

## **Politics of Confucian Revival: Analysis of Memorial Ceremony for Confucius**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A new wave of traditional Chinese cultural revival movements resurged in China after the turn of the millennium. Activities such as “Guoxue re,” (national learning) and “Confucianism Revival,” (ruxue fuxing) are frequently reported. Among them, the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius is one of the most televised, state-initiated activities that is held annually in China. Using the online video footage of the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius, this paper focuses on the ritual activities of this ceremony. Borrowing ritual theoretical frameworks from religious scholars such as Talal Asad, Anne M. Blackburn, Michael Puett and Saba Mahmood, this paper illustrates how rituals re-actualize religious canons, shape participants’ bodily movements, right dispositions and self-cultivation, and to recreate and reimagine a religious space to engage the humans with the ancestral spirits. The paper hence calls for an eclectic combination of ritual theories in comprehending these ritual activities in ceremonies.

**Keywords:** China, Confucianism, Rituals, Ritual theories, Memorial Ceremony

## Politics of Confucian Revival: Analysis of Memorial Ceremony for Confucius

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After the 2000s, mainland China witnessed a resurgence of traditional Chinese culture revival movements. These movements include a list of activities, such as “national learning” (guoxue re, 国学), “Confucian Revival,” (ruxue fuxing or ruxue re, 儒学复兴/儒学热), the China Central Television programmed lecture series *Lecture Platform* (baijia jiangtan, 百家讲坛), and the more controversial “Women’s Virtue Schools” (nüde ban, 女德班), which emphasizes women’s unconditional submission to husbands and male patriarchy.<sup>2</sup> These different movements add complexities to China’s social narratives and Chinese people’s search for their identity. They serve as potential counters to the Western ideologies and religions such as capitalism, liberal democracy, and Christianity. Moreover, unlike many Western critics’ assumptions, these movements are not entirely initiated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); rather, they are initiated by grassroots organizations and public intellectuals.<sup>3</sup> This complicates the discourse of Chinese religious studies.

In this paper, I will focus on the Confucianism Revival movement and its activity in mainland China after 2010. Particularly, I will focus on the

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<sup>2</sup> “Inside China’s ‘Virtue Schools’ for Women,” *BBC News*, December 13, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-42305137>. This led a new wave of debate on what should be treated as “authentic national learning.”

<sup>3</sup> John Makeham, “The Revival of Guoxue: Historical Antecedents and Contemporary Aspirations,” *China Perspectives* 2011 no.1:15-20; Xie Shaobo, “Guoxue Re and the Ambiguity of Chinese Modernity,” *ibid*: 40-43. Also see Lizhu Fan and Na Chen, “The Religiousness of ‘Confucianism,’ and the Revival of Confucian Religion in China Today,” *Cultural Diversity in China* 1, no.1 (January 2015): 27-43.

rituals practiced in the Confucianism Revival. To explain the rituals in the movement, I will analyze the annual Confucius Veneration Ceremony (jìkǒng dàdiǎn, 祭孔大典) from both 2016 and 2017.<sup>4</sup> Through my analysis of the ceremony's ritual spaces and activities, I argue that the ritual activities in the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius can't be explained by one single ritual theory. Instead, the ritual activities in the ceremony require an eclectic effort to combine the different ritual theories to explicate them.

To carry out my argument, several caveats need to be made. I am not making a new argument on the debate of whether Confucianism is a religion or not. I am not theorizing the interplay between state politics and religion in the Confucianism Revival here. Nor am I discussing the philosophical ideas of Confucianism.<sup>5</sup> I am researching ritual activities of the Confucianism Revival after 2010 in the occasion of Memorial Ceremony for Confucius. There has seldom been any literature on the study of those public ceremonies, and most Western scholarly works on Confucianism have not touched on the Confucianism Revival after Xi Jinping's ascent to power in 2013.<sup>6</sup> Hence, my research intends to fill this gap in the existing literature and provide a reflection on China's contemporary ritual practices and ritual theories.

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<sup>4</sup> Jìkǒng dàdiǎn (祭孔大典) can also be translated as "Memorial Ceremony for Confucius." The 2016 and 2017 Ceremonies can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-6EojvgjrU> and [https://www.sohu.com/a/195240451\\_688831](https://www.sohu.com/a/195240451_688831) [accessed December 18, 2018], respectively. Both videos are filmed in Mandarin. Henceforth, the ceremonies will be cited in-text as (year, hour:minute).

<sup>5</sup> On how Confucianism was incorporated as a world religion in history, see Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* (Princeton: University Press, 2014). On how politics and religion intersect in China, see Anthony C. Yu, *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005). For a quick overview of Confucius' philosophical ideas and system, see Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> For research on Confucian Revival in China, see Sebastien Billioud and Joel Thoraval, *The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); cf. Lizhu Fan and Na Chen, "The Religiousness of 'Confucianism.'" Billioud and Thoraval conducted fieldwork on Confucian Revival movements between 2005 and 2013. Anna Sun's work focuses on the individual ritual practices in the Confucius Temple, not state-initiated rituals.

The paper's main body will be divided into three parts: I will first introduce the background information on the annual Memorial Ceremony for Confucius, including the Confucius Temple in Qufu. Second, I will list and describe the ritual activities enacted in the Memorial Ceremony, following its chronological procession. Third, I will selectively analyze some ritual activities in the ceremony by employing the ritual theories from theorists Talal Asad, Michael Puett, Anne M. Blackburn and Saba Mahmood.

The Memorial Ceremony for Confucius happens annually on September 28<sup>th</sup>, the birthday of Confucius, organized by the state since 2004.<sup>7</sup> The Chinese name "Jikong Dadian," (祭孔大典) literally means "Sacrifice to Confucius Ceremony." It resembles the ancestral sacrifice that Chinese families hold annually.<sup>8</sup> In ancestral sacrifices, the participants present their tributes such as food and clothes to the deceased ancestors' spirits and ask them for blessing over their descendants. Similarly, the Ceremony for Confucius includes participants presenting tributes and asking blessing from the deceased Confucius' spirit.

The most spectacular Confucius Ceremony is held in Qufu, the renowned birthplace of Confucius. The Confucius Temple in Qufu is one of the largest and most renowned in East Asia. It is regulated by the Chinese state. The Memorial Ceremony for Confucius in Qufu is indicative of the state's goals. After Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, he emphasized the use of Confucian values to tell the "Chinese Dream" story (Zhongguo Meng, 中国梦) and to incorporate those values with the fulfillment of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" (Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi, 中国特色社会主义).<sup>9</sup> His frequent visits to Qufu from 2013 to 2018

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<sup>7</sup> To be clear, as a Chinese Mainlander, I have participated in almost every family ancestor sacrifice annually as the eldest son and the eldest grandson. I also have travelled to Qufu's Confucius Temple, and during my travel I have been informed of the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius. Hence, I see myself quite acquainted with the ancestor sacrifice and Confucius Ceremony.

<sup>8</sup> These sacrifices are usually held on early April, coincided with the Qingming Festival (清明节) or "Tomb-Sweeping Day."

<sup>9</sup> Selusi Ambrogio, "Moral Education and Ideology: The Revival of Confucian Values and the

solidify the ceremony's status as an educative project for Chinese citizens. The state then broadcasts the ceremony on television for the nationwide audience. During the ceremony, participants perform the reinvented Confucian rituals<sup>10</sup> based on *The Analects of Confucius*,<sup>11</sup> a collection of sayings and ancient Chinese ritual manuals recorded by Confucius' disciples.<sup>12</sup>

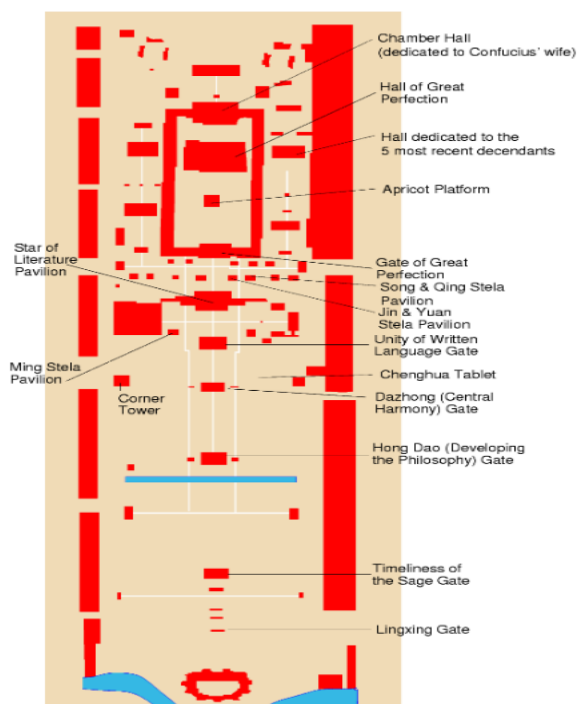


Fig. 1, The Structure of Qufu Confucius Temple

Before I begin to describe the Memorial Ceremony fully in the next paragraph, it is essential to mention first how frequently the evocation of the Confucian canons features in both the volunteers' beginning

Harmonious Shaping of the New Chinese Man," *Asian Studies* 5, no.2 (2017): 114-121, 128- 129.

<sup>10</sup> By "reinvented rituals," I mean that the rituals performed in the Memorial Ceremony are adapted from the Confucian canons and examples from the previous dynastic ceremonies. The Chinese state recreates the ceremony's rituals from those sources.

<sup>11</sup> *The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation*, trans. Robert Eno (2015), [http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Analects\\_of\\_Confucius\\_\(Eno-2015\).pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2015).pdf). Sections of classical Chinese literature are hereafter cited as Title book:passage.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion*, 89-92, 171f. Also see Yong Chen, "Renewing Confucianism as a Living Tradition in 21st Century China: Reciting Classics, Reviving Academies, and Restoring Rituals" in *Mapping Religion and Spirituality in a Postsecular World*, ed. Giuseppe Giorda and Enzo Pace (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 76-77.

reading session and the final funeral oration (including broadcasters' interpretation and analysis throughout) read by the leading participant of the ceremony, and also how dance performances and musical instruments are incorporated into the ceremony. I also include a structure of the Qufu Confucius Temple to demonstrate the ceremony's progression (fig. 1).

The Memorial Ceremony for Confucius proceeds with two ushers, wearing traditional Han Chinese official robes, leading the following a group composed mostly of municipal and provincial leaders, as well as officials from Qufu and the greater Shandong province, to walk towards the Confucius Temple (2016, 0:07-0:16). In the background, there are volunteers, from primary school students to college students and local company staffs, reading the excerpts from the Confucian canons, mostly *Analects*. Those excerpts address Confucius' teaching of personal conduct and the importance of learning, friendship, and virtue such as humaneness and propriety (ibid). Those readings are exemplified as ideals for listeners to emulate.



Fig. 2 Volunteers reading classics during the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius (On the left). The host and Chinese Professor Bao Pengshan ( 鲍鹏山) serve as interpreters for the live broadcast program.



Fig. 3 A bird's eye view of all the different volunteer groups reading classics during the ceremony.

The ceremony includes two opening rituals in its procession. As the guests walk through several entrance doors, they arrive at the front of the Confucius Temple. Here, they perform the “opening temple ritual” (*kaimiao yishi*, 开庙仪式), in which the guests are required to straighten their dresses (*zhengyiguan*, 整衣冠) and stand upright as to show respect and present their best visage to Confucius. After this ritual, the Confucius Temple is officially opened (2016, 0:17). The guests then proceed further into the Confucius Temple. They arrive at the Gate of Great Perfection (*dacheng men*, 大成门), the entrance to the Hall of Great Perfection. Here, the guests perform the “inception ritual” (*qihu yishi*, 启户仪式), which marks the official beginning of the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius. In this ritual, the traditional Chinese drum is rolled for three rounds (*yushi tiandirenhe*, 喻示天地人和) as a metaphor for the harmony between heaven, earth, and humans (2016, 0:26-0:30). After this ritual, the guests enter the main center of the Confucius Temple and the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius officially starts.

Next, the ceremony proceeds with a series of performances. Afterwards, the guests move to the Apricot Platform (*xingtan*, 杏坛), the reputed

teaching podium for Confucius and his disciples, and face the front of the Hall of Great Perfection. Here, they present their bouquets to Confucius and bow to Confucius' statue three times (2016, 0:36-1:10). Meanwhile, the dancers, also in traditional Han Chinese robes, perform choreography based on the traditional eight ranks dance form.<sup>13</sup> In their dance, they carry the corresponding dance apparatus (feathers *yu*, 羽 and moon guitar *yueqin*, 龠琴,) as well, based on the ancient ritual manual. The ancient musical instruments used during Confucius' time are introduced and played on this occasion. These dance performances and instruments intend to make the ceremony atmosphere appear as if it were occurring in Confucius' time and that Confucius is present to view these performances. Later the broadcast program flashes back to clips of dance rehearsals, in which the dancers are required to bend their bodies to certain degrees to demonstrate their respect to Confucius both in their movements and their hearts. Their bodily movements resemble every Chinese character in the accompanying dance songs (2016, 0:45-0:48). Dance performances serve to bring up the last rituals of the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius.



Fig. 4 The Eight Ranks Dance (八佾舞), viewers can see visibly eight lines of dancers. Each line has eight dancers. They carry the feather *yu* (羽), and the ancient musical instruments *yue* (龠) during performances. The two instruments are employed by dancers to show their propriety and decorum in the performance (0:53).

<sup>13</sup> This is based on *Analects* 3:1. The Eight Ranks Dance Form (八佾舞) was a funeral dance traditionally reserved only for kings during Confucius' time. As Confucius was entitled posthumously as King by the later dynasty rulers in China, the Eight Ranks Dance Form is considered an appropriate ritual and performance for Confucius during the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius.





Fig. 5 The Rehearsal of the Eight Rank Dances. The Choreographer accentuates to the dancers how to bend their bodies in order to demonstrate their deference fully in performance (0:46).



Fig. 6 The broadcast explains that every movement in the Eight Rank Dances represents every lyric of the songs in the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius (0:46).

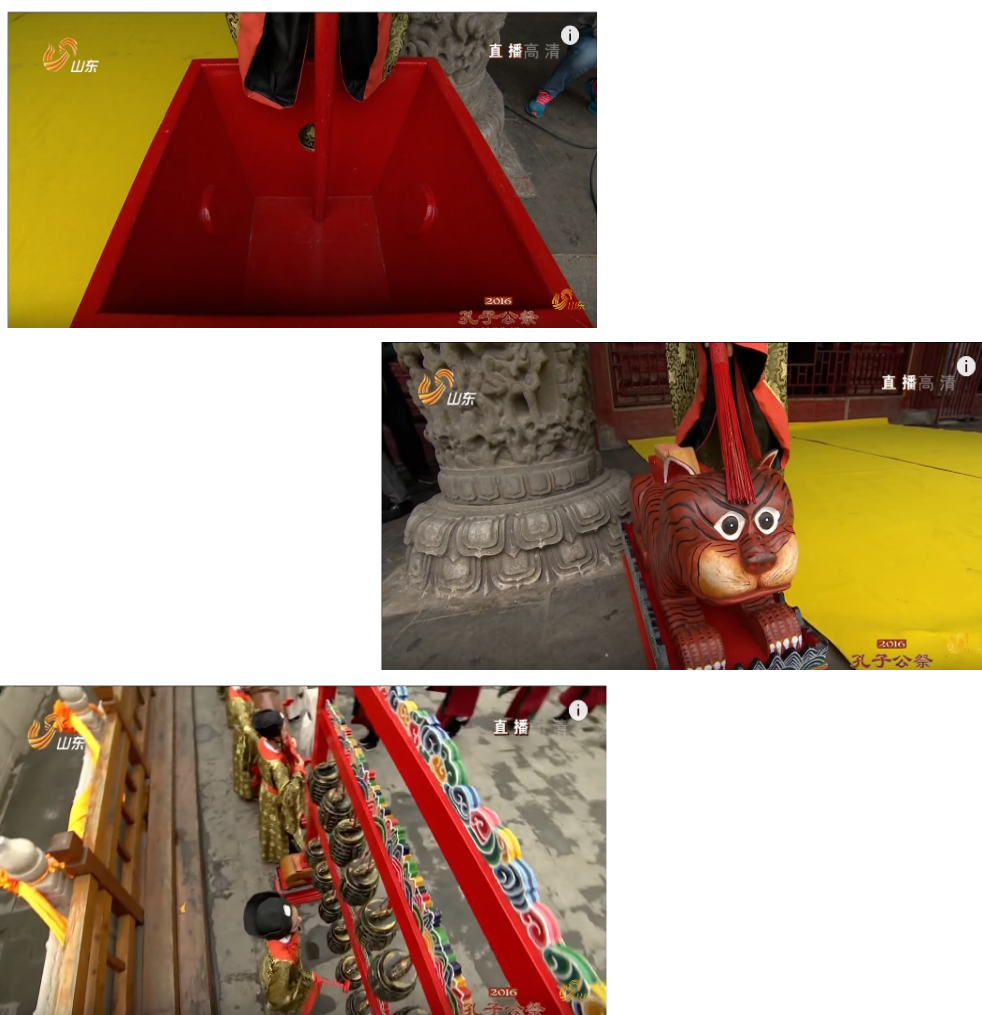


Fig. 7 (0:37), 8 (0:41), and 9 (0:44). The traditional musical instruments employed in the ceremony. All three instruments can be traced back to the age of Confucius.

The ceremony now moves to its finale. The ceremony's next ritual is the funeral oration (jiwen, 祭文). In this ritual, one leading top official will hold the funeral oration, framed in a way to resemble the traditional Chinese imperial edict. The official will read aloud the funeral oration to the audience in front of the Hall of Great Perfection (dacheng dian, 大成殿), the architectural center of the Temple complex.<sup>14</sup> The content of funeral oration consists of a straightforward narrative that in year 2016, on September the 28th, this Fall, the Shan

<sup>14</sup> The Hall of Great Perfection derived its name from Mencius, a Confucian philosopher active roughly 100 years after Confucius. Mencius described Confucius as “the sage of timeliness,” and called him “the man of great perfection” (dacheng, 大成) in *Mencius* 5B:1, cf. *Mencius: An Online Teaching Translation*, trans. Robert Eno (2016), <http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Mengzi.pdf>, though Eno translates this as “the great coda.”

ong provincial government officials, the Han Chinese communities in mainland China, and the Chinese diasporic communities along with their guests gather at the Hall of Great Perfection, in Confucius Temple to pay great respect to the Sage Confucius, his disciples and other Confucian sages. The oration then proceeds with a popular generalization of ancient Chinese history up to Confucius, and a summary of and praise for the thoughts and contributions of Confucius in his time and the lasting legacy Confucius endowed to the later generations of Han Chinese, including this generation. The funeral oration ends with praying to Confucius to protect the Han Chinese and provide eternal prosperity to the nation and wishing him to enjoy the tributes presented to him (2016, 1:11-1:16). After the funeral oration, the participants at the site bow three times in front of the Confucius portrait (2016, 1:17), ending the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius.



Fig. 10 (1:10) The Funeral Oration. The official is reading the oration out loud.



Fig. 11 (0:43) The Confucius statue inside the Hall of Great Perfection, in which Confucius is portrayed as a king.

Although those rituals practiced in the ceremony are mostly state-oriented reinvention, they still play an important role in our understandings of religion and ritual theories. They are mostly based on the Confucian canons, an attempt to bring the foundational texts back to life. Anne M. Blackburn, a Buddhism scholar, argues that “authoritative foundational scriptures have remained central to practitioners and communities.”<sup>15</sup> She sees importance in investigating how texts are performed. In this way, Blackburn raises our awareness of the role of texts in ritual activities and ceremony, as in the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius.

The specific verses from the Confucian canons read in the ceremony by volunteers provide models for human actions and characters. Blackburn speaks of how the recitation of Buddhist texts were employed by the Thailand king to shape himself with an Asoka persona.<sup>16</sup> She intends to demonstrate to us how the texts inform the imagination of people who read them. In the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius, the volunteers read verses from *Analects* that emphasize the self-cultivation of morality, right personal conduct, and the importance of education and virtues such as humaneness, propriety, and friendship. Lastly, the verses emphasize how junzi (君子), the perfect gentleman, acts decorously in different manners and situations. Those verses are not in vain; in fact, for both the readers and the audience viewing the ceremony, they provide the blueprint for people to reimagine the right behaviors and shape their conduct as people read, hear and see the verses. Read in a collective form, those powerful words become transformative rites for volunteers and viewers as they instill archetypes in their minds to actualize the models written in *Analects*. In this way, Blackburn’s

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<sup>15</sup> Anne M. Blackburn, “The Text and the World,” in *A Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert Orsi, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 158.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

analysis informs us of how reading texts is not only a fundamental act but also an actualizing act of oneself in models.

Talal Asad, another religious theorist on ritual studies, helps us to comprehend that rituals serve instrumental roles in moral discipline. Blackburn already underscores the fact that rituals such as reading texts give the participants a model they can reimagine. Studying the medieval Catholic rituals, Asad contends that “the learning of virtues according to the medieval monastic program...took place primarily by means of imitation.”<sup>17</sup> Texts for Asad provide the imitating subject a way to connect the “outer behavior” and “inner voice” together, so that there is no disjunction in the two.<sup>18</sup> From both scholars, we can recognize that, for volunteers reading the classics and people who read and listen to the funeral oration, the models in the *Analects* bridge their “outer behavior” and “inner voice,” so that they, at this moment, at the Temple of Confucius, Qufu, can display their inner virtues and veneration outward in public. In this way, Confucian texts become a disciplinary model for the practitioners and an entity that can be brought to life through rituals. Thus the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius takes up the form of a mass-organized educative project for Chinese citizens, both as participants and viewers of the ceremony, to correct their conducts.

The dance performance and musical instruments serve as way to re-create a common space for both the humans and Confucius’ spirit to dwell. From the outset, numerous participants (including volunteers) in the ceremony express the view that one should “sacrifice to Confucius as if Confucius is present,” and see this ceremony an opportunity to have close-contact with Confucius (or his spirit, “jikong ru kongzi zai,” “祭孔如孔子在,” 2017, 0:20). This view is actualized further in the dance performances. As the choreographer instructs in the rehearsal clip, the dancers should bend their bodies in certain gestures to a certain degree,

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<sup>17</sup> Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 63.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

so that the dancers can display their deference to Confucius' spirit. The assumption behind this instruction is that deference is a normative component of proper ritual dancing. Accompanying such performance is the playing of ancient musical instruments dated back to Confucius' time. Both the dance performance, based on the Eight Ranks Dance mentioned in *Analects*, and the musical instruments employed in Confucius' time, have been utilized to create a unique ritual space for humans and Confucius' spirit to cohabit. They assume Confucius' presence and observance.

Although the Ceremony for Confucius is a mass-organized educational project, it should be noted with a caveat that viewers of the ceremony in the above ritual space are not the intended audience. Confucius' spirit is the only *de facto intended* audience here. This claim may seem shocking, but reasonable. First, the participants' deference is not targeted at those viewers. Second, the participants in the ceremony, including guests, volunteers and the performers, are not the intended audience, as they participate in the ceremony. The only audience for this astounding ritual performance is Confucius' spirit. The human participants in the ceremony are trying to cultivate a relationship with this spirit. They are using the performance to please Confucius' spirit. The performers are bending their bodies to display deference to Confucius' spirit. Most of all, all participants perform the entire ceremony "as if" Confucius is present. Since Confucius himself passed away a long time ago, yet as the participants still think he is present in some ways, his spirit would be assumed to be the legitimate audience for viewing the ceremony. That is also the reason "Jikong Dadian" can be translated and comprehended as "Sacrifice to Confucius Ceremony," as Confucius is similar to the ancestors that are present in familial funerals and sacrifices.

Before proceeding to discuss the dance and musical instruments in depth, it is necessary to introduce one important ritual theory here. Michael Puett, a Harvard historian of ancient Chinese History and Anthropology, addresses the "as if" world theory in studying rituals.

Specializing in ancient Chinese rituals and ritual theories, Puett, impacted by Asad's work, also tries to dispel the Protestant Reformation's impact on religious studies.<sup>19</sup> He targets Durkheim's theory of the sacred as society in disguised forms and Eliade's theory of rituals as demarcating sacred time and sacred space in an orderly cosmology for the *homo religiosus* in particular.<sup>20</sup> Based on his study of Chinese ritual theories and *Analects*, Puett argues that, although rituals do create a subjunctive and a disjunct space from the everyday life, this disjunct space is not a result of orderly and harmonious cosmology as Eliade declares; rather, it is the exact opposite. The Chinese people, Puett contends, have seen the deceased ancestors and their spirits as resentful and angry. With those resentful spirits wandering in the universe, the cosmology is not peaceful and orderly. It is chaotic and fragmented. Hence, rituals for Chinese people, including the funeral rituals, were employed to forge a better relationship between the spirits and humans, and to domesticate humans into the right dispositions towards those spirits.<sup>21</sup> It is in this space that the participants pacify the angry spirits, transform the spirits into something relatable in the society, and cultivate participants' dispositions and virtues. This ritual space, Puett claims, is an "as if" space, in which the participants act "as if" the world created around this ritual space is a true one.<sup>22</sup>

Puett's ritual theory is better at illuminating how participants themselves approach Confucius in their rituals than those of Durkheim and Eliade. As people perform, they assume the presence of Confucius, even if in a spiritual form. They are presenting themselves supposedly in

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Puett, "Critical Approaches to Religion in China," *Critical Research on Religion* 1, no.1 (2015):100.

<sup>20</sup> See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), 208; Micrea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1959), 116-117.

<sup>21</sup> Puett, "Critical Approaches," 97-99; idem, "Social Order or Social Chaos," in *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert Orsi, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 113-116, 122-127; idem, "Ritual and Ritual Obligations: Perspectives on Normativity from Classical China," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 49 (2015): 544-549.

<sup>22</sup> Puett, "Critical approaches to religion in China," 98; idem, "Ritual and Ritual Obligations," 547-548; idem, "Social order or social chaos," 124-127.

front of Confucius. They deliver their utmost deference to Confucius through their performances and bending bodies. Meanwhile, the musical instruments used in the performance demarcate the space disjunctive from the everyday life, so human participants of the ceremony and Confucius' spirit can dwell in this space and relate to one another. The human subjects are asked to propose a relationship with Confucius' spirit in their deferential manners. Furthermore, the funeral oration prays directly to Confucius for blessing the nation with eternal prosperity and ends its words with the wish that Confucius will enjoy the tributes presented to him in the ceremony. Employing Puett's theory, we can see that the Chinese participants in the ceremony try to address Confucius as if he is really present, and that this ritual space is an "as if" world because they try their best to cultivate a relationship with Confucius' spirit, by performing the Eight Ranks Dance and presenting the musical instruments in Confucius' time as to make Confucius' spirit feel comfortable, so they can receive blessing from Confucius. Henceforth, Puett's ritual theory is indeed more illuminating than those of Durkheim and Eliade in the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius. In treating Confucius as another ancestor, the ceremony shapes people's cultural identity through their cultivation of deferential manner.

Bodily movements are continuously featured in the ceremony and illumines Saba Mahmood's theory of the body in ritual activities. Mahmood, an anthropologist specializing in Islam, says that the repeated *bodily acts* can train "one's memory, desire, and intellect to behave according to established standards of conduct."<sup>23</sup> Focusing on the gendered bodies of female Muslim participants of the Islamic Revival movements and the mosque movements in Cairo during the 1990s, Mahmood asserts that female bodies can be employed as a way to cultivate virtues such as modesty and humility. The female bodies have an effect to project "the interiority of the individual," in this case the inner values, on the "outward behavior"

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<sup>23</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: University Press, 2012), 157. My emphasis.



or means to acquire these attributes.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, those bodily movements are performative in that they can be employed as the medium to demonstrate the above cultivated virtues in their bodily movements.<sup>25</sup> Although not addressing male bodies and bodily movements specifically, Mahmood's work informs our analysis of dancers' bodily movements, male and female, during the ceremony. The group of mostly male performers bend their bodies in certain gestures to certain degrees based on instruction. In this way, they exhibit their deference to Confucius' spirit. Meanwhile, they are told to hold true respect in their hearts for Confucius. As they try to cultivate their heartfelt respect for Confucius, their bodies become the tool for them to attain this virtue. That way, the performers try to bridge their inner virtue (respect) with their outward performance towards Confucius through their bodily movements. Their bodies become the medium for them to express their inner respect as an outward performance, as viewers can find it in the ceremony. Hence, even though originally focused on the gendered, feminine bodies, Mahmood's theory can still be applied to the male performers' bodily movements in the Eight Ranks Dance.

To conclude, the ritual activities in the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius, along with broadcasters' description, explanation and participants' interviews, demonstrate ways that texts are read to actualize self-cultivation. Additionally, dances and musical instruments re-create and re-imagine the ritual space so the participants can develop the right dispositions towards Confucius' spirit through their bodily movements. The ceremony, overall, domesticates both ancestral spirit (in this case, the Confucius' spirit) and humans. Therefore, the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius cannot be fully unpacked through one ritual theory. Rather, it requires a joint effort from different ritual theories to holistically comprehend the rituals in the ceremony. For ritual activities not originating from the Abrahamic religions, it is essential to first incorporate ritual

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 159-161.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 166.

theories, especially indigenous ritual theories, from different religions to get a better picture of the rituals, and second to widen our ritual analysis more on the contemporary religious activities, instead of assuming a premodern and modern society divide in religious studies.

Moreover, it is important to look at the Confucian Revival movement itself. Throughout the broadcast of the Memorial Ceremony, the host and the professor refer to Confucius as a “prophet,” (xianzhi, 先知), and guests’ procession as a “pilgrimage,” (chaosheng, 朝圣). They also emphasize the sense of rituality (yishi gan, 仪式感), and analogize the Memorial Ceremony as “sacrificing for heaven” (jikong rutong jitian, “祭孔如同祭天,” 2016, 0:15-0:20). All those terms connote religious elements. Therefore, even though people in China view the Confucianism Revival movements and Memorial Ceremony for Confucius as cultural activities, they certainly contain some religious flavors. Examining these rituals, we might have to agree with Eliade’s assessment that the descendants of *homo religiosus* uphold certain pseudo- and para-religious paradigms in their lives. If so, his claim that “religion is the paradigmatic solution for every existential crisis” is realized in the Confucian Revival.<sup>26</sup>

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