

Shenzhen's Kongshengtang: Religious Confucianism and Local Moral Governance

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Abstract: *How do Confucian groups participate in local governance? Contrary to the growing body of literature which discuss the development of Confucianism as religion and its possible institutionalization in China, this paper will focus on the role of these groups in the local governance. This article explores the Shenzhen-based Kongshengtang, a non-profit public interest group and will argue that the latter participates in the moral governance through its teachings and daily rituals. First, the article will introduce the Kongshengtang, its origin, activities (i.e. teachings, rituals, etc.) and its director. By examining the later, who is a student of the « Confucian master » Jiang Qing, we will demonstrate that not only does Kongshengtang actively participates in moral governance but also in the local religious landscape, even though Confucianism is not recognized as being a religion on mainland China. Moreover, it will be shown how Kongshengtang's religious and moral discourse insert itself in the Party's narrative regarding harmonious society and thus, how it participates in moral governance. We will conclude by applying Yang Fenggang's religious economics framework in order to assess its validity in the case of the religious Confucianism displayed by Kongshengtang.*

"儒教的宗教生活也是以家为其本单位的，家庭同时也是儒教最其本的道场"¹- Zhou Beichen

How do Confucian groups participate in local governance? Since the 1980's several researches have been produced in regard to Confucian renewal on mainland China (*Dàlù rújiā fùxīng*, 大陆儒家复兴) (Adler, 2006 ; Ai, 2009; Bell, 2008 ; Billioud and Thoraval, 2009 ; Bresciani, 2001 ; Fan, 2011; Makeham, 2008)². Contrary to the growing body of literature which discuss the development of Confucianism as a religion (Chen, 2010; Kang, 2004, 2005; Jiang 2003, 1989), its possible institutionalization (*zhìdù huà*, 制度化) in China and its politicisation (Bell and Fan, 2013; Bell and Jiang, 2012), this paper will instead focus on the local side of Confucian revival (*mínjiān rújiā fùxīng*, 民间儒家复兴) and its role in the local governance. This article explores the Shenzhen-based Kongshengtang (孔圣堂), a non-profit (*fēi qǐyè*, 非企业) public interest (*gōngyì*, 公益)

¹ "Confucianism's religious life takes place inside the home, at the same time the home is the most important Confucian temple". - Zhou Beichen

² It would be too long and impractical to list all the studies.

group and will argue that the latter participates in the moral governance through its teachings and ritual performances.

First, the article will introduce the Kongshengtang, its origin, activities (*i.e.* teachings, rituals, etc.) and its director, Zhou Beichen (周北辰). By examining the latter, who is a student of the « Confucian master » Jiang Qing, we will demonstrate that not only does Kongshengtang actively participates in moral governance (*dàodé zhìlǐ*, 道德治理) but also in the local religious landscape, even though Confucianism is not recognized as a religion in mainland China. Moreover, it will be shown how Kongshengtang's religious and moral discourse insert itself in the Party's narrative regarding harmonious society (*Héxié shèhuì*, 和谐社会) and thus, the way in which it participates to moral governance. I will conclude by applying Yang Fenggang's religious economics framework in order to assess its validity in the case of the religious Confucianism displayed by Kongshengtang.

First, I will briefly present and describe the case study that is the Kongshengtang (*e.g.* its teaching, its rituals, activities and its Master). I will also further elaborate on its functions and objectives. Second, its role in Shenzhen's governance will be explained. Finally, Kongshengtang's religiosity will be discussed under religious economics' perspective. The last two points will also allow me to address the broader discussion of the local Confucian revival, its meaning and multiples expressions in contemporary China.

Methodology

I used a research strategy that combines documentary analysis (primary and secondary sources) and field research³ (direct observations, interviews and informal discussions). I also wish to underline that a "site-based" method was used, which consists of only one visit ("one-time interview"). This choice was mainly motivated by both financial and time constraints.

The method of analysis is mainly based on interpretativism with some elements borrowed from social anthropology. First, I decided to use interpretativism because I assumed that participants have their own understanding of the phenomenon and as such, interviews are seen as being co-elaborated. Lastly, why talk about social anthropology? The study involves contact with a given community (*i.e.* Confucian groups) and it implies a focus on current events and a direct or indirect participation in their local activities. It also emphasizes their perspective and interpretation of the studied phenomenon (*e.g.* function and role of Confucianism in Chinese society).

Theoretical considerations

Since this paper discusses governance and religion related issues, it seems appropriate to define what these terms mean in the context of this research.

Governance refers to the exercise of power, political authority and administration of the country through the implementation of norms, rules and procedures which seek to legitimize certain practises (Sepp, 2004; Keohane and Nye, 2000). "Taking part in

³ Kongshengtang is one of the 5 case studies that was completed for my PhD dissertation.

governance" thus refers to actively participating in the application process of this authority and legitimacy. "Cultural Governance" alludes to the use of cultural idioms - instead of always relying on coercion - in the process of governance. It also implies the application of the State's authority on the cultural sphere (Nyiri, 2006; Oakes, 2006). "Moral Governance", notion specific to our inquiry on the role of local Confucian groups in governance, involves the use of moral idioms (*e.g.* ethical and religious teachings) to shape and structure society.

Second, regardless of the Party's secular stance and attempts at eradicating religion - especially during the Cultural revolution (1966-1976) - in China, the latter simply went into hiding then reappeared, slowly at the beginning of the Reform and Opening (*Gǎigé kāifàng*, 改革开放) in 1978. As Berger (1999) realized, secularization, as an all-encompassing/all-explaining theory was perhaps the exception rather than the norm as religion never actually disappeared and the "resurgence" is mainly one according to this theory. Yang Fenggang (杨凤岗) comes to the same conclusion and, by dissociating himself from secularization, applies instead religious economics framework⁴ to the case of China (2011) and defines the concept of "tricolour market" (2006).

Contrary to Western countries, China's religious market is based on shortage (Kornai, 1992) coming from the State's regulation and religious institutional structure⁵. Regulations, rules and structural control of the religious offer are thus characteristics of the Chinese religious economy. The State created - unintended consequences of regulation - a tricolour market (*sān sè shìchǎng*, 三色市场) comprising of the "red" (*e.g.* officially recognized and registered religious groups and their activities), "black" (*e.g.* illegal sects or associations and their activities) and "grey" zones (*e.g.* illegal activities of groups in the red zone, religious activities of unregistered groups). Zones are regulations and policies dependant as groups can registered/be declared illegal thus redrawing the boundaries of religious landscape. Furthermore, and this will later become central to our inquiry, lots of groups (*e.g.* Qigong practitioners, Confucianism, etc.) have sometimes ambiguous practises when it comes to religion: to avoid the State's regulation, they registered under different categories, such as "physical activity", "National Studies group" (*Guóxué*, 国学), "traditional culture activities" (*Chuántǒng wénhuà huódòng*, 传统文化活动) (Micollier, 1996)⁶.

Third, there exists a debate in mainland China regarding religious Confucianism and the religiousness of the latter. However, I will not be able to explain it at length in this paper. As such, only certain precisions will be given regarding the state of Confucianism in China today: (1) Confucianism is not recognized as a religion in China; (2) scholars are still debating as to whether or not Confucianism is a religion; (3) the question of what exactly is "Confucianism" is not settled⁷; (4) Political Confucianism (*zhèngzhì rúxué*, 政治儒学), regardless of the attention devoted to it (*e.g.* scholarly work, translations) does not prevail inside the Party nor inside the society; (5) discourses of individuals such as Jiang Qing (蒋庆), Kang Xiaoguang (康晓光) and Chen Ming (陈明),

⁴ I cannot fully render the religious economics framework in this paper as it is not the main topic of the presentation. For more information see Iannaccone (1991, 1992) and Stark and Iannaccone (1994, 1996).

⁵ On the other hand, western scholars, such as Gill (2001), believed that free market could instead offer more options to accommodate the demand for religious goods.

⁶ Kongshentang is no exception to this.

⁷ Even the terms used (*i.e.* the Chinese characters) are still the object of constant debates (Makeham, 2008).

to name just a few, do not represent the multiple opinions of the Chinese academic community regarding Confucianism and its place in contemporary China; (6) contrary to appearances, the Party does not fully embrace nor officially support Confucianism.

Finally, since this paper often refers to the notion of "religion", it ought to define it as well, at least, what is the adopted angle regarding it. Contrary to more "traditional" definitions (*e.g.* scripture, clergy, defined location [Smith, 1991]), religion will here incorporate the notion and the importance of the spiritual "experience" (Asad, 2001). As such, experience is an inseparable aspect of religion and I will emphasize this element during the discussion regarding religious Confucianism⁸.

The Kongshengtang

The institution

Kongshengtang was established by Samwo's (*sān hé guójì jítuán*, 三和国际集团) president Zhang Hua (张华) in 2008 (Liu, 2010: A22)⁹. It opens its doors in 2009¹⁰. The latter then invited Zhou Beichen (周北辰) to become the director of the group. The Kongshengtang is also supported and financed by the local chamber of commerce (Ten Thousand Holy Network, 2011). The group was visited by Tu Weiming (杜维明), a prominent Confucian scholar from Harvard and maintains close ties with the Hong Kong Confucian Academy (*Xiānggǎng kǒng jiàoxué yuàn*, 香港孔教学院) by way of Dr. Tang En-Jia (汤恩佳) (Zhou, 2009: 159). As such, the local, regional and international visibility of Kongshengtang are making it a very interesting case.

According to employees, Kongshengtang fits under the category of "public welfare group" (*gōngyì shìyè tuántǐ*, 公益事业团体)¹¹. By using the term "welfare", Kongshengtang aligns itself with the notion of "public interest" (in the interest of the public), new buzzword that refers to modern social philanthropy, as a remedy to trust, morality and injustice problems. Kongshengtang actually poses itself - by way of this notion of "welfare" - as a redemptive society through its teachings and self-transformation (personal salvation through Confucianism).

Objectives and functions

Kongshengtang is primarily depicted, by its director and employees, as the only "temple" (*Dào chǎng*, 道场)¹² allowing the free worshipping of Confucius in all of China¹³. The main objectives of the group are to (1) promote Confucius worship (*Jì kǒng*, 祭孔) and sacrifices on the local cultural scene; (2) promote Confucian studies in order to restore

⁸ Rituals and sacrifices will then be seen as being religious and as permeating social life in its entirety, for China that is.

⁹ Zhang used 1000000 RMB of his own money and still acts as principal funding source for Kongshengtang.

¹⁰ Lü Puguang (吕普光), local representative of SARA (State Administration of Religious Affairs), attended the opening ceremony. Lü went on to praise the establishment of this kind of organisation.

¹¹ Interview (Shenzhen) May 17 2012.

¹² Daochang [道场] is a word that usually is employ to depict Taoist temples.

¹³ Interview (Shenzhen) May 30 2012

morality and to tone down damages done by the arrival of Western culture; (3) to stop the moral decadence in Shenzhen (e.g. money worshipping, corruption, prostitution, etc.) due to the introduction of the Western capitalist system; (4) to promote a return to traditional values (e.g. filial piety [*xiào*, 孝], harmony [*hé*, 和], social etiquettes [*lǐyí*, 礼仪], etc.)

The functions of Kongshengtang are to (1) manage local liturgical activities (e.g. spring festival, mid-autumn festival, light festival [*Qīngmíng jié*, 清明节], Confucius' birthday, etc.); (2) welcome "pilgrims" (i.e. everyone wanting to learn about Confucianism) in search of spirituality; (3) establish Confucian study groups [*shūyuàn*, 书院] and (4) organize charitable activities (*císhàn huódòng*, 慈善活动) aimed the local community (e.g. alleviating moral "torment" and provide psychological care [*xīnlǐ guānhuái*, 心理关怀]). As such, this group already frames itself within the Party's narrative regarding the construction of a harmonious society (*Héxié shèhuì jiànshè*, 和谐社会建设)¹⁴.

In the short term, Kongshengtang intends to occupy an important place in the local religious market; in the long run, the latter wishes to reshape the socio-religious landscape of Shenzhen by building a new Confucian college. Its director, Zhou Beichen, also wants to create more religious and ritual sites outside of Shenzhen to establish a Kongshengtang national network (Ten Thousand Holy Network, 2011).



Teaching and activities

Kongshengtang provides several types of classes (e.g. lecture, calligraphy, etc.) that are free for the public to attend (Kongshengtang, 2010 ; s.d.b). They mainly focus on classical reading (e.g. the book of transformation [*Yìjīng*, 易经], filial piety classic [*xiào*

¹⁴ e.g. curbing of corruption, rebuilding public ethics, alleviate social tensions, etc.

jīng, 孝经], the Analects [Lúnyǔ, 论语], the Great study [Dàxué, 大学], Doctrine of the Mean [Zhōngyōng, 中庸], etc.) and aimed at educating the child in the "traditional" way. That being said, Zhou's teaching, regarding children, mainly focused on two things: (1) filial piety and (2) ancestor worship.



The group also dispenses classes specially designed for adults (parents) and business people. The objective here is to initiate them to Confucian morality, ritual teachings [*lǐjiào*, 礼教] and its governance aspects (mainly in terms of household management) (Kongshengtang, s.d.c: 1). The redemptive aspect of Kongshengtang comes into play primarily for business people. Zhou teaches them that money cannot buy culture, innocence nor manners. He is trying to moralise them in order to curb certain practises (e.g. corruption, consumerism, etc.). As such, redemption can be achieved through self-cultivation and by attending Zhou's classes. Classes for parents are more focused on manners, traditional values and filial piety (how to teach it). All of these elements are seen as essential for China's cultural revival.

Kongshengtang's teachings are conveying a message of order, respect, morality and loyalty all close to the official narrative regarding social harmony.

Rituals and ceremonies

Several rituals and ceremonies are performed in the Kongshengtang. First and foremost, it performs the worship of Confucius (*jì kǒng*, 祭孔). Offerings (*jìsì*, 祭祀) are given on a daily basis and a great celebration is held for his birthday. The ceremony includes several procedures such as the "three bows" (*sān bài*, 三拜). In the same line of ideas, ancestor worship (*jì zǔ*, 祭祖) is also performed inside the walls of Kongshengtang, which serves as an ancestral hall (*cítáng*, 祠堂). Due to the complexity of these rituals, it usually left the ordinary people out of the ceremonial practises. However Zhou simplified their forms in order for rituals to become more accessible by the local community. This is of course to make them part of the Confucian revival.

Kongshengtang also offers "Confucian wedding" (*rújiā hūnlǐ*, 儒家婚礼) ceremonies in exchange for a hefty cost. Why would this specific ceremony be of interest to us? In Confucian thinking, as underlined by Zhou, the main unit of Chinese religious life is the traditional family¹⁵ (Yao and Zhao, 2010: 103). The "traditional wedding" offered by the Kongshengtang aims at the re-sacralization of the family (vs. the Western familial model, nuclear family, reconstituted, etc.). In turn, this will create stronger and more ethical families. Simply put, it will lead to social harmony (Kongshengtang, s.d). Zhou wants to reshape the social life around the family and its crucial (sometimes lost) role in both care provision (*jiātíng guānhuái*, 家庭关怀) and social order. Furthermore, the need for a return to a more traditional family is based on the negative effects of Western culture (e.g. atomization of society, individualism). All the rituals and ceremonies performed at the Kongshengtang both exhibit a clear sense of religious experience (e.g. ancestor worship) and promote social harmony.

The Importance of Zhou Beichen

Zhou Beichen, without going into too much detail regarding his background, is the student of the "Grand Confucian Master" Jiang Qing. Zhou considers himself the first and sole professional Confucian in China (*zhuānyè rúzhě*, 专业儒者) and the only "broadcaster" of religious Confucianism in China (*chuánbò rújiào de rúzhě*, 传播儒教的儒者)¹⁶.

Zhou sees the Kongshengtang as being a "popular college" (*mínjiān shūyuàn*, 民间书院) where people of all creeds can learn (and should) about religious Confucianism. As such, the group plays a definite role in Shenzhen's religious landscape (Zhou, 2009 : 131). Furthermore, the group is part school part temple (*xué miào hé yī*, 学庙和一): it both teaches and performs rituals.

Contrary to other recognized religious groups, Confucianism lacks resources to express itself inside society. Zhou deplores this situation especially when considering its the importance throughout Chinese history. Zhou is aware of the economic possibilities

¹⁵ Confucianism is, according to Yang (1961) diffuse into social institution such as the family. Actually, the latter is the starting point of social order (i.e. if the family is in disorder, the nation is). As such, if the family is dysfunctional, Confucianism will also be, as it is tied to it.

¹⁶ Interview with Zhou (Shenzhen) May 20 2012.

of Kongshengtang (e.g. cultural tourism [*wénhuà lǚyóu*, 文化旅游], cultural industry [*wénhuà chǎnyè*, 文化产业], etc.) yet refuses any government involvement into the groups as marketization of religion leads, according to him, to "dead temple"¹⁷.

The Kongshengtang is a living institution which participates in the community's spiritual construction. It is, as stated by Zhou, based in Shenzhen to rebuild the family culture¹⁸ - the spiritual home (*jīngshén jiāyuán*, 精神家园) - and save it from recent years' moral decadence. The sole solution (to rebuild the family culture and replace Confucianism as a religion) is the Confucian revival and the return of the "filial way" (*xiàocǐ zhī dào*, 孝慈之道) as "core" values (*héxīn jiàzhí*, 核心价值) in Chinese cultural and spiritual life (Zhou, 2010c).

Zhou frames his entire discourse against the "West": he seeks to answer the economical (*i.e.* capitalist economy) political (*i.e.* democracy) and spiritual (*i.e.* Christianity, Islam, etc.) problems brought up by the incursion of foreign culture in China. All of these are seen as subversive elements contributing to the "cultural gap" (*wénhuà duàncéng*, 文化断层) and moral decadence. These incursions deprived China of its core values - better embodied by religious Confucianism - resulting in social problems (e.g. the rich/poor gap, children abandoning their parents, individualism, etc.) and in the atrophy of the national spirit (*mínzú jīngshén*, 民族精神), leaving Chinese people to be "errant ghost" (*yóu hún*, 游魂)¹⁹.

Lastly, Zhou, while never directly challenging the Party, pushes for the removal of Marxism (foreign ideology) and its replacement by Confucianism in society, education and political system.

Kongshengtang and the local moral governance

It is often easy to believe the Party is behind the renewal of religion and culture in China (Oakes and Sutton, 2010: 4). However, some practises remain outside the State's reach. Rituals and symbols (and assertion of control over them) are crucial for the Party as it is within these that boundaries of social control are renegotiated (Oakes, 2010: 53). This in turn pushes the State to recuperate those practises and use them as a form of social control (*i.e.* using cultural governance) instead of using force - legitimacy costly - to implement policies. The State inserts itself in both cultural production and life in order to assert its authority (*i.e.* cultural authority) over it and its meaning. As such the State can structure the correct doctrines and meanings (orthodoxy) as well as the correct practises (orthopraxy) (Oakes, 2010:57).

The notion of moral governance thus implies a political turn in culture, in the ways of governing cultural practises and beliefs (Oakes, 2010: 58). It is the use of moral idioms in the governing process as to supplement the apparent lack of legitimacy caused

¹⁷ Zhou refers here to implicit problem of "authenticity" of religious venues "touched" by the Party's hand.

¹⁸ The reader will note, Zhou is referring to the traditional Chinese family, structured according to the 5 relations. To a certain extent, Confucian family revival implies a reinforcement of patriarchy in China as well.

¹⁹ Errant ghost refers to spirits which are not at rest due to lack of proper rituals.

by previous uses of force. As such, local revival of either religion or culture is seen as a Government-led and government supported²⁰.

Explanations and observations found in the literature are not in tune with the field investigations done in Shenzhen. Kongshengtang is not under the government's influence. Its establishment and its development are owed to private local initiative. Local State agents come by to attend festival and other ceremonies yet they have no formal ties to the group. As such, it is a non-profit organization participating to the cultural renewal of China. It follows State's discourse regarding social harmony and order without any pressure from the latter. Kongshengtang's religious vision of Confucianism and its redemptive aspects are clearly outside of the State accepted "orthodoxy" in terms of both Confucianism and religion. Yet, local Cadres are not cracking down in it. Why? The group's discourse is in tune with the State narrative regarding harmonious society, social order and loyalty. Also, Kongshengtang answers the Party's call regarding the positive role that must play cultural and religious groups in the construction of a socialist harmonious society.

By way of its discourse and rituals, Kongshengtang takes part into local moral governance in Shenzhen. It uses moral idioms and symbols to restructure and reshape the community and safeguarding it from decadent behaviours imported from the West. It stresses the same elements the Party is, plus a strong devotion to filial piety and to honouring the country. Filial piety is of particular importance to the Party for two reasons: (1) it is strongly linked to social hierarchy and obedience and (2) it encompasses the notion of "care". Why is this issue of pressing matter for the Party-State? Simply because it is incapable of providing medical/old-age pension coverage to all its citizen, over-relying on the traditional role of the family as care giver²¹. This in turn is addressed by Confucian revival.

Kongshengtang represents a change in the internal logic of governance in the People's Republic because it participates self-willingly to the governing process by replicating the State's narrative. What makes it interesting is the "self" side as Kongshengtang is not funded by the State nor any part of the Government apparatus.

Shenzhen's religious economics

Confucianism, as a religion, is *de facto* part of the "grey" zone. According to Zhou, and other Confucian and social Scientists before him (Yang, 1961; Yao and Zhao, 2010; Tu, 1996; Billioud and Thoraval, 2008; 2009), Confucianism is a religion or at least contains clear religious elements.

Religious Confucianism is defined by its (1) spirits (*shén*, 神) worship; (2) by its elaborated ritual performances (*lǐyí*, 礼仪); (3) its sacred grounds (*shèngdì*, 圣地)²² and (4) by the core figure of Confucius and the many other ancestors and local deities. As such, it is more of a polytheistic religion (*duōshénjiào*, 多神教) rather than a monotheistic one. For Zhou, Confucianism has its own scriptures (*i.e.* classical Confucian

²⁰ Yet it is important to know that the State only accepts designated practises which fits in its definition of "religion".

²¹ As such, the Party has a vested interest in promoting, in the long-run, the Confucian renewal.

²² Confucius native city is called the Holy City of the East (*Dōngfāng shèng chéng*, 东方圣城).

readings), clergy (*i.e.* familial structure) and place of worship (*i.e.* the house/temple). Thus, it is no different from any other religion.

What explains, at least in part, the revival of religious Confucianism? Well, for one, as Marsh (2011) explained, it never really disappeared. Second, Yang (1961) clearly underlines the requirement for Confucianism to thrive: strong social institution as it permeates them²³. Following this logic, a weak social structure equals a weak Confucianism. Third, the importance of national demand for spiritual good during the post-reform era. There is a growing need for spiritual/religious goods in China since the beginning of the reform era. This growth accelerated followed the multitude of unintended consequences of the reforms. Therefore, individuals went back to Chinese traditional culture, mainly structured around Confucianism in order to fill this spiritual vacuum.

Kongshengtang, and other cases found during field research, exactly fits what is described by both Yang (2011) and Micollier (1996), that is the use of different labels in order to escape the State's regulation and oversight in terms of religious activities. Furthermore, the choice of Shenzhen in the establishment of this group was not random. In terms in sheer economics, Shenzhen is seen as cultural desert (*wénhuà shāmò*, 文化沙漠). What better place then to establish a market? According to Zhou, Shenzhen was an easy choice as there would have no competition from other religious groups²⁴.

Kongshengtang also differs from sectarian movements like Falungong [*Fǎlúngōng*, 法轮功], which directly defied both the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the Party by expressing "black" zone practises and ideas onto the "red" zone. Confucianism, and groups like Kongshengtang have relied on the ambiguity regarding the religiosity of Confucianism to remain undetected. As previously stated, scholars do not agree on this issue (*i.e.* Confucianism as a religion) and neither does the Party. The latter can therefore encourage it and sometimes even support it, yet keeps it at arm's length (Ai, 2008).

Concluding remarks

This exploration and enquiry into local Confucianism has brought to light its religious expression and its local political engagement (*i.e.* its participation to governance through its moral discourse close to that of the Party) as well as the market structure in which Kongshengtang is inserted.

As we explained, secularisation, though attempted by the State, was never fully implemented and religious groups kept on thriving under communism (Marsh, 2011; Yang, 2011). Confucianism is no exception. Furthermore, secular policies in China (seen as regulations regarding religious expression) had the unintended consequence of creating this market structure (*i.e.* red/black/grey) thus pushing a lot of believers towards the "grey" zone in order to satisfy their spiritual needs.

²³ See Yang (1961) for the notion of "diffuse religion".

²⁴ Under the Song [1130-1200], Fujian province [福建] was one of the "civilisational" frontiers of the Han culture. The province of Guangdong (in which is located Shenzhen) was considered to be primitive and populated by barbarians. As such Guangdong was considered impure and dangerous (Carrico, 2012 : 27). Establishing Kongshengtang in Shenzhen thus serves also a "civilisational" purpose: bring the Confucian knowledge to the local population in order to "confucianize" them. This implicitly means to make them better citizens.

Current renewal may be explained by both a social need for spiritual goods close to people's original convictions and because it serves the Party's political purposes (*i.e.* rebuilding moral and ethics to curb social tensions)²⁵. Local Confucian groups are involved in reorganizing society through teachings and rituals performances that offer a form of moral redemption. This is in line with the construction of social harmony. By reproducing the State's narrative and by not challenging it, Kongshengtang actively participates in local moral governance and is not disturbed by the Party for its religious activities.

That being said, siding with Confucianism is not problematic for the Party's secular stance simply because the previous is not recognized as a religion²⁶. Moreover, by sometimes supporting Confucianism (*e.g.* through the funding of Confucius Institutes), the Party can draw on popular sympathy, framing itself as defender of the national tradition (social capital).

Finally, Kongshengtang opens the way for more research regarding local Confucian renewal and its possible religious expression in contemporary China. It also brings forward new elements into the larger debate that is the Confucian revival: its novelty here lies in its "local" empirical characteristics rather than being only philosophical opinions or normative/prescriptive discourses (*e.g.* Jiang Qing, Kang Xiaoguang, Chen Ming, etc.). Focusing on local groups will eventually allow us to fully grasp the importance and relevance of the Confucian renewal in China. Kongshengtang also brings new components to the notion of cultural governance (Oakes, 2010): (1) as a case that is not State-sponsored and (2) because it is self-participating to governance.

For secularism literature, this case underlines its relative failure and the unintended consequences of secular policies on the religious landscape of China: new domestic structure (*i.e.* religious market) and the emergence of ambiguous forms of religiosity (*e.g.* Confucianism).

Lastly, as for the broader field of comparative politics, Kongshengtang gives us a new perspective into the governance (change in its internal logic) and adaptive mechanisms of authoritarian States (use of cultural idioms as social control) with the inclusion of cultural/religious groups.

Note: This paper is the abridged version of :

- (1) Le Religieux confucéen du Kongshengtang de Shenzhen : de pratiques locales gouvernance morale. (PhD dissertation chapter);
- (2) 深圳孔聖堂的儒教實踐與道德治理 - Under review in 香港社會科學學報.

As such, shortcomings and or missing details may be due to shortening of the paper's original length (44 pages). This research has been approve by Ottawa University's Ethical Committee (#12-12-05).

²⁵ Even though the Party tried to eradicate Confucianism during the 1960's throughout the 1970's.

²⁶ This observation is similar to that made by Lily Tsai regarding local accountability vs. the presence of lineage groups and or religious groups (2007).

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