

2 Redeploying Confucius

*The Imperial State Dreams of the Nation,
1902–1911*

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Few periods in Chinese history were more tumultuous than the seventeen years from 1895 to 1911. In every aspect of social, political, and cultural life, the advent of global modernity fueled drastic changes. The momentum of these changes started in the mid-nineteenth century. After the Opium Wars, Euro-American and Japanese powers of colonial expansion increasingly encroached on the Manchu empire of the Qing with demands for political and territorial concessions, trade expansion, and the right to spread foreign culture and religion in China. Armed with treaties from their home countries signed under duress by the Qing government, Western missionaries, merchants, and diplomats came to China with their respective agendas. Together, they presented a world of new technology, social practices, and radically new concepts to the Chinese, altering Chinese cosmology and the Chinese perception of the world and themselves, and transforming the whole Chinese way of life.

The Xinzheng (新政, New Policies) program of political reforms, initiated by the Qing dynasty's highest authorities in 1902, was part and parcel of this time of change. On the surface, the project stood for the Qing state's response to the social and cultural tumult by exerting leadership in guiding its subjects out of the turbulence and confusion. The reform government purported to embrace the new knowledge and technology in order to fortify and preserve the old values and orientation, and it upheld the famous axiom "Chinese learning for the essence, Western learning for the application" (中學為體, 西學為用; *zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*). The logic of this formula held that modernization should strengthen, rather than alter, the foundations of Chinese culture. In reality, the Xinzheng program soon became a total overhaul of government organization and state apparatus. In 1906, when the Qing promulgated a plan to transform

the imperial system into a constitutional monarchy, it transpired that the reforms had become a full acknowledgment of the force of the new. The most enduring institution in Chinese history, the dynastic empire, was to be replaced with an openly imported system.

The Xinzheng program was a government-orchestrated effort to implement a new vision of modernity in China. Many historians have interpreted this effort as a desperate strategy of regime survival at the expense of virtually all of its institutional heritage. Yet even those who hold this opinion do not deny the project's formidable legacy. The thorough revamping of government structure, the compilation of new legal code, and the creation of Western-style schools all departed sharply from the past model and laid the structural foundation for later state formation (Reynolds 1993; MacKinnon 1983). And many of the Xinzheng initiatives introduced what Michel Foucault famously identified as modern political technologies for social discipline and engineering. Institutions such as the prison, the educational system, and the police force were inaugurated, and would become permanent features of the Chinese state apparatus from this point onward (Dikötter 2002; Bailey 1990; MacKinnon 1975). Through these devices, the Xinzheng reforms established a new regime of statecraft and envisioned a modern state that would be both expansive and extractive. Although the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 abruptly forestalled the full implementation of these reforms, the new vision provided the blueprint for later phases of state formation.

The most radical departure of the Xinzheng program from the past was an overt embracing of nationalism. The monarchical empire expressly attempted to engineer its own transformation into a nation-state of mass citizenry. In stretching "the short, tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire," the motive behind the Xinzheng program was indeed what Benedict Anderson calls an "official nationalism" that aimed to "combine naturalization with retention of dynastic power" (1991:86) by appropriating the image of the nation into the empire's self-representation.¹ However, in contrast to the European examples on which Anderson bases his analysis, the Qing government's deployment of the nation was not "an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups who are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community" (Anderson 1991:101). In 1902, print capitalism and the imagined community barely existed in China. Still, the imperial state shifted its claims to legitimacy to a focus on the representation of China as a nation. The Xinzheng reforms were in this sense the imperial state's systematic reinvention of political symbolism and ritual scheme, an attempt

to infuse a shared sense of national time and space into people's lives. Through ritual planning, these reforms wrote the script to enact China's new identity as a nation.

In the following pages, I explore the historical significance of ritual reinvention undertaken by the Qing court and the rise of official nationalism during the Xinzheng reforms. The focal point of this exploration is the reform government's promotion of the worship of Confucius (孔子, Kongzi). Early in the reforms, the Qing state designated the worship of Confucius as the principal component of school rituals in modern schools throughout China. Later, the Manchu authorities further elevated Confucius from the middle to the highest rank in the three-tier system of the state cult. Historians have viewed this as indicative of a backward-looking conservatism of the Qing authorities at the time (Levenson 1965, vol. 2:3–21; R. Smith 1990:285; Yuan 2001:94–202). By situating the promotion of the worship in the context of an emerging official nationalism, I argue that during this brief interlude of the Qing court's reform of state ritual, Confucius was remodeled from one of many great sages and sage-emperors of timeless truth in the imperium into a new image of the nation. By synchronizing and integrating the ritual bodies of both the emperor and the people in front of this new symbol of the nation, the reform government subtly authored a new ritual scheme that signified a united, homogeneous nation. This radical departure from imperial precedents undermined the imperial throne's paramount ritual status. At the same time, the state retained a total power over the composition of ritual and the disciplining of ritual bodies. This ritual innovation, while shifting the center of the imperial order from the sacred body of the emperor to a Confucian image of the nation, enabled the long imperial tradition of ritual government to continue into the new era of nationalism.

By focusing on the imperial state's historical role in instituting nationalism, this essay joins other scholarship in rethinking the putative dichotomy between "nation-state" and "empire" (Duara 2003; DuBois 2005a). Until recent years, this conceptual dichotomy had been one of the cornerstones in understanding the history of nationalism. Benedict Anderson's indictment of official nationalism is a fine example. For Anderson, official nationalism could only be the empire's "conjuring trick" and defense mechanism because nationalism was fundamentally contradictory to how the empire functioned. Nationalism was the historical antithesis of the empire, and official nationalism under the empire could mean nothing but inconsistency. In the China field, the dichotomy has been equally influential. Joseph Levenson (1965) was a prominent representative of using the

dichotomy to explain the historical rupture between modern China and its imperial past. Although in many ways the China field has moved beyond Levenson's stance, the heuristic incompatibility between the empire and the nation-state is still one of the most powerful paradigms that inform our understanding of modern China.

The Qing state's efforts at self-transformations proved that the heuristic contrast between nation-state and empire was not absolute. Indeed, to appropriate the model of nation-state meant surrendering a number of imperial claims. Here the dichotomy is indisputable. As Chang Hao has pointed out, the cosmology that underpinned the dynastic empire was under severe challenge by modern scientific knowledge at the end of the nineteenth century. The collapse of this cosmology triggered a "crisis of orientation" among the elites of the empire (H. Chang 1987:5–8). The Xinzheng government's active reforms could be viewed as a response to this crisis. In all official documents of this period, the state noticeably stops using cosmological references to buttress its political authority. But the evidence needed to prove that the Qing state acted out of weakness is lacking. After 1900, the state showed tremendous determination and swiftness in planning the reforms. To account for this willingness to shift the grounds of political legitimacy, one needs to go beyond the "nation-state versus empire" paradigm.

Here some recent theoretical discussions about the continuum between the colonial and postcolonial states may be useful. Postcolonial scholars have argued that, in projecting power imaginaries, the nation-state often drew on the same knowledge of governing techniques as the imperial state (Chatterjee 1986, 1993; Mbembe 2005); the two also shared the same objective of the "structural effect" (Mitchell 1991a). According to this line of analysis, both the colonial state of the empire and the postcolonial state of the nation seek to maximize their governing power by inscribing themselves into the structure of the subjects'/citizens' social lives. Through deploying categories and concepts, they come to govern not as an external force of coercion and restriction but as an internal force of classification and production (Mitchell 1991b). This recognition of a continuum in statecraft has inspired scholars to reassess the putative rupture between modern Chinese states and their imperial predecessor. In his recent article on the discourse of "religion" in East and Southeast Asia, for example, Thomas DuBois draws attention to the precolonial states' appetite for religious control and argues that the real impact of European hegemony "was to integrate the preexistent concerns into larger discourses, transforming them in the process" (2005a:113).

Historians of premodern China have increasingly noted the late imperial state's political aspiration in social engineering. The Ming and Qing states both expressed political interests in building an empirewide network of schools down to the most local and individual levels (Schneewind 2006; A. Leung 1994). They also viewed it as their primary mission to "guide" subjects into proper ritual behavior and to stamp out deviations from state-sanctioned orthodoxy and orthopraxy. These precedents prove that the appetite for social programming predated the modern era, and thus help explain the swiftness of the Qing state's embrace of some of the practices of the nation-state. Nationalism placed the imperial state on the moral high ground and endowed it with a renewed sense of political legitimacy. It also provided a novel device for controlling political and cultural capital. In the name of nation-building, the state expanded its governing power to unprecedented areas. The declaration of the Confucian classics as the "national religion" in 1904 (Zhang, Rong, & Zhang 1904a) thus coincided with aggressive policies to confiscate properties of religious establishments and dismantle local temple communities (Thompson 1996; Goossaert 2005). By the same token, the creation of a national school system in 1902–4 ran parallel with state-controlled programs of textbook censorship, the imposition of school uniforms, and pedagogical standardization. The old institutions of local community schools became targets of state reform and came to be regarded as obsolete institutions of the past (Borthwick 1983).

The Xinzheng reforms can thus be understood as a historical process whereby the imperial will sought to appropriate the construct of nation for its own reification, a process through which the imperial episteme tried to infuse new life into itself in the modern era. This imperial episteme used official nationalism for its own perpetuation. It took control of the process of imagining the nation by actively authoring a new symbolic and ritual schema. The state, as the true enactor of the nation, wrote itself into the structure of the collective life of the nation. Contrary to Benedict Anderson's formulation, the Chinese state created the imagery of the nation, rather than being created after the national imaginary. Thus state power in China was not constrained by the nation and did not have to answer to the imagined community. Despite its espousal of nationalism, the reform government of the late Qing remained a "nationless state." As John Fitzgerald has pointed out, in modern China's dual process of state-building and nation-building, "the state was not just the midwife at the birth of the nation, but in fact its sire" (1996:58); the successive political regimes continuously redrew the imagery of the nation according to their respective assertions of legitimacy. In this process, the nation was "the

desideratum of state-building" (Fitzgerald 1996:59); its attributes reflected the wish of the unitary state, rather than the characteristics of a preexistent entity. Although Fitzgerald's comment was primarily addressing the nation-state formations under the Nationalist and Communist regimes, the reform government of the late Qing also illustrates this phenomenon. The decade of the Xinzheng reforms, in this sense, constitutes a key moment for assessing the legacy of the Chinese empire for the process of nation-state formation in the twentieth century.

CONFUCIUS WORSHIP AND RITUAL GOVERNMENT

Confucius had been worshipped in China since antiquity. The earliest record of imperial worship of the sage dates to the early Han dynasty, at the end of the third century B.C.E. The first state temple dedicated to Confucius was built in the fifth century C.E., during a time of political fragmentation. The cult became a component of the imperial ritual after the reunification in 589 C.E. Along with the establishment of government schools during the Tang and Song, the cult of Confucius spread throughout the empire. During the Ming and Qing, the worship of Confucius was an integral part of the imperial state cult and occupied a stable place in the imperial pantheon (T. Wilson 2002a; Huang J. 2003a).

The system of state cult was one of the most significant institutions that grounded political legitimacy of the empire in the cosmic order. To offer sacrifices and obeisance to Heaven and Earth, and to reward, honor, and command various deities and spirits, were the exclusive prerogatives of the emperor, the Son of Heaven (天子, *tianzi*). The state cult, more than other imperial rituals, placed the emperor at the center of human communication with the world of gods and spirits, and thus signified the emperorship's cosmic significance.

In addition to reiterating the religious claim, the state cult was a central part of ritual government, the distinctive Chinese approach to statecraft. In China's long history of political thought and practice, ritual (禮, *li*) occupied a special place.² Throughout imperial history, "the scrupulous and pious performance of sacrifices and rites remain[ed] one of the criteria in terms of which the ruler's virtue [was] measured" (B. Schwartz 1985:48). It was the outer manifestation of the moral quality of the ruler. Ritual was also associated with the civilizing mission of the empire. As a social, political, and religious apparatus all in one, ritual was deemed to have the power to shape the interiority of the individual and to harmonize society at large (Yang 1994:226–27; Chow 1994; McDermott 1999). Since

the Mandate of Heaven (天命, *tianming*), which gave the Son of Heaven the authority to rule, entailed “a moral responsibility for sustaining the normative social order” and required the political authority to serve as “headquarters of spiritual and ethical initiative” (B. Schwartz 1975:59–60), ritual became the primary device of governing. Through ritual encoding and observance, the state set behavioral norms and moral examples for its subjects, and defined the social-political order without coercion.

Ritual government implied a particular conception of power. Those who placed themselves in a proper relation to the universe were thought to gain access to the inner process of behavioral and moral-spiritual formation in both individual subjects and the social order. The state cult must be understood as an expression of this approach to government and a confirmation of the imperial state’s political authority. This claim of authority allowed the state to issue ritual codes and standardize ceremonies, rites, and etiquettes for officials, the court, and the common people. The state-sanctioned knowledge of ritual, in turn, placed the empire within a network of norms and structured it into a hierarchical order (R. Smith 1990). The imperial state’s fixation with ritual encoding and performance was not a simple effort of disguising power. As James Laidlaw argues in his critique of Clifford Geertz’s symbolist approach, ritual in the world of imperial Chinese politics aimed much higher than the theatrical effect of power evocation. Chinese state rituals initiated, animated, and constituted imperial power itself (Laidlaw 1999).³

Although many have referred to the imperial state cult as Confucian,⁴ Confucius did not enjoy a particularly glorious career in the state cult. While the imperial state had never been negligent in paying homage to the spirit of the sage, the ritual acknowledgement of Confucius’s cultural status had not been consistently grand and prominent. Since the seventh century, the worship of Confucius had been of the rank of “middle sacrifice” (中祀, *zhongsi*) in the three-tiered hierarchy of imperial sacrifices. During the Qing, “grand sacrifice” (大祀, *dasi*) included those to Heaven (*Tian*), Earth (*Di*), the Spirits of Land-and-Grain (*Sheji*), and the imperial ancestors, or Spirits of Former Emperors (*Xiandi*). A step below that, middle sacrifices were offered to the emperors of previous dynasties (*Lidai Diwang*), the Sun, the Moon, and the God of Agriculture (*Shennong*). At the lowest level, that of “miscellaneous sacrifices” (群祀, *qunsi*), the objects of worship were the God of War (*Guandi*), Spirits of Former Physicians (*Xianyi*), the God of Fire (*Huoshen*), the Dragon God (*Longshen*), and other spirits and deities (Feuchtwang 1977:586).

In this hierarchy, Confucius was accorded the highest honor given to a

human unrelated to an imperial line. Yet his cult status was arguably in constant decline throughout the Qing. As more and more human worthies, as well as folk deities and spirits, were incorporated and upgraded within the state cult, Confucius worship seemed less significant. In 1853, for example, the God of War was promoted to the level of middle sacrifice and for the first time worshipped by an emperor in person. In 1856, the God of Literature (*Wenchang*) was accorded the same rank (Liu J. 1935:9119–20). By the middle of the nineteenth century, Confucius had to share the state's ritual attention with more icons of the same rank; his ritual status in the imperial state cult was by no means preeminent.

If the sacrificial status of Confucius does not seem to match the late imperial state's ideological indebtedness to the sage, it forms a useful site for interrogating the tension between the Confucian literati and the imperial throne. Although the widespread worship of Confucius, independent of imperial patronage, has not been extensively researched, there is no doubt that by the period in question Confucius had become the symbol of the literati's collective identity. The worship of Confucius spread among literati, and the sage emerged as the patron deity for those devoted to the classics.⁵ In this vein, state patronage may be seen as following the same state strategy of what Prasenjit Duara calls "superscription" that occurred with other human deities. According to Duara, by incorporating popular worship of a given figure into the state cult, the state defined permissible interpretations without resorting to total suppression. At the same time, it positioned itself as "the patron of patrons" and thereby drew on the symbolic power of the icon in question for its own legitimacy and authority. The state cult of Confucius was by definition a subtle means of social control and cultural cooptation; it was never meant as a celebration of the cultural stature of the sage himself (Duara 1988b).

As a flexible strategy, superscription allows for interpretive contestation—after all, the state could contain but could not eradicate the cultural vitality and fluid dynamism of the symbol. Unlike the cults of Heaven, Earth, Land-and-Grain, and imperial ancestors, which could only be addressed directly from the throne, the worship of Confucius was of the status of "general worship" (*tongsi*) and was widely practiced among different social strata with few restrictions. As a state cult, worship was routinely conducted at Confucius temples (孔廟, *Kongmiao*) or temples of civil culture (文廟, *wenmiao*) attached to the government schools at the imperial, provincial, prefectural, and county capitals. Outside the official network of educational institutions, regional academies (書院, *shuyuan*) had also become an important locus of worship since the Song.⁶ Other

than collecting books and providing discussion and teaching forums, worshipping the sage was one of the main imperatives for the *shuyuan* movement in the thirteenth century (Chan 1987). After the Ming, the worship of Confucius spread with the expansion of local literacy and community schools in China (A. Leung 1994).

The cult was anything but uniform. Strict in the government schools, everywhere else it varied in its rites and its meaning. *Shuyuan* sometimes participated in the empirewide state cult of Confucius, but only with government permission; along with literacy and community schools, they insisted on separate performance of worship. Some schools stipulated worship on the first and fifteenth days of every month, while others required it only at the beginning of the term. In some cases, a simplified rite was performed daily (Qu & Tang 1991, vol. 1:326, 339, 345, 356, 360; Borthwick 1983:29–30; Shu 1945:43–45; Hu S. 1933:59). The state and the increasingly educated populace both worshipped Confucius, but each attached different meanings to doing so. The same worship could signify imperial authority, express the scholarly elite's collective identity, or constitute a rite of passage into literacy. The meaning of Confucius worship was never monolithic and static. Together, these interpretive perspectives of the worship made the Confucius shrine a site of contestation.

This contestation between the state-sanctioned orthodoxy/orthopraxy and the alternative interpretations and practices required the imperial state's most vigilant management, since the contestation did have the potential to challenge the imperial state's cultural authority and undermine its political legitimacy. To maintain control, the imperial state periodically attempted aggressive interventions. In 1369, for example, the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Hongwu (1328–98), in a despotic assertion of power over the bureaucracy, abolished the state cult of Confucius and issued a proscription of the cult outside the sage's hometown in Qufu, Shandong. This proscription was quickly reversed and the state cult of Confucius reinstated, yet efforts to control the cult's cultural meaning continued throughout the history of the Ming dynasty (Huang J. 2003b). Although different interpretations were normally tolerated by the state, the imperial desire for total control never completely died out.

LATE QING CHANGES IN RITUAL GOVERNMENT

The advent of official nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century did not signal the weakening of imperial control. Rather, the Xinzheng

reforms were meant to be a doubling process: the matrix of the old ritual contest was dismantled, while a system of modern institutions was established to serve as the new platform for ritual government.

After the Boxer Uprising and the ensuing political turmoil in 1900–1901, Zhang Zhidong (張之洞, 1837–1909) and Liu Kunyi (劉坤一, 1830–1902), two powerful regional officials of Han ethnicity, initiated the Xinzheng reforms with a proposal for a six-level educational structure in place of the examination-oriented imperial school system. The new structure would incorporate the whole nation into a network of modern schools. In the original 1901 proposal, Zhang and Liu (1962) justified the scheme of educational reforms for its effectiveness in producing “men of talent” (人才, *rencai*). By emphasizing *rencai*, Zhang and Liu invoked the traditional utilitarian view of education as the process of producing high-quality civil servants and state bureaucrats. *Rencai* was for the use of the state and implied an elitist view of education. The system would focus on educating the most talented men for the country.

Despite this traditionalist overtone in the educational reform, what is historically significant is that the major advocates of the new-style schools soon revised their position and shifted their attention to elementary education. In 1902, when Zhang Zhidong drew up the actual program for the education reform, he claimed that “to generate men of ability for the state’s employment is of secondary significance” (Zhang Z. 1962: 57.13a [3935]). The most urgent task of educational reform was in the area of primary schools. Yuan Shikai (袁世凱, 1859–1916) echoed Zhang’s opinion in a 1904 memorial that openly called for abolition of civil service examinations: “The new-style schools were not exclusively for the provision of talent, but mainly for enlightening the minds of the people” (Zhu S., comp. 1958 [1909]:5390). Thus the education of the mass of the people was now the primary purpose of educational reform.

To enlighten the minds of the people entailed a two-pronged approach. The new-style schools would teach Western subjects, such as geography, math, and biology, and impart modern knowledge and skills that citizens would need to secure a livelihood. Education would therefore produce economically independent and intellectually modern-minded people to strengthen the nation. Equally important for the Xinzheng program of enlightenment was the objective of personality transformation. The educational reformers almost unanimously envisioned modern education as a tool for promoting patriotism and political loyalty. In his educational plan, Zhang Zhidong enumerated three guidelines for primary education nationwide: (1) moral cultivation that would make the people know

right from wrong; (2) patriotism that would make the people know the importance of defending their nation; and (3) the development of skill training that would give the people the means to become economically self-reliant (Zhang Z. 1962 [1902]:57.13a [3935]). It is noteworthy that two of the three qualities that Zhang underscored were moral traits. The new-style school system was about character formation as much as imparting knowledge.

Prevalent in the official discourse of education was the neologism *guomin* (國民, literally, “the nation’s people”). This loanword from Japanese (*kokumin*) functioned at this time as the equivalent to the Western notion of a “national” or “citizen.” Zhang Zhidong popularized the term by calling the elementary level of schooling “national education” (國民教育, *guomin jiaoyu*; Zhang Z. 1962 [1902]:57.13a [3935]). Yuan Shikai, in his famous memorial of 1904, also used the term when referring to the elementary school system (Zhu S., comp. 1958 [1909]:5390). To enlighten the people was to transform them from imperial subjects of the emperor into national citizens, a political task that concerned not only the leading intellectuals but state officials as well (Zarrow 1997:16).⁷

For the purpose of citizen formation, the reformers specifically selected several areas of study and gave them a prominent place in school curriculums. In both 1902 and 1904, the imperial guidelines for new schools listed moral cultivation (修身, *xiushen*) or ethics (倫理, *lunli*) first among all the subjects to be taught at all levels. The regulations also stipulated that teachers use classroom time to explicate previous moral examples and Confucian teachings. After ethics, the next conspicuous subject on the list of requirements was classical studies (讀經, *du jing*). The 1904 regulations specified the number of classroom hours only for lessons in this subject (Baily 1990:32).

This emphasis on classical studies was meant to foster patriotism. The *Outline of Educational Principles* of 1904 devoted one long paragraph to explaining the significance of classical learning at the elementary and middle school levels:

The Classics are China’s religion (宗教, *zongjiao*). If schools do not teach the Classics, then the way of Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, King Wen, King Wu, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius—in short, the “three cardinal principles and five constant virtues” (三綱五常, *sangang wuchang*)—would be left to perish. China would then be unable to establish itself as a nation. This is so because learning without a foundation would be no learning; political order without foundation would be no political order. Lacking a foundation, love for one’s nation

and for one's compatriots would change. [That being the case,] how could there be any hope for wealth and power? (Zhang, Rong, & Zhang 1904a:212)

Two points deserve our special attention. First, the *Outline* celebrated the Confucian classics exclusively because of their association with the essence of the nation. Their value no longer derived from any specific moral doctrines. Rather, the classics defined China and therefore deserved a special place in the new educational system. Second, the classics and Confucian ethics, as the epitome of the nation's spirit, became tools for instilling patriotism. Uniquely Chinese, they helped fasten the people's affection to the nation and thus facilitated the formation of citizens' moral character. Overall, classical learning was not only given a new meaning but also treated as a vehicle for nation-building.

Much like the curricular emphasis on classical learning, Confucius worship was inserted into the core of the new schools' ritual. As will be discussed below, both the 1902 and 1904 regulations called for worship at all levels of schools (Zhang, Rong, & Zhang 1904b:381–82). This movement to rally China's future citizens around the image of the sage reached a new height after the establishment of the Board of Learning (學部, Xuebu) in late 1905. In March 1906, at the urging of the newly established board, the court promulgated five virtues as the guidelines for national education: loyalty to the monarch, reverence for Confucius, public spirit, martial spirit, and pragmatic spirit (Xuebu 1906a:634–35). In the memorial proposing these guidelines, Confucius was exalted as the fount of Chinese language, history, custom, and religion—the quintessence of Chinese culture.

This exaltation paved the way for the request issued by the Board of Learning to elevate the state cult of Confucius. In its memorial of November 1906, the board claimed that one of the five educational guidelines, reverence for Confucius, encompassed all the other virtues. If the court really wished to enact the educational guidelines, the time had come to elevate the state cult of Confucius from a middle sacrifice to a grand sacrifice. Such an action would help elucidate the country's cultural roots and consolidate the citizens' understanding of their identities during a time of drastic changes (Xuebu 1906b). This proposal won the imperial authorities' quick endorsement. In 1906, Confucius joined Heaven, Earth, Land-and-Grain, and the imperial ancestors and ascended to the highest level of state sacrifice and obeisance.

Rather than an act of defending the traditional order, the 1906 eleva-

tion of Confucius represented a rupture in the history of the state cult. The grand sacrifices, as Angela Zito has convincingly shown, were not a random collection of four different rites of worship. They gathered together the cultural and religious symbols that informed the foundation of imperial rule. Heaven and Earth were the highest forces of the cosmic and moral order. Land-and-Grain stood for the economic basis of the empire. The imperial ancestors had founded and perpetuated the dynastic rule. Since the founding the Qing, these four rites of sacrifice had been bound together to form a class of their own, remaining unaltered for more than two-and-a-half centuries. The performance of these rites took the emperor's ritual body to the four cardinal directions around the capital in accordance with the changing seasons. Sacrifice to this highest level of deities signified the emperor's unique role of unifying human and superhuman realms, and his ability to mediate and bring together the natural, human, and supernatural forces. The grand sacrifices formed the sacred protocol and codification of imperial rulership (Zito 1997).

Confucius's presence in the group tipped the constellation off its semiotic balance. Unlike the other four, Confucius did not represent the cardinal forces of the cosmos, nor was he an integral part of the dynasty's historical mandate. Even after being elevated to the top of the imperial pantheon, Confucius retained his identity as a human in official representations. As an emblematic act signifying the cultural unity of the nation, Confucius worship served a political function that was historically unprecedented. Its presence introduced a new element into the self-contained world of imperial symbolism, and signaled a change in the conception of rulership.

In the wake of the 1906 elevation of Confucius worship, Cao Yuanzhong (1865–1923), an editor in the Bureau for Studying Rites (Lixue Guan), wrote an essay to discuss the ritual implications of this change. Cao pointed out that in the Hall of Esoteric Transmission (傳心殿, Chuan Xin Dian) the emperor was now obliged to offer sacrifices in person to Confucius with three kneelings and nine prostrations. But that would be inappropriate, since the other figures represented in the hall were merely emperors of the previous dynasties (*Lidai Diwang*), who were accorded only middle sacrifices. Performing the rite according to the scale of grand sacrifice in the Hall of Esoteric Transmission would mean honoring the emperors of previous dynasties with the same obeisance as the emperor's own imperial ancestors. This constituted a violation of the principles of status distinction, since the emperor must give priority to his own ancestors over those of other dynastic clans. To avoid such a patent impropriety, Cao suggested

that for the Hall of Esoteric Transmission, the rite would have to be reconsidered and revised (Cao 1916).

Cao's appeal for ritual coherence did not resonate with the changing sentiments and concerns in high officialdom. Few took his question seriously. Not only was there no discussion of the specific ritual revision that Cao suggested, but ruling group in general exhibited no inclination to trouble itself about ritual propriety. This indifference toward ritual matters stood in marked contrast to the attitude of the eighteenth century, when the Qing reached its peak of theoretical maturity and aesthetic elaboration in ritual semiotics. Even those straightforward ritual changes called for by the court were not implemented with any sense of urgency. Not until 1910 was there a serious effort to bring the Confucius Temple in the imperial capital into line with its new status (Jin et al. 1934:812–15). This neglect of what would have been grave concerns of ritual propriety in former times confirms Marianne Bastid's diagnosis that "the ritual thinking had lost its grip on the spirit of the lettered and the functionaries at the turn of the twentieth century" (1997b:173).

This indifference coincided with a persistent effort to dismantle the Board of Rites (禮部, Libu) during the Xinzheng reforms. For the better part of imperial history, the Board of Rites had been no less than the third most important board of the government's administrative arm. Its primary responsibility was ensuring ritual orderliness throughout the empire. It supervised court rituals, issued the ritual calendar, and handled all aspects of the state cult. In addition, the Board of Rites administered the civil service examinations and the tributary system that maintained a diplomatic equilibrium between China and the surrounding kingdoms and states. However, the modernization of the empire's political apparatus during the Xinzheng decade witnessed a quick reduction in the administrative significance of this venerable institution. The abolition of the civil service examinations in 1905 eliminated one of its most significant responsibilities; the Board of Rites was no longer involved in the empire's routine operation of recruitment. The imperial practice of granting official recognition to local cults and incorporating them into the state cult, another major function of the board, ceased at about the same time (Sawada 1982). Meanwhile, in preparation for the transition to a constitutional monarchy, the Qing state initiated a government restructuring in 1905. Newly created government divisions, such as the Board of Learning, quietly shattered the administrative power of the Board of Rites. For example, tributary affairs were reclassified as diplomatic affairs and lost their cultural association with ritual. They were thus removed from the Board of Rites's jurisdiction. The

newly founded navy and army took over the design and management of military rituals. The Board of Learning similarly came to be in charge of school rituals, including the sacrificial rite to Confucius at new-style schools (Zhu S., comp. 1958 [1909]:5514–15).

Indeed, the very survival of the Board of Rites became an issue. In 1905 the Office of Political Affairs proposed abolishing the board and replacing it with the Board of Learning (Zhu S., comp. 1958 [1909]:2167–70). Although the proposal was not adopted, the question of the Board of Rites' place in the government's new structure remained open for debate. In 1906, the board went through substantial downsizing and consolidation in response to the accusations that it had become superfluous. The only duties it retained were recording court ceremonies, organizing official banquets, supervising the state sacrifices, and conferring imperial honors on individuals of great civil or moral excellence (Zhu S., comp. 1958 [1909]:2343–44). The board lost its administrative significance and became a clerical office for ceremonial references and history. Finally, in 1911, in the last effort at governmental restructuring, the Board of Rites was abolished.

All this was more than a mere reshuffling of managerial responsibilities. It signaled changes in the conception of ritual and ritual government. Moved to a new office, old rituals were renovated. When the work of coordinating foreign affairs was relabeled as diplomacy, it subscribed to a different principle that was, at least nominally, based on the equality of all nations in the world. New military rituals for the navy and army would heighten military morale and discipline, rather than reinforcing the imperial hierarchy. Governmental restructuring instituted new categories of public management and a new notion of what constituted the legitimate business of the state. Ritual lost its conspicuous centrality in the new conception of state affairs.

A NEW RITUAL WORLD OF THE NATION

No longer the matrix of political power, ritual remained a significant political concern throughout the Xinzheng modernizing and nation-building process. For its mission of citizen formation through national education, the state had to rely on ritual for the new purpose of inculcating civic virtues.

The 1904 school regulations stipulated three kinds of ritual occasions in the school calendar and gave Confucius worship a prominent place in them. The first kind celebrated the birthdays of the empress dowager, the emperor, and Confucius. Shangding (上丁), the first *ding* days of the sec-

ond and eighth months of spring and autumn,⁸ which were the designated dates for the imperial state's cult of Confucius, belonged to this category. The second category was special days on the school calendar, such as the beginning and the end of a semester, and the day of commencement. The third category of occasions followed the national calendar, and included the lunar New Year and the first day of the month, when sacrifices were customarily offered to Confucius at schools (Zhang, Rong, & Zhang 1904b:381–82).

No matter the occasion, the rites were rather similar. The school officials, as well as the students, wore formal school uniforms and performed the “three kneelings and nine prostrations” (*sangui jiukou*) either to the empress dowager or the emperor's “dragon tablet of longevity” (*wansui longpai*) or to the spirit tablet of Confucius. For school events of the second category, the rite was performed to both the tablet of longevity and Confucius's spirit tablet together. During the monthly and yearly routine sacrifices, only Confucius was honored. After the kneelings and prostrations, school administrators and teachers would stand on the east side of the room, face the west, and receive the students' bows or kowtows. For events of the first category, the regulations further state, “If there is a banquet and speeches are offered by school administrators or students, the appropriate topic would be respect for Confucius's teachings or love for the Qing state” (Zhang, Rong, & Zhang 1904b:381–82).

In the ritual regulations, references to traditional symbolism were abundant. It takes no ritual expert to see that kneeling and prostration, the gestures of absolute obeisance, signified the supreme nature of their object. A bit more knowledge, and one appreciates that “the east” was the honorary position customarily reserved for the teacher and that the traditional ritual calendar was closely followed. Both the timing and the form of rite at new-style schools matched earlier practices of educational rites. Hattori Unokichi (1867–1939), who was teaching in Beijing during the reforms, maintained that the rite of Confucius worship at new-style schools was adopted from the home schools of late imperial times (1926:117).

Despite the ostensible continuity, ritual performance at new-style schools was not simply a repetition of earlier practices. One of the most noticeable differences was the secularization of the rituals. As Thomas A. Wilson has argued, although the image of Confucius was of important symbolic meaning in Chinese society, the worship itself had always had a religious dimension. To worship was “a technical activity requiring exacting ritual mastery aimed at achieving concrete results,” namely, nourishing the spirit with a sacrificial feast (T. Wilson 2002b:258–59). Ritual

guidelines for the imperial state cult and for *shuyuan* academies had paid meticulous attention to religious technicalities: the length of abstention before worship; the exact kind, number, and arrangement of vessels and sacrifices; and the procedures proper. The physical, albeit invisible, presence of the spirit was always assumed during the rite. In this sense, the worship was squarely grounded in the world of Chinese religion. The realms of the living and the dead coexisted in the same space, and the gap between them could only be bridged through the accurate execution of sacrificial liturgies.

Such concerns with religious technicality were missing in the planning of new-style school rituals. In the worship of Confucius, the offering of sacrifices ceased to be the vital crux of the rite. The regulations meticulously stipulated the performance of the participants but had little to say about the sacrificial details, such as the timing of movements, the vessels employed, and the kind of the offerings presented. The communication between the worshipped and the worshippers—the assumed objective of any sacrificial rites—received short shrift. Even the wording of the regulations betrayed a loss of religious sensibility. After the sacrificial celebration on Confucius's birthday, for example, an entertaining banquet was assumed to ensue. Ostensibly, this practice of feasting at the end of the rite continued the religious custom of distributing the sacrificial food, and thus the blessing, among all participants. Yet the official regulations used only the most common term, “banquet” (宴會, *yanhui*), for the feast, and made no reference to the act of sharing sacrificial food (分胙, *fenzuo*, or 餽餘, *yunnyu*). The word choice stripped the custom of its religious connotation. School worship of Confucius in this sense followed the prototype of modern civic ritual, whose meaning completed itself in the very act of collective assembly. The 1904 school regulations carefully stipulated the clothing, actions, and movements of the participants, and focused the liturgical attention exclusively on the choreography of rite.⁹

The second major departure from earlier ritual practice involved the new emphasis on the collectivity. The late imperial rites of Confucius worship were never standardized, but there was always a clear demarcation between the state cult of Confucius and other forms of worship. This demarcation marked off the imperial prerogatives in rituals, which theoretically could not extend beyond the imperium. The state cult was thus extremely exclusive: only the emperor, or his legitimate delegate, was the primary worshipper of Confucius. Only members and potential members (degree holders) of the imperium were permitted to take part. Because the cult of Confucius belonged to the category of general worship, local magis-

trates would mimic the emperor's sacrificial movements at provincial and prefectural capitals' school temples. Still, the participants were limited to the local elites with imperial degrees.

All the sacrifices carried out by officials, even at the local level, underlined imperial hierarchy. Both civil and martial officials were required to attend, and their spatial positioning during the rite reflected their rank and title. Those who were not qualified for government positions, including students enrolled in the official schools, were by and large excluded. The primary worshipper, the highest-ranking official, was at center stage: a guide (*zan*) would announce to participants his every move. During the rite, he was very often the only moving body that completed the ritual action, offering sacrifices and wine while the others looked on. Only upon the completion of these prescribed actions did the crowd join in, prostrating themselves and kowtowing en masse (Su'erna et al., comps. 1968 [1774]:28; Liu K. 1870, juan 1:1a–7b, juan 4:1a–3a).¹⁰

The calendrical separation also distinguished the state cult from the general cult. Traditionally, the first *ding* days in spring and autumn were the reserved dates for the state sacrifices to the sage. These dates belonged to the imperial calendar that prescribed the Son of Heaven's and the emperor's ritual schedule. Therefore, the learning communities at government schools were often excluded from the procedure. These members of the student body performed their rites according to the cycle of community life: at the beginning of the terms, on the birthday of the sage, or every day. A quick survey of the regulations of Qing communal and charitable schools confirms that schools without official affiliation almost never scheduled even the simplest rites for students on the *ding* days. Outside the government schools, only the most prominent *shuyuan* academies that had received official funding and imperial sponsorship participated in the *ding* day sacrifices (Qu & Tang 1991:242). Even then, a government official, rather than the school head, had to serve as the primary worshipper. A cultural consensus existed that reserved the *ding* days as the exclusive prerogative of the imperial state for worship of the sage. Everyone else sacrificed and kowtowed on other days.

The demarcation between the state cult and the worship of Confucius by various schools disappeared in the planning of the new-style school rituals. The new regulations ignored the ritual boundaries and invited the future citizens of the nation into the previously forbidden realm of the imperial prerogative. School pupils without imperial degrees were allowed, for the first time, to join the emperor's ritual actions of the state cult. Moreover, even on the special *ding* days, students formed the main body

of worshippers. The new guidelines made no ritual distinction between the designated primary worshipper and the auxiliary audience. In performing the rite, students lined up behind the superintendent of the school and bowed in unison to the spirit tablet of the sage. All the participants acted as a single ritual body. The rite concealed, rather than accentuated, differences in generation, age, and social background; this was a single, undifferentiated body of citizens.

State officials' presence was no longer required as the role of the primary worshipper withered away. The students' ritual performance was not only collective but unmediated; each participant enacted the rite and established an individualized and direct relationship to the icon. This direct relationship between the worshippers and the worshipped was another novel aspect of the new ritual. No longer relying on the primary worshipper for completing the ritual act, each student formed a nexus of communication and/or communion with the worshipped icon. The new ritual was premised on, and meant to solidify, the assumed rapport between the citizen and the imagery of the nation.

The retreat of a visible state from the schools' Confucius altars did not mean the relinquishment of power but only a different form of the state exercise of power, however. The 1904 regulations instituted a unified ritual act throughout the nation. Central planning stripped the school rituals of their previous flavor of local variability and eliminated the ritual autonomy of individual schools. It wove each school's ritual activity into a larger imaginary of collectivity, so that the national choreography of rite became a signifier of the imagined national community. Through ritual, the reform government initiated the construction of "national time" and "national space" in modern Chinese history. School pupils across the nation performed the rite according to the same calendar. This ritual synchronization created a novel sense of simultaneity and facilitated the imagination of a shared time. Because the territorial stretch of the new schools was coterminous with national boundaries, the ritual scheme also marked out the geographic extent of the nation and thus delineated its shared space. Furthermore, the standardized rite of worship as part of the program of civic education demarcated from the rest of the populace the true citizens of the nation, who had the experience of modern schooling and presumably shared a national consciousness. Participation in the national scheme of ritual symbolically qualified each person as a member of an imagined nation and made him or her a national citizen of China. No longer inserting itself between the people and the cosmic order at large, the state exerted power by instituting the terms in which

its citizens imagined their collective identity and their socio-political environment.

Ostensibly, the elevation of Confucius worship did not change much of the imperial rituals. The emperor, or his designated delegate, continued the worship of Confucius twice a year in Beijing's Confucius Temple. Despite slight moderations, this worship consisted of the same ritual actions that the Qing emperors had performed for hundreds of years. However, there was indeed something new in the whole picture. In comparison with his worship of Heaven, Earth, Land-and-Grain, and the previous emperors of the dynasty, the emperor had a different relationship with the newly elevated icon of Confucius. The emperor could not claim personal rapport with the spirit receiving his offering, nor could he claim the performance of the ritual as his sole prerogative. His ritual role no longer hinged on his claim of divinity. Rather, in the new ritual scheme, the emperor performed the grand sacrifice "as one body" with the citizens. The unprecedented synchronization of the emperor's and the citizens' ritual bodies signified a new ritual order that accentuated the internal cohesion of the nation, rather than the barriers between them. This new ritual order stripped the emperor of his absolute supremacy in ritual matters and reduced him to a symbol of the national collective. As the head of state, he was now the embodiment of the national will, and no longer the will that transcended the national collectivity.

CONCLUSION

The ascendance of this new ritual order not only marked the advent of official nationalism in China but also ushered in a new script of state power. By elevating the figure of Confucius and gradually allowing it to displace and relativize the body of the emperor, the Xinzheng reforms engineered a shift from a monarchical court order anchored in a sacred cosmology to a flattened national formation. In the name of the nation, the state legitimately restructured the social space and encompassed the formally unreachable areas of daily life into its administration. The Xinzheng program, in this sense, was driven by the imperial state's will in appropriating the imported category of "nation" for a new script of power. Although the program only lasted a decade, this script of power was largely inherited by later political regimes. It was the most significant legacy of the late Qing reforms.