Patriotism
- 4) Confucian Religion is applicable to society
 - i) The ethical relationship among friends
 - ii) The way of universal love (博愛 *boai*)
 - iii) Social policy
 - iv) Philanthropic undertakings
- 5) Confucian Religion is applicable to the world

It would be too hasty to conclude that Chen Huanzhang tried to defend conventional Confucian values when he relocated the traditional Confucian norms of the five human relationships in respective realms. In fact, his defence was more like a reinterpretation. For example, Confucian ethical doctrines on the five human relationships were interpreted in a new light. In contradiction to Cai Yuanpei's criticism that the Confucian notion of 'loyalty' violated the principle of republicanism, Chen argued that Confucian ethics concerning the relationship between ruler and subject should not be treated in its narrow sense and thus regarded as Confucian apology for monarchy. Instead, Chen believed, although the system of government had evolved from monarchy to democracy, which was also anticipated by Confucius in his *Doctrine of Three Ages*, the relationship between ruler and subject did not cease to exist. It should be interpreted in a new light as in the context of collaboration between superior and subordinate, in which mutual reciprocity was underlined. He believed it was what Confucius meant by "the superior treats his subordinate with propriety, and the subordinate serves his superior with loyalty"

(*Analects* 3:19). In fact some of his explications were too 'extreme' for some Confucian conservatives to accept. When Zhong Rongguang was censured by the Guangdong Provincial Assembly, besides the main charge against his resolve to abolish worship of Confucius in schools, some assembly members were also offended by his advocating the stipulation of monogamy in civil law. In contrast, Chen Huanzhang admitted that Confucius had consented to the practice of polygamy in his times, for the sake of the continuity of the family line by producing male heirs. However, based upon his interpretation of various passages in the *Book of Changes*, Chen affirmed that Confucius had actually endorsed the idea of monogamy and equality between male and female. In regard to the Confucian vision for the future, Chen even anticipated that "women's rights will be full-fledged" and male and female will become more independent from each other.²⁷

It might well be questioned whether Chen Huanzhang imposed personal concerns and contentions upon his interpretations of Confucianism. One thing is evident: when he tried to prove the applicability of Confucianism to the present or even the future situation, he shifted his focus, whether unconsciously or not, to the 'Human Way' side of Confucian Religion. That is, assuming his hermeneutics of the Confucian classics were grounded and Confucius did have appropriate political doctrines, ethical principles or economic theories to deal with each realm of the present and even the future world, these all concerned the mundane affairs and were neither derived from nor based upon any Confucian theology. Most of the features he revealed in his earlier lecture to prove the religiosity of Confucianism, such as the notions of gods and God, heaven, or anything concerning the 'Divine Way,' seemed to be either irrelevant or insignificant to the worldly applicability of Confucianism.

Interestingly enough, when he concluded his lecture by proposing various methods to promote Confucian Religion, he seemed again to emulate other "religions of the Divine Way". These methods included:

- 1) Establishing the Association for Confucian Religion nationwide and internationally
- 2) Setting up membership of Confucianism

²⁷ Arguably many of his 'hermeneutics' of Confucian Religion were elaborated upon or at least bore resemblance to Kang Youwei's. For example, most of his statements on the applicability of Confucius in the future can be traced to Kang Youwei's utopian *Datong shu*.

- 3) Adopting a special 'religious banner' to fly along with the national flag
- 4) Adopting the 'Confucian Calendar'
- 5) Practicing worshipping God, Confucius, and one's ancestors together
- 6) Worshipping Confucius in schools
- 7) Holding daily gatherings to study Confucian classics in school
- 8) Preaching Confucian Religion on every Day of Coming Return (*laifu ri*; Sundays)
- 9) Celebrating Confucius' birthday
- 10) All ceremonies should be taken care of by the Confucian church
- 11) All followers should exert themselves to disseminate Confucian Religion.

Many of these had been put into practice by Chen Huanzhang before. No doubt these measures would enhance the development of Confucian Religion in various ways. However, they all seemed to focus on promoting Confucianism as a "religion of the Divine Way" and had nothing to do with the realization of Confucian secular doctrines in the mundane world.

'Religion' as the Salvation for Confucianism

A question might be raised in this regard: if the applicability of Confucianism related mostly to the 'Human Way,' why then was it necessary for Chen Huanzhang to promote Confucianism in the way of other "religions of the Divine Way?" Moreover, since the term *religion* was already tainted by the understanding of other religions, notably Christianity, and was widely employed in its narrow sense, why not simply exclude Confucianism from the category of 'religion?' Instead, Confucianism could be regarded as a school of philosophy, a system of political and ethical theories concerning the 'Human Way,' or it could simply be called the Confucian Way (孔道 *kongdao*) or Confucian Learning (孔學 *kongxue*).

Chen Huanzhang's answer was clearly revealed in his *Instruction to the Association for Confucian Religion (Kongjiaohui xu)*, which was also included in his *On Confucian Religion*. On behalf of the Association for Confucian Religion, Chen strongly condemned the Ministry of Education for abolishing Confucian worship in schools and the Ministry of the Interior for identifying Confucianism as the Confucian Way instead of Confucian Religion. However, what concerned him most was that even the supporters of Confucianism were afraid to defend Confucianism as

a religion. Chen was certainly aware that some Confucian societies had already been established before the Association for Confucian Religion. They were either named as Society of the Confucian Way or Society of Venerating Confucius. Although he admitted that classically the connotations of *dao* (way) and *jiao* (religion) were interchangeable, especially in Confucian thought, he resolutely refused to employ terms like *Confucian Way* or *Confucian Learning* as a substitute for *Confucian Religion*. To him, even the phrase Venerating Confucius (尊孔 *zunkong*) was too ambiguous and nebulous as the objective of Confucian societies because it failed to manifest in what specific way Confucius should be venerated.

Chen Huanzhang expressed sympathy for those who defended Confucianism by adopting the terms *Confucian Learning* or *Confucian Way*, because they were trying to place Confucianism above all other religions. However, he also warned them:

Although originally it was intended to revere Confucius in the way that Confucius was superior to Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed, yet as a result Confucius descended into one of the hundred thinkers in the pre-Qin period.

Chen believed that once the religiosity of Confucianism was refuted, then it would become nothing but a school of philosophy and Confucius would become merely a secular scholar, no matter how great he was. Consequently, even the appeal to Venerate Confucius would become at best “nothing but hero-worship”. He asserted that if even the Confucian followers failed to treat Confucianism as a religion, then the Confucian Religion *per se* would ultimately cease to exist. In addition, he claimed,

If we do not identify Confucianism as a religion, then even if the Confucian Way still exists, it is but an empty theory; even if Confucian Learning still survives, it is but the doctrines of a private school; even if the Six Classics are not abolished, readers of the world will only treat them as the works of the Hundred Schools [in the pre-Qin].

To Chen, the lethal threat to Confucian Religion did not come from those who were trying to abolish Confucian worship or abrogate the study of Confucian classics by associating them with ‘religion.’ Instead, it was from those who regarded themselves as followers of Confucianism but hesitated to advocate Confucian Religion. Confucianism would eventually be de-religionized by them. In this regard, the emphasis of the ‘Divine Way’ aspect of Confucianism is, for Chen Huanzhang, vital to assuring the inviolability of Confucianism. Confucianism merely as a secular school of

worldly doctrines would not survive the inevitable attacks from the modernizing, Westernizing world.

Chen Huanzhang was at least right about one pivotal point pertaining to the nature of 'religion': most, if not all, religions would require their believers to take a Kierkegaardian 'leap of faith' without questioning absolute authority. Or in Chen Huanzhang's own wording, if the followers "do not have the sincere heart of believing, there will be no concrete conduct in observing their worship". In short, faith precedes knowledge as well as action. Chen Huanzhang clearly recognized that, "only if Confucianism is worshipped as a religion that 'in it are included the forms and the scope of everything in the Heaven and on earth, so that nothing escapes it; in it all things everywhere are completed, so that nothing is missing'".²⁸ Indeed, only if Confucianism was worshipped as a religion by its followers would the Confucian classics be canonized as the Confucian bibles and all its secular doctrines become sacred dogmas.

Conclusion

Just before Imperial China drew its last breath, the prestige of Confucianism had ironically reached its climax. The interdependence of Confucianism and the past dynasty allowed Confucianism to reach the peak of its power, but Confucianism also paid the price when the monarchy was overthrown. The abolition of the ceremony for worshipping Confucius and the obligatory course for studying Confucian classics in schools were regarded by many intellectuals of the old generation as a potential threat to the survival of Confucianism, which had long been identified as the one and only legitimate cultural tradition in China.

The Association for Confucian Religion was established just in time to strive for the survival of Confucianism. Through a nationwide network, it aimed to gain the support of the majority. Indeed, within a short period of time, the Association had developed into one of the most influential societies in the early Republican period in terms of members and branches all over China.

²⁸ Although it was not expressed in a form of quotation, Chen Huanzhang here actually made an allusion to the *Book of Changes*. My translation here was based upon Wilhelm, *The I Ching*, 296.

The emergence of various societies in the name of Confucius right after the establishment of Republican China could be interpreted as an indication of a sense of crisis among the majority of Confucian intellectuals who used to enjoy social and political privileges. On the other hand, however, once the predominance of Confucianism over other cultural and religious traditions in China was no longer endorsed by the imperial authority, it also became a valuable symbolic asset over which unofficial circles could exercise patronage. From that time on, Confucianism had to attract its followers through channels other than the former official examination and education system. Moreover, without any official support, Confucianism now had to learn to compete with other traditions, and, most importantly of all, other religious organizations which had already been evolving on their own for centuries.

In contrast to Cai Yuanpei's emphasis that Confucianism might have developed into a form of religion but that the original Confucius was not a religious founder, Chen Huanzhang argued that from the very beginning the Confucianism founded by Confucius was already a religion by nature, although this Confucian Religion paid particular attention to the 'Human Way,' while other religions centred mostly on the 'Divine Way.' However, Chen's clear-cut stand of advocating Confucian Religion did not resolve the problematic predicament of Confucianism raised by Cai Yuanpei at all. On the contrary, the rationale behind Cai Yuanpei's proposals might have been perfectly justified by Chen Huanzhang's interpretation. If Confucianism was identified as a religion among others, then it should certainly be treated equally to other religions. Accordingly, under the Constitutional principle of religious freedom, any activities suggesting the promotion of the Confucian Religion, such as the worship of Confucius and the study of the Confucian 'bibles,' should be avoided in the education system.

There was only one way left for the Association for Confucian Religion to advocate Confucianism as a religion on the one hand and to insist on the necessity of worship of Confucius and the study of Confucian classics in the education system on the other: Confucianism should be treated as not only a religion but as the national religion of the Republic of China. Immediately after the Association for Confucian Religion was established, its urgent and ultimate goal was defined as to promote or, in their logic, to restore, Confucianism as the national religion.

In retrospect, the 'national religion' campaign initiated by the Association for the Confucian Religion eventually failed. The attempt to enshrine Confucianism as the national religion in the Republican

Constitution did not win the majority vote during the deliberation in the bicameral National Assembly. Consequently the frustrated supporters of the Association for Confucian Religion gradually lost their enthusiastic confidence in the marriage of Confucianism and 'religion.' Many came to believe that the label of 'religion' was a dead end for the future of Confucianism.

In fact, after the establishment of Republican China, not only the old tradition of Confucianism was on trial, but the new discourse on religion was also being questioned. The neologism *religion* was inevitably imprinted onto the Chinese discourse at the turn of the century as the 'Western *jiao*,' with all the biased associations of the West's colonialist and proselytizing encounter with China. The Chinese perception of 'religion,' then, was evidently affected and deflected by their understanding of Christianity. This bias was consequently embodied in the partial convergence of the Anti-Religious Campaign and Anti-Christian Campaign in the 1920s. Any form of 'religion' was believed to be nothing but 'superstition' in various disguises that could only delude the populace. For many Chinese intellectuals, the modern mission of 'enlightening the populace' entailed the emancipation of all people from any form of 'superstition,' namely, 'religion.' Consequently, the advocacy of Confucian Religion was engulfed by a counter-current to de-religionize Confucianism, a movement which basically set the tone for many decades to come.

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