

Descendant of the Sage in China

Is the rôle of the Sacrificial Official to Confucius a potential future factor in greater China identity issues?

OUTSIDE THE SOLOMONIC DYNASTY of Ethiopia, the Kong Clan, or the descendants of Confucius, has the longest, traceable family lineage in the world, spanning more than 3,000 years as direct male-line descendants of the Kings of the Shang Dynasty, China's first, historical dynasty.²

Today, thousands of members of the "House of Confucius" exist. However, one member — the patriarch of the clan — plays visible and symbolic rôles in both the Republic of China (ROC-Taiwan) and People's Republic of China (PRC): the Sacrificial Official to Confucius.

Little has been written about the Sacrificial Official to Confucius in the English language, both in the press and academia, despite the institution's more-than 2,000 year existence in one form or another. Even more importantly, understanding the history and function of the Sacrificial Official to Confucius may have implications for the Cross-Strait relationship and the ROC's soft-power projection.

By learning more about the position of Sacrificial Official to Confucius, it may be possible to see that a symbol of national and cultural unity exists between the ROC (Taiwan) and the PRC. To fully understand the rôle of the Sacrificial Official to Confucius, it is necessary to first delve briefly into the linguistics behind the title itself and the history of the institution, and then examine the various functions of the position.

In Chinese, the Sacrificial Official to Confucius transliterated as *Dacheng Zhisheng Xianshi Fengsi Guan*. Liter-

ally, this means the "official who offers a sacrifice at the great hall of the greatest sage and teacher (Confucius)". Already, one can infer that the Sacrificial Official to Confucius makes a sacrifice to Confucius at a Confucian temple. History does, however, paint a more nuanced picture.

Before the Sacrificial Official to Confucius existed, there was the Duke of Yansheng. The Duke of Yansheng was a hereditary title of nobility given to the head of the Kong Clan. This title was abolished in by the Republic of China in 1935; 24 years after the Qing monarchy had ended. Although the noble title and its privileges were eliminated, the ROC Government, in reverence for Confucius and Confucianism, transformed the Duke of Yansheng title into the more symbolic Sacrificial Official to Confucius, thereby allowing the last Duke, Kong Decheng (Kung Te-cheng), to remain a significant figure in society.³

But symbolism was not all that the ROC allowed for the rôle. Until 2008, the Sacrificial Official to Confucius was a paid position and was of cabinet rank, which granted it heightened status during the Republic of China's duration on the Mainland and on Taiwan.⁴

Under ROC law, the Sacrificial Offi-

cial to Confucius is an hereditary title following male-line primogeniture of the descendants of Confucius. As of 2009, a female may inherit the title if there were no other male members of the Kong Clan. Additionally, those who inherit the position must be surnamed Kong.⁵ The only legal function of the Sacrificial Official to Confucius is to offer a sacrifice at the Taipei Confucius Temple, a national temple, on September 28 of each year, regarded as Confucius' birthday and formerly the "Teacher's Day" national holiday in the Republic of China.⁶ Oftentimes the ceremony is attended by the President of the Republic of China, cabinet ministers, the Mayor of Taipei City, foreign dignitaries, and thousands of spectators, emphasizing the national symbolism and international significance of the Sacrificial Official to Confucius. Beyond legal obligations, the Sacrificial Official to Confucius has been involved in a variety of symbolic and non-symbolic capacities.

Since the Sacrificial Official to Confucius position was established, every title-holder has been a Senior Advisor to the President of the Republic of China, at the very least making the Sacrificial Official to Confucius a nominally active participant in state affairs beyond the September 28th ceremony and at most an influential government official with the ear of the President.⁷ The first Sacrificial Official to Confucius, Kong Decheng went beyond the Senior Advisor to the President position and served as a member of the Re-

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2 Qing Jiang, *A Confucian Constitutional Order: How China's Ancient Past Can Shape Its Political Future*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013, p. 82.; Peter Foster, "Confucius Family Tree Unveiled", *The Daily Telegraph*, September 25, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/6230959/Confucius-family-tree-unveiled.html>.

3 Austin Ramzy, "Q. and A.: Kung Tsui-chang on Life as the Heir to Confucius", *The New York Times*, November 14, 2014, <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/14/q-a-kung-tsui-chang-on-life-as-the-heir-to-confucius/>.

4 "Sacrificial Official to Confucius", *World Heritage Encyclopedia*, republished in Project Gutenberg Self-Publishing Press, http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/sacrificial_official_to_confucius.

5 Ramzy, *Op. Cit.*

6 "Religious Ceremonies", in *Yearbook 2013 Taipei*, Taipei City Government, August 28, 2014, <http://yearbook.taipei.ct.asp?xItem=81150664&ctNode=73802&mp=100103>; "Kung Tsui-chang to Officiate at Confucius Day", *The China Post*, September 28, 2009, <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/national/national-news/2009/09/28/226413/Kung-Tsui-chang.htm>.

7 "President", Examination Yuan of ROC, <http://www.exam.gov.tw/cp.asp?xItem=9283&ctNode=608&mp=5>; LLC Books, ed., Senior Advisors to President Ma Ying-Jeou: Han Pao-The, Chang Po-Ya, R. C. T. Lee, Kung Tsui Chang, General Books LLC, 2010. (It should be noted that the Sacrificial Officials to Confucius were only Senior Advisors to the President under *Guomindang* (GMD)/*Kuomintang* (KMT) administrations.)

public of China's National Assembly, the disbanded "upper-house" of the ROC's legislature which had the right to amend the Constitution of the Republic of China, elect and recall the President and Vice-President of the Republic of China, and vote on "constitutional amendments originating in the Legislative Yuan".⁸

He even went on to become the President of the Examination Yuan, the civil service management body, thus head of one of the five branches of the Republic of China.⁹ While Kong Decheng's experience in government and politics may have been unique, it showed that the Sacrificial Official to Confucius could represent both the Chinese nation and Confucianism. Outside of government, educational and symbolic rôles, both in the ROC and PRC, are the primary "extra-legal" functions of the Sacrificial Official to Confucius.

Regarding education, Kong Decheng was a professor at the National Taiwan University, Fu Jen Catholic University, and Soochow University.¹⁰ His successor, Kong Chuichang (Kung Tsui-chang), founded the Chinese Association of Confucianism in May 2011 to facilitate the spreading of Confucianism. On the Mainland, Kong Chuichang, to honor his heritage and position, was named dean of the School of Chinese National Culture Studies at Qufu Normal University.¹¹ Thus, like Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom and her other realms and territories, the Sacrificial Official to Confucius can bring awareness to specific causes, such as education, and serve as a representative of China's, both Republic and People's Republic, culture.

The symbolic and unitary functions of the Sacrificial Official to Confucius has become more prominent since the ascension of Kong Chuichang in 2008 and more akin to the rôles played by constitutional monarchs. Sacrificial Official to Confucius Kong Chuichang, in recognition of his ancestry,

was invited to attend the Taipei première of the PRC-made film, *Confucius*, showing the reverence in both the ROC and PRC for Confucius and his heir.¹² Similarly, the Sacrificial Official to Confucius has personally attended or sent a representative to attend various functions honoring his ancestor in both the ROC and the PRC, including, but not limited to the unveiling of the Taipei Confucian Temple's revitalization project, the donation ceremony of a photocopy of the "Four Books and Five Classics" written in calligraphy at the Confucius Research Institute in Mainland China, a tour of the same Confucius Research Institute, and a visit to the Confucius Temple and Kong Family Mansion in Qufu, China.¹³

Even more significant, in addition to his annual sacrifice to Confucius on September 28 each year in Taipei, the Sacrificial Official to Confucius has conducted and led rituals in Mainland China. These rituals took place at the Confucius Temples in Qufu and on Mount Ni, the birthplace of Confucius, as well as at the Kong Family Cemetery.¹⁴

For the Sacrificial Official to Confucius to perform and lead rites at locations directly connected to Confucius in Mainland China shows the respect the Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have for Confucius' heir and view him as an embodiment of the Confucian culture.

Similar to the Cross-Strait reverence for the Sacrificial Official to Confucius, the Sacrificial Official to Confucius has been used to improve and strengthen the Republic of China's ties with nations heavily influenced by Confucianism. For example, during the Presidency of Ngô Đình Diem of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), Sacrificial Official to Confucius Kong Decheng made sacrifices to Confucius in South Vietnam to build on and improve the ROC-South Vietnamese relationship. Kong Decheng's visit and sacrificial offerings helped fa-

cilitate dialogue between Pres. Chiang Kai-shek of the Republic of China and Pres. Ngô Đình that intended to create an anti-Communist *bloc* of Confucian culture countries.¹⁵ Thus, the Sacrificial Official to Confucius acted as a "soft power" tool to help achieve the ROC's foreign policy goals.

Now that the official and unofficial rôles of the Sacrificial Official to Confucius have been explained, what implications can be drawn? The first is that the Sacrificial Official to Confucius is seen as a symbol representing Chinese and Confucian culture both in Taiwan and Mainland China. This unifying nature of the Sacrificial Official to Confucius could serve to bring the ROC and PRC closer together at a time when Cross-Strait relations have become increasingly strained.

Secondly, the Sacrificial Official to Confucius could be used by the Republic of China, as it once was used with South Vietnam, as an instrument of international "soft power". The ROC could send the Sacrificial Official to Confucius to countries with Confucian influenced cultures, like Vietnam, South Korea, and Japan, to strengthen cultural and political ties in an effort to achieve foreign policy goals.

Finally, and most radically, the Sacrificial Official to Confucius could serve as the cultural and unifying symbol of a future United China. This has been proposed in the past, when the Duke of Yansheng was being considered as Emperor of China after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, and in the present, by Mainland Chinese Confucian scholar Jiang Qing and his argument for a Confucian monarchy, given the impact of Confucius and Confucianism on China's history, culture, and society.¹⁶

Despite this brief account of the Sacrificial Official to Confucius' rôle, more research on the origins of the institution and why it was even created would be helpful for researchers interested in the importance of traditional governance structures today. ★

8 "Chapter III: The National Assembly, Article 27", in the Constitution of the Republic of China.; "President", Examination Yuan, *Op. Cit.*

9 "President", Examination Yuan, *Op. Cit.*

10 "Who's Who", *Taiwan News*.

11 Ramzy, *Op. Cit.*

12 Department of Information and Tourism, "Confucius Premières at Taipei Confucius Temple", Taipei City Government, February 4, 2010, <http://english.tpdoit.gov.taipei/ct.asp?xItem=1108667&ctNode=38813&mp=112002>.

13 "Taipei Confucius Temple Revitalized", *Taiwan News*, December 17, 2011, http://taiwannews.com/en/topics_detail.php?i=164; "The Donation Ceremony of the Photocopy of the Calligraphy Wo", Chinese Confucius Research Institute, April 10, 2016, <http://www.kongziyiy.org/plus/view.php?aid=257>; Ramzy, *Op. Cit.*

14 Ramzy, *Op. Cit.*; *Qian Sima, Records of the Grand Historian*.

15 Jason Lim, "Confucianism as a Symbol of Solidarity: Cultural Relations between the Republic of China and the Republic of Vietnam, 1955-1963", *Issues & Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (December 2014): 119-156.

16 Sheng Hu and Danian Liu: *The 1911 Revolution: A Retrospective After 70 Years*. Beijing, 1983; New World Press, p. 55.; Qing Jiang, *A Confucian Constitutional Order: How China's Ancient Past Can Shape Its Political Future*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013.