

Zhou Gong Came to Serve: On the Personal Substance of Confucian Religious Consciousness

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Abstract

This paper proposes a Reformed theological method for missiological interpretation of culture and cultural dialogue in terms of religious consciousness and uses classical Confucianism as a case study. The thesis of the paper is that, on the basis of the proposed method, a man called the Duke of Zhou was a Christlike figure for Confucius, and that therefore Confucius, for his immense influence, may or perhaps should be thought of as a herald, or rather a guardian, even an apostle untimely born, of the restorative ethic embodied in the Duke of Zhou.

Keywords: Missiology, religious consciousness, Confucianism.



The Special Case of Chinese Cultural Consciousness

China is a special case for studies of collective memory, or what we might call historical consciousness. The reason for this is not China's remarkably long and well-documented history—or, not only that—but the awareness on the part of the Chinese people, no less today than in times past, of the basic unity of their long history.

In the United States, by comparison, there does appear still to be nostalgia, no less lively than shallow, for the spirit of colonial independence. Americans know it as the libertarian stoicism of John Dutton, the reckless moral clarity of John McClane, and the self-assured cynicism of Ron Swanson. But the left, too, in American political and social life, insists with the zeal of an evangelist and the blind courage of a pioneer on the unimpeachable, unsurpassable right to individual expression and self-determination, from abortion to gender reassignment. Thus, even in a deeply divided America, there is an identifiable cultural coherence in the very terms of the nation's founding. And yet, as impressive as this legacy might be, it reaches back at most two and a half or three centuries, while the origin stories of the American people themselves tend much more quickly to dissolve into the histories of other peoples and other lands.

In China, however, consciousness of a classical culture dating back three millennia, at least, is conspicuous. "Who do you say Confucius is?" is asked implicitly or explicitly of every influential personality and every distinguishable period in Chinese history.¹ Attempting to capitalize on the currency of the revered sage's legacy, in 2013, Xi Jinping visited Confucius's birthplace and, holding noticeably a copy of the *Analects*, declared, "A state without virtue cannot flourish; a person without virtue cannot succeed."² But even Confucius himself, who lived in the 6th century BC, considered himself not a founder but a kind of reformer, an agent not of innovation but of renewal—renewal and recovery of a nobler past.³

China then stands to be a special case for studies of what, for present purposes, we shall call corporate religious consciousness. That is to say, if they are read rightly, the primary sources of classical Chinese philosophy and history provide a window into one of the world's oldest expressions of a people's sense of itself, and arguably the singularly predominant one today, in terms of raw head count. By no means do the classical sources tell us all that we need to know about Chinese culture's response to the God who is there, but to the extent that China still knows herself to be the progeny of or the heir to her oldest traditions, to that extent one cannot understand the China of any age without reckoning with Master Kong and the tradition that bears his name—thus the present study. The thesis of this paper is that an ancient man by the name of Li Dan, known as Zhou Gong or the Duke of Zhou, was a Christlike figure for Confucius, and that therefore Confucius,

1 See for example Tong Zhang and Barry Schwarz, "Confucius and the Cultural Revolution: A Study in Collective Memory," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 11, no. 2 (1997): 189-212, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20019932>.

2 Ian Johnson, *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion after Mao* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 354.

3 Not unlike the Hebrew prophets, who preached faithfulness to the law of Moses. Roughly speaking, Daniel, Haggai, and Zechariah, and possibly Ezekiel, were contemporaries of Confucius, who was born in 551 BC.

for his immense influence, may or perhaps should be thought of as a herald, or rather a guardian, even an apostle untimely born, of the restorative ethic embodied in that one man, the Duke of Zhou.

In order to comprehend the religious consciousness of classical Confucianism, one must engage the pertinent texts appropriately, even viewing them as manifestations of religious awareness.

Reading (Chinese) History in Search of Religious Consciousness: How and Why

Imagine that you feed a copy of the Bible through a shredder and then slowly pour the disordered strips of text out the open door of a cargo plane as you traverse the world at an altitude of 30,000 feet. Some of those little bits of Scripture would be lost forever, but others would be discovered and received by different sorts of people in any number of ways—with indifference, confusion, curiosity, enthusiasm, or hostility—who knows? The resulting vague and partial notions of “what man ought to believe concerning God and the duty God requires of man” (Westminster Larger Catechism 5), scattered randomly around the world, could over time help shape how different groups of people think about themselves and their surroundings, even if the actual pieces of paper are long gone.

Now imagine that some centuries later, a Christian missionary approaches one of these people groups. (You might imagine an educated, modern Westerner missionary; not necessary, but harmless in this case.) What does he uncover? He finds highly developed religious consciousness and religious practice, or highly developed moral self-awareness and self-regulation, and likely also a tradition of reflection, which he will dub either “philosophical” or “religious,” upon what impairs human flourishing and what might be the remedy. Our missionary knows about general revelation, but fails to realize that long ago, before written history, the culture he is now seeing had already come into contact with real stories of covenant history and incorporated at least echoes of that important religious experience into its beliefs. There is a sense in which he does not see all that he is looking at, even though it is, or ought to be, familiar to him in many ways.

What we have here is an allegory raising certain questions regarding the character of general revelation, the history of special revelation, and the theological nature of the missionary (or apologetic or evangelistic) encounter, the encounter with the so-called religious other or with the non-Christian world and life view.⁴ It is a common Christian assumption that non-Christian religions (and world and life views and so on) are developed from the raw materials of general revelation, and this characterization is surely biblically defensible.

However, it is less often recognized that no culture on earth is untouched by special revelation. Although anyone who supports covenant theology as well as the universal significance both of the covenant of works and the fall may acknowledge the universal imprint of special revelation on human consciousness and culture, this connection is

⁴ For “world and life view” one may substitute “worldview,” “philosophy of life,” even “culture.” Flexibility—semantic distribution, if you like—is an asset in this case.

rarely made in missiology.⁵ The error is to identify special revelation with the Bible and then to assume that if someone has not read the Bible, then he has had no contact with special revelation. But this identification silences the entire history of special revelation and neglects the many ripples of secondary and tertiary influence that special revelation can have in human culture and religion. The allegory above is meant to recapture the pervasiveness of special revelation in human experience, and the questions it raises in doing so are fundamental for missions, but not only missions. In our day, we recognize that such understanding is also the stuff of an appropriately robust Christian cultural analysis, obviously relevant in a cross-cultural context, but relevant for all Christians who reckon with the cross-cultural implications of regeneration and heavenly citizenship, wherever upon the earth the Christian now finds him or herself.

The goal of this article is not to answer our missionary's questions necessarily but to explain in greater theological detail the relevance of this vignette, perhaps to enhance our missionary's theological understanding of his situation via the presentation of an example that is hopefully enjoyable even if of questionable relevance for some readers: the religious consciousness of classical Confucianism, focusing on Dan, the Duke of Zhou.

An Example from Ancient Times

It is beyond dispute that Confucius (551–479 BC) has been the single most influential personality in the history of China, and yet I suspect that Confucius himself would disagree, even if he were alive to see it. He would consider the massive currency of his name a misunderstanding of his teaching. Confucius would likely demur first of all due to his distaste for flattery, but more importantly, the ancient sage was a “ritual master,” an expert for hire who specialized in moral self-cultivation, ceremony, high culture, and statecraft.⁶ That is, he considered himself not an originator but a faithful and diligent restorer or preserver and propagator of the practical wisdom and moral achievements of others, of prior ages, and of greater men than himself. Confucius was the great apostle of moral accomplishment and moral possibility for which he had no right to boast. This statement from *The Great Learning* encapsulates his program of reform quite well:

The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things.

Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their

⁵ An exception is the notion of “remnantal revelation” which appears in Daniel Strange, *Their Rock is not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 95–120.

⁶ Paul R. Goldin, *Confucianism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2011), 7.

families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.

From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides.⁷

Missiologist J. H. Bavinck seems to have caught the tenor of Confucius' historical longing and even something of the echoes of original Adamic experience. He writes:

From time immemorial, China has also looked back to a primitive era when righteousness ruled in the world. The mythical kings of prehistory are the ones to whom Kong Fuzi (K'ung fu-tzu) reached back when he wanted to lay out the standards by which people should live. We find a paradise at the dawn of history. The human race fell from that paradise. Something occurred there that we can no longer recover, but through which immorality and chaos broke loose in our world.⁸

The "mythical kings of prehistory" that Bavinck refers to may include the Yellow Emperor, who is regarded as a patron saint of Daoism; Yu the Great, known for taming the Yellow River and founding the Xia dynasty; and the Shang kings. In contrast, the "ancients" to whom Confucius refers above are undoubtedly these gentlemen: King Wen of Zhou, his son and successor King Wu, and Wu's brother Dan, the Duke of Zhou.⁹ These founders of the Zhou dynasty, which lasted from 1046 to 221 BC, represented the glory of a golden age that Confucius sought to recover and emulate in both his teaching and his own life, even though that glory was fading in his own time.

Confucius did not take himself too seriously, yet he strove always to store up his treasure out of the reach of moth, rust, and thief. From where, then, did Confucius's help come? Once, when lamenting a lapse in personal piety, he wrote these now-famous words:

How seriously I have declined! It has been so long since I last dreamt of meeting the Duke of Zhou.¹⁰

One wonders what the Duke of Zhou did to deserve the heartfelt filial admiration of Master Kong. In a word, it was all a matter of dynastic succession.

The Zhou first appear in history as a minor state or clan living on the northwestern periphery of the land ruled by the Shang, which included the land north and south of the Yellow River in what are now Henan, Anhui, and Shandong provinces. The Shang, who are the earliest dynasty in the land that we now call China for which there is solid archaeological data, are said to have taken power from the Xia—a basically unverified, mythical dynasty—during the 16th century B.C. The Zhou were loyal to the Shang for

7 "The Great Learning," see James Legge (trans.), *The Four Books: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, and the Works of Mencius* (China: The Commercial Press, 1893), 311-313.

8 John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and Paul Visser (eds.), *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, trans. by James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 187.

9 In fact, the Zhou bore the surname Ji. Our protagonist was Ji Dan, but he is better known as the Duke of Zhou, or Zhou Gong, or Zhou Gong Dan. The Zhou dynasty is divided into Western (1046/5-771 BC) and Eastern (771-221 BC) periods. The Western Zhou is considered the golden age, whereas the Eastern was characterized by instability. This period is divided into the Spring and Autumn period (c. 770-481 BC), when Confucius lived, and the Warring States period (c. 475-221 BC).

10 Confucius, *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 7.5.

some time, offering sacrifices and paying homage to Shang ancestors, as was expected of loyal states.¹¹ The Shang and the Zhou believed that deities, spirits, and ancestors might influence agriculture, meteorological conditions, childbirth, the monarch's well-being, military conflicts, and similar matters.¹² Consequently, it was imperative to please them by offering sacrifices to them. The magnitude of the sacrifices differed, although during significant rituals, hundreds of animals and human victims were slaughtered.¹³

The average life expectancy at that time appears to have been 34.5 years, and the Shang practiced a complex routine of ancestor worship that included the sacrifice (sometimes by drowning) and dismemberment of both animals and humans, including captured enemies in some cases. Deceased dignitaries were accompanied in burial by several tiers of supporters and subordinates, including a number of armed guards and attendants, evidently put to death for that purpose alone, who themselves were sometimes accompanied by "their own followers-in-death," and these: "the most numerous group of victims consisted mainly of young males, between fifteen to thirty-five years of age, and a few children."¹⁴ These victims were found "[g]enerally decapitated or dismembered," with their bodies buried some distance from their heads, "and their hands appear to have been tied." These were frequently sacrificed to Shang ancestors, with the numbers offered at one time—all at once—"varying from 3 to 400, but usually being about 10."¹⁵ According to one expert, the Shang recorded the fact that they offered as ritual sacrifice members of the Qiang people who lived to their northwest.¹⁶ One might call this aggressive interest in the trade value of death 'very religious'.

Sometime in the middle of the 11th century, tensions between the Shang and the Zhou reached a breaking point (more than one Zhou dignitary had been detained by the Shang), and King Wen of Zhou began to expand his influence by annexing, by force, neighboring states previously under Shang rule. King Wen had intended to make his way to the capital and overthrow the Shang but died before he had the chance, so it fell to his son, King Wu, to see the conquest through, which he did, in 1045 BC. The ancient historian Sima Qian (145 BC – 86 BC) wrote that

After the Shang had been defeated, the Shang palace was entered, Zhòu [(紂), the last Shang king, not to be confused with Zhou (周) of the succeeding dynasty] being already dead. Dan, Zhou Gong, stood holding a great halberd, flanking the king [King Wu, the Duke's elder brother] along with his cousin, the Duke of Shao, who held a lesser halberd. There they performed a blood rite at the altar of state and proclaimed the crimes of Zhòu to Heaven

11 Harold M. Tanner, *China: A History (Vol. 1): From Neolithic Cultures through the Great Qing Empire (10,000 BCE – 1799 CE)* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2010), 46.

12 Tanner, *China*, 43.

13 Tanner, 43.

14 Tanner, 46.

15 David N. Keightley, "The Shang: China's First Historical Dynasty," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, ed. Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 267. According to Gideon Shelach, the Shang recorded the fact that they offered as ritual sacrifice members of the Qiang people who lived to their northwest. Gideon Shelach, "The Qiang and the Question of Human Sacrifice in the Late Shang Period," *Asian Perspectives* 35, no. 1 (1996): 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42928374>.

16 Shelach, "The Qiang and the Question," 2.

and to the people of the Shang.¹⁷

Following his victory, King Wu set an important precedent by rewarding his supporters and family members with fiefdoms of their own. For his hand in overthrowing the Shang and the establishment of the Zhou dynasty, our hero, the not-yet-famous Zhou Gong, brother to King Wu, received the state of Lu as a fiefdom. Later, as the course of subsequent centuries shaped classical Chinese history and culture, Lu would assume a central role.

The overthrow of the Shang, as suggested by the aforementioned “blood rite at the altar of state,” would become the centerpiece of the doctrine of the mandate of heaven, authoritatively articulated by Zhou Gong. The mandate of a heaven is just what one might think: a cosmic, semi-personal but morally concrete legitimization of dynastic rule. Whether Zhou Gong believed the doctrine or wrote it up after the fact to bestow upon his family’s accession the honor of divine endorsement is a question not often asked in the ancient secondary sources and never in the primary ones. The question is probably in bad (modern) taste. It is simply the case that at this point, belief in the influence of heaven on the appointment of worldly authority, leveraged on heaven’s assessment of the moral character of human rulers, became established doctrine and would remain so for the foreseeable future in China, implicitly or explicitly.

At this particular juncture, the Shang royal house had led its people into ritual negligence and moral decadence—the one following necessarily from the other—and heaven had revoked her sanction of Shang rule. King Wu of Zhou would come to be regarded, therefore, as a perfecter or executor of divine purpose, himself representing the hand of heaven in condemning the waywardness of the Shang and transferring heaven’s mandate and heaven’s favor to a new dynasty, as one reads in the *Odes*:

August was King Wen,
continuously bright and reverent,
Great, indeed, was the Mandate of Heaven,
There were Shang's grandsons and sons,
Shang's grandsons and sons.
Was their number not a hundred thousand?
But the High God gave his Mandate,
and they bowed down to Zhou.¹⁸

But King Wu lived only two years after establishing the Zhou reign. The question of succession was of tremendous importance, but the way forward was by no means clear. The rightful successor was Wu’s son, King Cheng. But according to the traditional account, Cheng was too young to assume the role. Wu’s brother Dan, therefore, stepped

17 Sima Qian, *The Grand Scribe's Records: Volume V.1: The Hereditary Houses of Pre-Han China, Part 1*, ed. William H. Nienhauser, Jr., trans. Weiguo Cao, Zhi Chen, Scott Cook, Hongyu Huang, Bruce Knickerbocker, William H. Nienhauser, Jr., Wang Jing, Zhang Zhenjun, and Zhao Hua (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 33.2. Where possible, I use pinyin (Sima Qian) rather than the Wade-Giles transliteration system (Ssu-ma Ch'ien).

18 Burton Watson, David S. Nivison, and Irene Bloom, “Classical Sources of Chinese Tradition,” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: Volume 1: From Earliest Times to 1600* (Second Edition), ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 38.

in, or seized power, as some believed, supposedly just to keep the throne warm for his nephew until Cheng was ready.¹⁹

The optics of Zhou Gong's imposition were unwieldy for several reasons. First, the Shang succession had been at times (though not predominantly nor very recently) according to agnatic seniority, which meant that upon the death of the king, not his son but his next oldest brother would succeed him.²⁰ So when Zhou Gong volunteered to maintain order upon his brother's passing, one could have suspected that Ji Dan was rather conveniently indulging political nostalgia. More alarming was the fact that Zhou Gong was not the next eldest brother—if a brother were to step in, he would have been third in line—so even though he stepped in purportedly on behalf of his nephew, the move appeared plainly illegitimate to many observers. Furthermore, Wu's other brothers, along with others in the Zhou state, were still uneasy about the accession of their brother Wu after the death of their father and were eager to take the opportunity to assert themselves. Zhou Gong's illegitimate seizure of power—whether that's what it was or not—was a perfect excuse to destabilize for selfish reasons, or at least to derail Wu's rise and Cheng's succession. Rumors that Zhou Gong planned to do away with Cheng served these aims perfectly, and discontented siblings could count on the sympathy of folks still loyal to the Shang. Add to that a basic sobriety regarding human nature—who would seize power just to relinquish it later? —and there was little reason remaining to trust Zhou Gong. Two years of bloody clashes ensued, called the Rebellion of the Three Guards, until at last Zhou Gong's regency and Cheng's right to the throne were secure.²¹

Defying expectations, disproving rumors, and confounding every reasonable assessment of human nature, when it came time for Cheng to take the throne, Zhou Gong honorably stepped aside. On top of that, instead of moving to Lu to enjoy his fiefdom and all the accompanying privileges, he chose to remain in the capital city of Luoyang in the service of the king for the rest of his days. And for his unqualified deference to his nephew, to custom, and to heaven itself, Zhou Gong would come to embody the ideals of humility, integrity, and deference to propriety, which Confucius and Confucianism would expect of leaders ever after. He became the model man. Sima Qian retells the key moment with exemplary reverence:

The regency during which the Duke of Zhou ruled in place of King Cheng, facing south and wearing royal robes as he assembled the patrician lords at dawn court, altogether lasted seven years. Then he returned the government to King Cheng and took up his position facing north as a subject minister, thoroughly manifesting an attitude.²²

19 Edward L. Shaughnessy, "Western Zhou History," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, edited by Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, 232-91 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 311. There is doubt as to whether Cheng was in fact too young to rule. See Shaughnessy, n.44; Accordingly, some contemporary assessments are less enthusiastic: "The Duke's arrogant assumption of power nearly caused the end of the Zhou kingdom." Tanner, *China*, 47.

20 Keightley, "The Shang," 273.

21 Though difficult for the Western mind to comprehend history in such vast terms, the Rebellion of the Three Guards would come to be regarded, in the words of one expert, as a "defining moment not only for the Western Zhou dynasty but for the entire history of Chinese statecraft." Shaughnessy, "Western Zhou History," 292. Sima Qian writes: "Earlier, when the [princes] Guan and Cai rebelled against Zhou, the Duke of Zhou punished them. It took three years before he completely pacified them." Sima Qian, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 4.27.

22 Qian, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 4.21.

And Confucius would later cry out, “The virtue of Zhou—surely it can be said to represent ultimate virtue?”²³

Zhou Gong’s legacy is formidable. We have already mentioned his role in the formation of the doctrine of the mandate of heaven. He is also said to have had a hand in the composition of a major text from the classical era, the *I Ching*, or the *Book of Changes*. This text, among the oldest of classical Chinese texts, is the primary guidebook on what we might call divination or spiritual wisdom, but it is much more than that. The *I Ching* weaves together mathematics, superstition, metaphysics, and practical philosophy. It comprises, in a word, an ancient mathematical-symbolic attempt to map out the fluidity of reality itself for the sake of peaceful living in harmony with nature and with others. It remains a part of daily life today wherever Chinese culture has set the tone, and it is in that sense emblematic of the broad cultural currency of classical China. The *I Ching* is, for example, the origin of the symbols on the flag of South Korea. The origin of the core content recedes into semi-historical myth, but the beginning of the text as we know it today and considerable development of its seminal themes are credited to King Wen. Zhou Gong is said to have completed the text, and Confucius is considered its crowning canonical formulator. The voice of Zhou Gong, in that sense, guided Chinese folk religion for, roughly speaking, three millennia and resonates still today in some of the most basic principles in East Asian thought. To be clear, the point is not that it is beyond historical doubt that Zhou Gong picked up where King Wen left off, and is rightly credited with major authorial influence in the *I Ching*. The point is rather that in the formation of classical Chinese culture, this account was generally accepted as true, or at the very least worth remembering. Zhou Gong faithfully completed King Wen’s work, and Confucius anointed it with imperishable prestige.

For a long time—since the time of Christ, give or take—the Duke of Zhou was said to have written the *Zhouli*, known in English as the *Rituals of Zhou*.²⁴ The *Zhouli*, which outlines the administrative structure, political savvy, and civil (ritual) ceremonies of the Western Zhou, was discovered during the Han dynasty (202 BC–220 AD) and edited by a scholar called Liu Xin (c. 50 BC–23 AD), who gave the text its name and attributed it to the Duke of Zhou. Modern scholars uniformly reject that attribution; nor did it (the attribution) always sit well with the political thinkers and actors who found themselves forced to address it. Nonetheless the *Zhouli* was added to the Confucian canon in the mid-8th century, and, at least by those who found it expedient to do so, it was said to represent a distillation of the accumulated administrative and ritual wisdom of past generations, up to and culminating with the golden age of the early Zhou—and put to paper by the Duke. As we read in the *Analects*, “The Master said, ‘The Zhou gazes down upon the two dynasties that preceded it. How brilliant its culture is! I follow Zhou.’”²⁵ The *Zhouli* represents, in that sense, a

23 Confucius, *Analects*, 8.20. Granted, Confucius speaks here of the house of Zhou not specifically of the Duke.

24 Jaeyoon Song, *Traces of Grand Peace: Classics and State Activism in Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 23–36. Also informative is Benjamin Elman and Martin Kern (eds.), *Statecraft and Classical Learning: The Rituals of Zhou in East Asian History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

25 Confucius, *Analects*, 3.14.

high point in administrative wisdom and ceremony, and its influence upon statecraft and state administration in and around China for well over a millennium is beyond controversy. According to one scholar, it would become “a constitutional document of arguably the most comprehensive statist reform in imperial China,” the so-called “New Policies” reform of the Song dynasty (960-1279). Emperor Xiaozong (1127–1194) himself reportedly remarked, “As the *Zhouli* is the book by which the Duke of Zhou achieved Grand Peace, one should study it.”²⁶

Reading (Classical Chinese) Historical History Missiologically

In our retelling of the story of Zhou Gong, we have depended heavily upon a historian called Sima Qian. Qian’s *The Grand Scribe’s Records* [*shiji*] is the definitive ancient source on ancient Chinese history. According to Paul Goldin, Sima Qian’s *Records* is among the first texts composed in ancient China by a single author, by “the kind of solitary and brooding author that he [Qian] describes so well.”²⁷ Interestingly, as Goldin notes, “no single-authored book is attested before the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), but thereafter it was common for writers to compose in their own name.”²⁸

The *Records* is a massive work covering over 2,500 years of Chinese history (and legend) leading up to Qian’s own day. Roughly speaking, Qian’s account of the life of Zhou Gong was written eight centuries after the fact and four centuries after the death of Confucius, during the Western Han dynasty, when Confucianism became the official philosophy of the state. Thus, what we learn about Zhou Gong from Sima Qian may be considered the reigning historical sense of who the ancient ruler was. Contemporary historians will take a more critical approach, as suits their purposes, enumerating historical inaccuracies and exaggerations, and highlighting likely biases. For the present study, however, the dominant ancient account is precisely the one we want, for it captures for us the perception of Zhou Gong most cherished by the people, the account that bore greater popular currency, and thus the one most influential in the formation of ancient Chinese culture. As Paul Goldin writes, “a modern reader of classical Chinese texts must strike a fundamental balance: paying due attention to the historical circumstances of each text’s transmission without losing sight of its animating ideas—for the ideas are the reason why the texts were transmitted in the first place.”²⁹

In fact, our focus here is not on empirically verifiable historical narratives but on the revered Chinese habit of telling a certain kind of historical story. As Michael Loewe and Edward Shaughnessy explain:

... many of the rulers and officials who have governed the land and its people have sought cultural precedents for their policies. They reiterated tales, sometimes strange, to which they

²⁶ Song, *Traces of Grand Peace*, 23.

²⁷ Paul R. Goldin, *The Art of Chinese Philosophy: Eight Classical Texts and How to Read Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020) 4.

²⁸ Goldin, *The Art of Chinese Philosophy*, 4-5.

²⁹ Goldin, 3.

traced their beginnings; they satisfied their pride in their own institutions by a belief that these harked back to many centuries before; and they idealized and respected the behavior that they saw depicted in the deeds of cultural heroes, model kings, or exemplary ministers of state. A deep-seated veneration for the remote past (*Shang gu* 上古) or for the Three Royal Ages (*San wang* 三王) colored much of the training to which the scholars and civil servants of the imperial age were subjected . . . In particular, the house of Zhou was treated with a degree of respect and admiration that few of China's men of letters would care to gainsay.³⁰

Loewe and Shaughnessy record precisely the activity of the moment but psychologize the relevant historical nostalgia in a different way. Their interpretative schema has to do with the validation or legitimization of power and reputation. They identify a historically inclined public relations culture. This is informative for a historico-missiological approach, but even if entirely accurate, it is still incomplete: why would a ruler or official count on the relevance of an ancient historical precedent for his own role and methods? He would do so only if he were confident in the importance of a golden *Urzeit*, in a popular, nostalgic admiration for the moral nobility of what came before. Evidently, Confucian culture as a whole is reliably nostalgic, seeking solace in folklore and legend as a source of hope for a brighter future. The particular grammar of this hopeful nostalgia is what interests us presently.

Acknowledging the context and the “animating ideas,” to use Goldin’s term, not only in history but in historical reflection, is a refreshing antidote to modern Western historicism which dreamed for a period of its history, and sometimes still does, of ‘historical facts as such’ recounted without bias, interest, or agenda. Readers of the synoptic gospels who have struggled with questions of harmonization and the weight of modern historicist expectations may consider this observation intriguing:

Ssu-ma Ch'ien's (145?-86? B.C.) *Shih chi* (Historical Records) is one of the most influential of Chinese histories, but its organization reflects a historiography quite different from that of traditional Western history. Ssu-ma divided his account of the past into five overlapping sections . . . One result of this fragmented arrangement is that stories may be told more than once, from different perspectives, and these accounts may not be entirely consistent. From a Western perspective this would seem to indicate a certain disregard for the truth, but in many *Shih chi* passages Ssu-ma Ch'ien demonstrates a passionate concern for accuracy.³¹

This means, I suppose, that biblical inerrantists, who distinguish apparent contradiction from ultimate contradiction and accept the former but not the latter, are just that much more prepared to trust Sima Qian's work than the reader of ancient texts who might be beholden to a more wooden and impersonal notion of historical fact.

For our purposes, the lesson here is that we do not have access to a historical reality onto which, one might suppose, religious-like meaning was imposed after the fact. We have

30 Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, edited by Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11-12.

31 Grant Hardy, “Can an Ancient Chinese Historian Contribute to Modern Western Theory? The Multiple Narratives of Ssu-Ma Ch'ien,” *History and Theory* 33, no. 1 (1994), 20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2505650>.

only the religious-like meaning and the creation of religious-like history. Would “legend,” then, be a useful notion here? One must not be tempted in that direction. There is a distinct sense in the classical literature that the ahistorical implications of the term “legend” would not only fail to honor the ancients themselves but run afoul of the whole point of fealty and filial affection, the very ethos of classical historical reflection and Confucianism. In sum, the dehumanizing ethos of modern Western historicism is no help when our interest is not in an abstract history-as-such but in the history of lived experience and even in the creation of a historical experience for the sake of moral and cultural hope.

Sima Qian rounds off the story of the Duke of Zhou in unforgettable fashion. He tells us that when Zhou Gong was ill and on his deathbed, he insisted, “Make sure to bury me at Zhengzhou, so as to make clear that I do not venture to leave King Cheng.”³² But when Zhou Gong died, “King Cheng indeed yielded [to him] and buried him at Bi to follow King Wen, so as to make clear that ‘I, the little one,’ did not venture to treat the Duke of Zhou as a vassal.”³³ In his death, the Duke was exalted.

The Mediatorial Humiliation and Exaltation of Zhou Gong: A Missiological Interpretation

The Duke of Zhou defended the true king with his life; he was willing to suffer indignity for the hope of a greater kingdom that he grasped only by faith; he was willing to set aside royal privilege and even ritual veneration, which were his for the taking, for the sake of a younger heir and countless future generations; he was fierce and unyielding to his enemies but gentle, lowly, and patient with his people; and for this true son of heaven Confucius was the apostle untimely born.

Specifically, the Duke of Zhou made a conspicuous self-sacrifice, and Confucius takes this as exemplary. That is, he exalts the selflessness of Zhou Gong as worthy of emulation—but notice on what grounds. The selfless acts of the Duke of Zhou were beneficial for the state. The Duke had, first of all, the sobriety to recognize what needed to be done for the state to stay true to itself and to thrive. So, in spectacularly unspectacular fashion, the Duke of Zhou considered others better than himself and placed the whole of his life under the kingdom’s considerable burden, and he did so without protest, as a sheep before the shearers. One could argue that this selflessness, so admirable for Confucius, is essentially vicarious. Had Zhou Gong not become nothing, the dynasty may not have survived.

Philippians 2 exalts Christ as the epitome of selflessness, implying that anything selfless follows his example. According to Philippians, Christ’s selflessness is both eminently imitable—“have this mind among yourselves”—founder as he was of a people to be known by his name and by their fruits of love, while also gloriously inimitable—he, like no one else, set aside the privileges belonging to his own royal name. And these two dynamics, the uniqueness and the imitability, are closely related. In Philippians 2, the

³² Qian, *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, 33.18.

³³ Qian, 33.18.

Pauline imperative to have Christ's mind and recreate his selflessness is underwritten by the vicarious character of mediatorial accomplishment: "if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy" —in other words, if you benefit from what Christ has accomplished on your behalf, if and only if, then "complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." That is, let the emulation of the selflessness of Christ permeate the whole community that is known by Christ's name, insofar as you are in fact the community regenerated by the power of his inimitable ministry. Vicarious accomplishment underwrites the imperative to emulate. We should imitate Christ because he accomplished salvation for us, just as that accomplishment bears fruit in the Spirit's work within us. Vicarious accomplishment, in other words, underwrites gracious application and enjoyment of the benefits of Christ, and gracious application underwrites the imperative to increase in conformity to the image of the Son. As Richard Gaffin has said in his study of the Pauline indicative/imperative relationship, not "become what you are," but rather, "with an all-encompassing Christological gloss, 'Become what you are *in Christ*.'"³⁴

In fact, in Reformed soteriology and ethics, the imperative without the indicative is despair, the imperative before the indicative righteousness by works, and the indicative without the imperative is lawlessness. An incomplete sermon, one which majors in what-you-can/should-do-for-Christ but overlooks what Christ has done for his people, fails to convey grace, and thus induces spiritual angst. And perhaps there is something in the covenant consciousness of humanity that makes it impossible for individuals to overlook decisively the futility of works as a means of self-vindication. The image-bearer knows that he is under wrath and condemnation (Rom 1:32), and thus also that his own good works can do nothing more than amplify the illusion of attenuating the seriousness of his condition. He knows he cannot save himself, but perhaps with sufficient effort, he can, for a time, effectively forget who and where he is and the severity of his predicament, and create just enough distance to live the delusion a little longer.

The idea here is not that the Duke of Zhou gave his life for the sins of many, but that there is an implicit attempt, successful or not, in the Confucian affection for Zhou Gong and the moral virtue he embodies to exalt him not only as imitable but also as the author of a vicarious and efficacious abnegation, and therefore of renewed moral potential for all who would call upon his name. The accomplishment of Zhou Gong is at least implicitly treated as, to use Geerhardus Vos's words, objective, meaning outside of but also on behalf of his people. Consider it this way: *be like him* is one thing; *he has done great things for us; therefore, keep his image alive in and among yourselves* is another thing entirely. Perhaps as one would expect, it seems that in the primary Confucian reflection upon the life of Zhou Gong, there are strong indications of a covenant consciousness, even of the specific relational dynamics of the covenant of works and the despair that resulted from transgression.

34 Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Second Edition) (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013), 80.

In fact, there is further evidence of this unruly covenant consciousness, perhaps of something like vicarious propitiation in particular, in Sima Qian's account. I cite here two examples.

First, according to the *Grand Scribe's Records*, at one point King Wu fell ill, and there was concern that he would not be able to resolve the conquest of the Shang. The Duke of Zhou felt accountable to his father, King Wen, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather, for how he might handle the situation. Sima Qian writes:

The year after the conquest, before the empire had been fully pacified, King Wu fell gravely ill, and his ministers were deeply fearful. The Grand Duke Wang and the Duke of Shao planned to make a solemn divination. But the Duke of Zhou said, "It is too soon to presume upon our former kings." Thereupon, the Duke of Zhou took it upon himself to serve as hostage for the king's welfare. He had three earthen altars constructed and stood before them facing north, having capped them with ceremonial round jades and clasping a long ceremonial jade in his fist. He called upon his great-grandfather, King Tai, his grandfather King Ji and his father King Wen. The scribal liturgist read out his prayer. "Your eldest descendant, the king Fa, has, through his arduous labors been struck by illness. If it be the heavenly charge of you three kings to determine his fate, then take me, Dan, in place of him. I am skillful and able, with many talents, many arts. I am well able to serve the spirits. The king is not so talented nor so able as I; he is not skilled at serving the spirits. Moreover, he has been mandated by the court of the Lord on High to possess the four quarters, and thus he has the power to settle your descendants upon the lands below such that none in the four quarters will not act with respect, all in awe. Do not destroy the mandate that Heaven has sent down. You, our former kings, would then have none upon whom to rely for sustenance. I will now entrust my destiny through a charge to the great diviner's tortoise. Should you grant my request, I shall carry with me these round jades and my long jade and await your decree. If you will not grant my request, I shall have these ceremonial jades removed." Having ordered the scribe to inform Kings Tai, Ji, and Wen of his wish to take the place of King Wu, the Duke of Zhou divined concerning the response of the three kings. The diviners all prognosticated that the cracks would be auspicious, and when the divination inscriptions were examined, this was indeed the case. The Duke of Zhou was pleased. He then opened the tube containing divination texts and those which he selected were also auspicious. The Duke of Zhou went back to encourage King Wu. "My king, you shall encounter no harm from this. I have just received a command from the three kings, and you shall be allowed to continue your enterprise to the end. This shows that they are concerned for your royal person!" Then the Duke of Zhou hid the text of his prayer in a coffer bound with metal bands, enjoining those who guarded it never to dare speak of it. The following day, King Wu recovered.³⁵

Christological themes of mediation, advocacy, and substitution are unmistakable. A second example is this:

Earlier, when King Cheng was still a boy, he had fallen ill. The Duke of Zhou plucked a tick from his body and submerged it in the river, offering a prayer to the spirit of the river:

³⁵ Qian, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 33.15.

"The king is a youth and as yet has no understanding; the one who has offended against the mandates of the spirits is I, Dan." . . King Chen then recovered.³⁶

These accounts exalt the selflessness of the Duke of Zhou, and they thus fortify Confucian admiration for him and Confucian insistence upon humble but diligent assumption of the role suggested for every individual by an objective social order. But these stories also clearly attempt to substantiate that social imperative on the strength of the Duke's inimitable and mediatorial self-giving.

The doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven further bolsters this corporate or representational aspect of Zhou Gong's moral perfection. The doctrine meant that rulers were expected to lead the people in or toward a harmonious relationship with the implicit nature of things. 'Heaven' is impersonal but at the same time responsive. Thus, a ruler should lead his people both by example and by legislation. And there was scarcely an aspect of life that did not figure into this calculus: agriculture, family relations, including ancestor worship, and so on. Surprisingly, this natural order packed a moral punch; it would either favor or disfavor individuals, families, lands, and especially rulers, who served as mediators, proportionate to their faithfulness and cooperation. Heaven would shut its ears to their prayers and supplications should they turn harsh toward their people, as is said of husbands (1 Peter 3:7). Faithfulness in all things according to that natural order invited the favor of Heaven—Heaven could be expected to respond justly—and was vindicated or verified by that favor in terms of prosperity and peace. Not only the people but the land itself would join in honoring a faithful son of heaven and in receiving his blessing. Even the stones would cry out. It is taken for granted that a heavenly or transcendent counsel determined the times and places for worldly powers, but also that heaven held its standard for sovereigns and could bestow or revoke its sanction at will.

Love and Radical Intolerance: Can Christians Learn from Confucius?

It is sometimes said that teachers learn from their students, and this would appear to be true. To be specific, teachers likely learn through or because of their students rather than from them. The distinction lies between direct instruction (where one assumes the role of teacher and the other that of the learner) and indirect learning through interaction. If so, then the more the teacher himself engages in listening, the more he is likely to learn, even though he is seldom instructed by his students.

The Christian can likewise learn from Confucius—that is, because of him. The Christian, and groups of Christians, can, in a manner of speaking, and perhaps should, in a manner of speaking, allow themselves to be taught by Confucius, for at least two reasons. First, one cannot claim to understand Confucius, or anyone else, unless one has listened not in a detached, scientific manner, much less in a critical way, but with genuine Christian empathy—the kind embodied once and for all by our Savior. How can we, who

³⁶ Qian, 33.15.

have received so much forgiveness, claim to care about others if we fail to listen to them with empathy? Second, as is demonstrated time and time again in Scripture, the Lord is not averse to teaching his people, even to disciplining them, through the world. Confucius, whether the man or the myth or both, is one of the best teachers in all recorded history. The Christian who refuses to hear Confucius because the ancient sage was not a Christian has missed the point. I add a third reason, that Confucius had nothing to work with but revelation and the creative design of God. If he achieved anything, he did it through the manipulation of precisely these things. It is therefore unlikely, probably impossible, that his very successful program tapped into nothing of value. We can, and depending on our contexts, perhaps we should, actively listen to the wisdom of the Master. Here is one example.

The Reformed often say that doctrine comes before life, that truth gives way to right living, and that, by contrast, liberal theology undermines the gospel precisely by reversing this fundamental logic. J. G. Machen observed that “the church at the beginning was radically doctrinal,” in the sense that

Doctrine was not the mere expression of Christian life, as it is in the pragmatist skepticism of the present day, but—just the other way around—the doctrine, logically though not temporally, came first and life afterward. Life was founded upon the message, and not the message upon the life.³⁷

Likewise, Machen insists,

A true Christian church, now as always, will be radically doctrinal. . . It will never say that doctrine is the expression of experience; it will never confuse the useful with the true but will place truth at the basis of all its striving and all its life. . . [Its] message it will find in the Bible, which it will hold to contain not a record of man’s religious experience but a record of a revelation from God.³⁸

I have no intention of qualifying Machen’s point here in any way. But there is a temptation here to infer that correctness invigorates, that correctness is sufficient for life. However, doctrinal truth is an intelligible notion precisely because God is personal, tri-personal, and has spoken. Not abstract or so-called objective truth but the exhaustively personal God is “man’s ultimate environment.”³⁹

Similarly, we observe that the deeply personal context of the Confucian program for moral self-cultivation, along with the Confucian affection for Zhou Gong at its core, serves as a powerful reminder that personal life is central to Christian doctrine. In God, who is truth, personal life and truth are equally ultimate. Similarly, Christian doctrine that saves is a theological description of Christ’s person and work as the substance of the covenant

³⁷ J. Gresham Machen, “The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 165 (1933): 5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1018160>.

³⁸ Machen, “The Responsibility of the Church,” 12.

³⁹ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Fourth Edition), ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), 65.

of grace.⁴⁰ Redemption itself is a personal accomplishment, and it was earned through the personal condescension and incarnation of the second person of the Trinity; through his personal growth in stature before God and man, not abstractly but in a relational context; and through personal suffering unto death—all of which demands, because heaven is just, the personal vindication of the Son of God in power, his resurrection from the dead. And redemption is no less a personal accomplishment than it is a personal bestowal in union with the risen Savior. Justification, adoption, and sanctification manifest union with the person of Christ, who now reigns, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (WLC 69). But Zhou Gong died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day, proving that the ancient duke is, however noble, still a man powerless to save others (Acts 2:29).

On the other hand, even while we appreciate the rich personalism of Confucianism, in worship and in public witness no less than in missions, “a true church,” argues Machen, “will be radically intolerant” because it “must maintain the high exclusiveness and universality of its message.”⁴¹ The church, no more or less than the individual Christian,

. . . presents the gospel of Jesus Christ not merely as one way of salvation, but as the only way. It cannot make common cause with other faiths. It cannot agree not to proselytize. Its appeal is universal, and admits of no exceptions. All are lost in sin; none may be saved except by the way set forth in the gospel. Therein lies the offense of the Christian religion, and therein lies also its glory and its power. A Christianity tolerant of other religions is just no Christianity at all.⁴²

J. H. Bavinck says likewise that “[t]here is no continuity between the gospel and human religious consciousness, although definite continuity does exist between the gospel and what lies behind human religious consciousness, namely God’s general revelation.”⁴³ While there is much common grace, and thus much to appreciate in non-Christian systems such as Confucianism, the antithesis remains clear.

Heaven, for Confucius, although he spoke of it vaguely and elusively, is that which upholds and works all things. It is impersonal, and perhaps for that reason, there is no spiritual help in classical Confucianism but only self-exertion. From the Confucian burden there is no rest, for he knew of no man sufficient to provide his life as a ransom for many, nor of a high priest who could sympathize, who could earn and bestow gifts, who could send the life-giving Helper.

The radical Christian intolerance for which Machen advocates manifests a radically ethical disposition of the church. “[A] true Christian church,” says Machen, “will be radically ethical . . . in the sense that it will cherish the hope of true goodness in the other world,” in the world to come, “and that even here and now it will exhibit the beginnings

40 As Geerhardus Vos says, “For what else are the doctrines but the theological interpretation of the facts? To become the proper object of religious contemplation at all, the history must necessarily first pass through this doctrinal alembic.” Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 468.

41 Machen, “The Responsibility of the Church,” 12.

42 Machen, “The Responsibility of the Church,” 12.

43 Bolt and Visser (eds.), *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, 297.

of a new life which is the gift of God."⁴⁴ And what would be the primary signal of that new life, of the seed of the world to come, which has been planted into the soil of the present world order? "That new life," writes Machen, "will express itself in love. Love will overflow, without questions, without calculation, to all men . . ."⁴⁵

Machen sees in the church in the time of the apostles the perfect organism of love and intolerance. "In being radically intolerant," says Machen, the primitive church "placed itself squarely in opposition to the spirit of that age," which surely was, he adds, "an age of syncretism and tolerance in religion."⁴⁶ The early church's radical intolerance meant that

A man could not be a worshiper of the God of the Christians and at the same time be a worshiper of other gods; he could not accept the salvation offered by Christ and at the same time admit that for other people there might be some other way of salvation; he could not agree to refrain from proselytizing among men of other faiths but came forward, no matter what it might cost, with a universal appeal.⁴⁷

The intolerance of which Machen speaks is the unique perfection and power of the gospel. The perhaps surprising interdependence of intolerance and love turns out to be rooted in the glory of the gospel itself. In that case, learning from a non-Christian world and life view must be done without attenuating intolerance because to lose intolerance is to dissolve the unique power of the gospel of Christ to save sinners. The Christian must have a special and sincere interest in others. He must be compassionate and never grow tired of listening. At the same time, no matter how much he learns from non-Christian sources, he must never allow the gospel to be diluted.

Conclusion

This paper aims to conclude by proposing a broad and admittedly unverifiable theory, one which suggests that the longevity of a non-Christian world and life view is determined by its proximity to the gospel. Similar to counterfeit currency, a more convincing forgery results in a higher quality counterfeit, allowing individuals to gain more from their fake money. To put it another way, the most profitable plagiarism is the one that is so well done that it goes undetected.

Consider the cost of following Jesus. Since it is a key part of the Christian life, a counterfeit gospel must address it. A good counterfeit will exact a certain price on its adherents, one which connects with an innate sense of moral debt and the desire to boast. But a false gospel, lacking grace, asks too much. Therefore, a crucial element of a non-Christian world-view and lifestyle is its ability to conceal, or deceptively package, the associated costs. Even so, sometimes the sight of a barbed metallic object protruding conspicuously from an enticing meal fails to have the effect that it should. Sometimes caution and common sense are overridden by desperation or pride.

⁴⁴ Machen, "The Responsibility of the Church," 12.

⁴⁵ Machen, 12.

⁴⁶ Machen, 10.

⁴⁷ Machen, 10.

Transgenderism, to take one example, preaches the false gospels of Marxist liberationism and American individualism, two of the predominant pseudo-gospels of the modern West. But the price it exacts is absurd. The movement from 'I think I am different' to gender reassignment surgery is a lot to ask, but some do make the journey. Now, according to the unverifiable calculus that this paper proposes, transgenderism garners considerable zeal because it reverberates among the socially disenfranchised with the appeal of a real gospel, but the barb is unhidden, and the price is high. On the present calculus, therefore, transgenderism is a crude imitation so its victims will fall fast and hard, and it is unlikely to endure.

Confucianism, however, presents a special challenge. It is a rich and subtle counterfeit gospel, approximating on numerous points a biblical view of the human organism in its corporate and individual dimensions. Its vision is of a peaceful, prosperous kingdom, a state of shalom characterized by human flourishing.

While the vast longevity and influence of Confucianism bear witness to its plagiaristic efficacy, to its real but antithetical genius, the burden of the present historico-missiological investigation has been to name its Godman—that is, to identify the personal icon of Confucian religious consciousness and Confucian religious hope. Zhou Gong is not the whole of the Confucian moral program, of course, but his persona embodies its fundamental principles. In many ways that revolve around him specifically, the deeper impulse of Confucian morality presents itself as a re-creation of Christian truth, even suppressive but creative imagery of the God who is there and the holiness he demands. In that sense, we might say that the Duke of Zhou is the “in Him” of Confucian moral longing.

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