Among all Chinese indigenous belief systems, Confucianism was affected most profoundly by the impact of globalization in the twentieth century. Criticized mercilessly by modernists, who regarded Confucianism as the biggest barrier to modernizing Chinese society, it subsequently lost its privileged position in state ideology. Already in 1912, Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858–1927), Chen Huanzhang 陈焕章 (1881–1931), and other followers of Confucius had established the Association for Confucian Religion (Kongjiaohui 孔教会) with the aim to rethink and reform Confucianism, thus securing its survival in the modern world.\(^1\) Their main program was to convert Confucianism from a philosophical-ethical teaching dependent on state hierarchy into an institutional religion similar to Christianity.\(^2\) According to these reformers, Confucius ought to be regarded as the founder of the religion and venerated as a deity alongside Heaven (tian 天), so as to highlight the structural similarity to Jesus and his heavenly father as they are venerated by Christians.\(^3\) Later New Confucian scholars like Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968), Feng Youlan 冯友兰 (1895–1990), Mou Zongsan 莫宗三 (1909–1995), Liu Shuxian (Liu Shu-hsien) 刘述先 (*1934), and Du Weiming (Tu Wei-ming) 杜维明 (*1940), reinterpreted traditional Confucian philosophy by systematically applying Western philosophical and religious (e.g. Buddhist) concepts.\(^4\) While the first attempt was considered a failure, and the Kongjiaohui was therefore reorganized in 1937, the second attempt of a philosophical constitution of modern Confucianism remains vigorous on an academic and theoretical level until today. Its influence on Confucian practice, however, has remained limited.

During the first 30 years of the People’s Republic, Confucianism was rejected completely in mainland China. Even at the end of the 1980s, ten years after Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904–1997) had introduced his new economic policy,
many Chinese cultural elites still saw the adoption of Western political values as prerequisite to China becoming a strong nation.\(^5\) In the 1990s, during the era of Jiang Zemin 江泽民 (*1926), politicians and the people in mainland China began to rediscover their own cultural traditions. Following the example of politicians in Southeast Asia, for example the former president of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew (Li Guangyao) 李光耀 (*1923), leaders in mainland China searched for new spiritual support for the nation in Confucianism.\(^6\) In 1994, a global organization named International Confucian Association (Guoji Rulian 国际儒联) was founded with the support of the governments of China and other East Asian countries.\(^7\) Today, Confucius is venerated in the People’s Republic as a great thinker, philosopher, and educator, who combines the roles of cultural idol, national patron, and cultural ambassador. In the wake of this renewed veneration, Confucianism and its contribution to modernity have again become the subject of scholarly debate,\(^8\) while annual offering rituals to Confucius have been reinstated or revitalized in many places and are often performed on a large scale.\(^9\) Government-sponsored Confucius Institutes (Kongzi Xueyuan 孔子学院) promote Chinese language and culture across the world.\(^10\) The veneration of Confucius and the rediscovery of Confucian values is one aspect of how China seeks to meet the challenges of economic and cultural globalization.

I have been investigating the revival of the cult of Confucius in my hometown Quzhou 衢州 (Zhejiang 浙江 province) since 2005. On three occasions I visited the city to carry out extensive fieldwork.\(^11\) Quzhou is home to a second family temple of Confucius’ descendents. The original one is in Qufu 曲阜 in Shandong 山东 province. Since 2000, the annual offering ritual to Confucius is held at the Family Temple of the Southern Lineage of the Kong Clan (Kongshi Nanzong Jiamiao 孔氏南宗家庙) by order of the local government in Quzhou, on the 28 September. Confucius’ statues are on display in

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5 Following this belief, thousands of students demonstrated in Beijing at the Tian’anmen 天安门 Square for ‘democracy and freedom’ in the spring of 1989. As is well known, this movement was finally suppressed by the central government with military force on 4 June 1989.
8 See Bell and Hahm (2003), Bell (2008), Zhu Ruikai (2000).
9 See Billioud and Thoraval (2009).
10 Some studies on this institution and related cultural strategies have been published recently in English, e.g. Ding and Saunders (2006), Paradise (2009), Starr (2009).
11 To date, I have carried out fieldwork in April, 2005 (2 weeks), October, 2006 (2 weeks), April, August & September, 2007 (8 weeks).