

## THE AURA OF CONFUCIUS

*The Aura of Confucius* is a groundbreaking study that reconstructs the remarkable history of Kongzhai, a shrine founded on the belief that Confucius's descendants buried the sage's robe and cap a millennium after his death and far from his home in Qufu, Shandong. Improbably located on the outskirts of modern Shanghai, Kongzhai featured architecture, visual images, and physical artifacts that created a "Little Queli," a surrogate for the temple, cemetery, and Kong descendants' mansion in Qufu. Centered on the Tomb of the Robe and Cap, with a Sage Hall noteworthy for displaying sculptural icons and not just inscribed tablets, Kongzhai attracted scholarly pilgrims who came to experience Confucius's beneficent aura. Although Kongzhai gained recognition from the Kangxi emperor, its fortunes declined with modernization, and it was finally destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Unlike other sites, Kongzhai has not been rebuilt, and its history is officially forgotten, despite the Confucian revival in contemporary China.

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THE AURA OF CONFUCIUS

*Relics and Representations of the Sage at the  
Kongzhai Shrine in Shanghai*



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*To Andy and Nina*

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I used to believe that I first became interested in images of Confucius in the early 1990s, while procrastinating on writing a commissioned article about pictorial biographies of the Buddha. But in 2017, while examining a four-volume *Shengji tu* (Illustrated Life of Confucius) from the late Qing, in storage at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I found a note tucked into its box that I had written while working there in 1978. It described the pictorial compendium as “of interest for the study of Confucius and his cult, as well as woodblock illustrations, popular religion, and the like.” What a surprise! I had completely forgotten this encounter, which took place years before I had even started writing my dissertation on Southern Song paintings of the *Book of Odes*, but it must have nudged me subliminally in the direction of the interests that I developed much later.

In the course of almost three decades of research on pictorial biographies and portraits of Confucius, and more than two on the history of the shrine at Kongzhai, I have accumulated debts of gratitude to many individuals and institutions. When I first began seriously working on visual representations of Confucius, Thomas Wilson and Deborah Sommer not only introduced me to the larger context of Confucian veneration and ritual but also generously shared contacts in China who could facilitate my access to relevant materials. Lü Zongli helped me track down the textual sources of events illustrated in the *Shengji tu* long before internet searching became possible, and he too sent me to friends in China who could assist with connections. A Mellon Seminar that I organized at Wisconsin with Mark Csikszentmihalyi and a graduate seminar I team-taught with William Nienhauser made me more conversant with recent research on early Confucianism. University of Wisconsin librarians Chester Wang, Thomas Hahn, and Dianna Xu made it possible for me to obtain important publications from China, as well as providing introductions that enabled me to surmount obstacles to viewing rare and significant works in the National Library of China, Peking University Library, and Shanghai Library. Kohara Hironobu arranged for productive sessions in several Japanese libraries and museums, and Ogawa Hiromitsu’s assistance was invaluable at the Institute of Oriental Culture of Tokyo University. In China, Kong Xianglin provided vital access to essential items in the former collection and archives of the Kong Family Mansion, now part of the Confucius Museum in Qufu. An invitation to co-curate the 2010 exhibition *Confucius: His Life and Legacy in Art* for the China Institute Gallery, with Lu Wensheng, led to fruitful interactions with the Shandong Provincial Museum and Qufu Cultural Relics Bureau. Professor Wu Zongjie of Zhejiang University arranged my memorable trip to Quzhou to visit the Southern Kong Family Temple and meet with Kong Xiangkai, the current head of the Southern Lineage of Kong descendants. At the National Museum of China, Zheng Yan and

Jiang Peng found a creative way for me to view unpublished paintings of great interest. A serendipitous inquiry from Ma Ni, who came to examine versions of the *Shengji tu* in American collections for her dissertation at Zhejiang University, resulted in a visit of several days of collegial discussion and viewing sessions in the Harvard Art Museum and Harvard–Yenching Library. She also shared her photographs from collections elsewhere and assisted me in obtaining others after returning to China.

My interest in Kongzhai specifically began as a tangent of my research on the *Shengji tu*, thanks to meeting Satō Kazuyoshi, who showed me a list of scenes recorded in the *Gazetteer of Kongzhai*. When I had a chance to peruse the rest of the book and wanted to investigate the place that it documented, Deborah Sommer generously took the time to search for what remained of the site and sent me slides before I could go there myself. Huang Xuanpei provided me with essential introductions to the Shanghai Cultural Relics Bureau, where Yang Songping showed me inventory photographs of Kongzhai from 1957; and to the Qingpu Museum, where Chen Juxing gave me copies of earlier photographs and took me to see two surviving stelae salvaged from Kongzhai. On my first visit to Kongzhai itself, Wang Xiang helped me conduct informative conversations with residents, who also showed me a genealogy of the local Kongs. When I returned many years later to take more photographs, it was in the congenial company of Yang You, who cheerfully slogged through muddy fields to reach the two majestic ginkgoes that remain on site and braved a downpour in downtown Qingpu’s Qushui Garden to help me find the few surviving incised stone tablets from Kongzhai. At the Qingpu Museum, Wang Hui shared his insights on Kongzhai’s current prospects and later sent me digital photographs, as well as welcoming Yang You to take additional ones for this book. I will always be grateful to Nancy Norton Tomasko for visiting the Suzhou Confucian temple with me and persuading me to spend a small fortune on a set of rubbings taken from incised stone tablets that were copied from Kongzhai’s *Shengji tu*. Studying these new rubbings enabled me to identify old rubbings from Kongzhai’s original version in the Musée Guimet’s library, which Francis Macouin and Christina Cramerotti allowed me to examine and photograph. Xurong Kong helped me grasp crucial nuances of their colophons, which differ from their published texts. Together these materials made Kongzhai more tangible as a physical place.

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I have been writing and rewriting this book for many years, but somehow I could never quite finish before other obligations intervened. When I returned to it, I invariably found that my thinking had changed, sometimes because of new developments or because of what I had learned from other scholars in the meantime. Just when I was beginning to despair of ever finishing, a well-timed conversation with James Flath renewed my sense of purpose, and I was able to submit a completed manuscript soon afterward. It took another couple of years to address the anonymous readers' thoughtful criticisms, as well as insightful comments from Maggie Bickford, Deborah Del Gais, and James Robson on portions of the manuscript. Only when the Covid-19 pandemic put a stop to my travels and imposed a lengthy period of undistracted seclusion did I finish a thorough-going revision. Lucy Rhymer masterfully steered the manuscript through acceptance by Cambridge University Press and graciously allowed Beatrice Rehl to take it on as an art book. I benefited immensely from Beatrice's experience and advice as the manuscript made its way through successive stages of content management and production, which were expertly handled by Mary Bongiovi, Kaye Barbaro, and Akash Datchinamurthy. Cheryl Huty displayed exceptional skill as copyeditor and was a pleasure to work with. Jack Cheadle created the cover design as a personal favor to my daughter, who told her friends that her mother's book needed a distinctive look. Throughout this long-drawn-out project, encouragement from friends and colleagues and the unflagging love and support of my husband and my daughter kept me going. I am pleased to have this book to show them at last.