Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval, *Le Sage et le peuple. Le renouveau confucéen en Chine* (The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China), Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2014, 436 pp.

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the ensuing worker protests have already occurred; in fact, the state-sector share of the working population has stabilised since the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, although the new entrants tend to be casual workers. Taiwanese and Hong Kong firms specialising in labour-intensive garments and electronics continue to operate in the notorious sweatshop fashion with low wages and long hours. Despite some success in industrial upgrading, repetitive, monotonous, and low-skilled assembly line tasks continue to make up the bulk of job offers in these firms.

Chinese Workers in Comparative Perspective also sheds light on the difficult but hitherto largely successful imperatives of reconciling the conflicting demands of encouraging investment and protecting workers, which the highly-adaptive Chinese Communist regime has mastered into a political art. The Communist-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions has gradually been given a larger role, and its rank-and-file membership has actually increased since the turn of century. Except in the few cases where union leaders were democratically elected due to grassroots activism, “yellow unions” predominate at the enterprise level, which nevertheless has not prevented local-level unionists from playing a more assertive role in mediating industrial disputes. Persistent effort in labour legislation since the 1990s has substantially improved workers’ legal and economic status without empowering them politically. In spite of the proverbial official corruption and collusion with business, the Chinese government has not embraced an exclusionary strategy toward the working class, which has helped contain class antagonism within a manageable scope.

There are several chapters in which cross-national comparisons offer valuable insight into some contemporary puzzles. Both Japanese and German carmakers operated joint ventures in China, but the former have been more prone to industrial disputes, not only because Japanese firms are easy targets of nationalistic sentiment, but also because they are less embedded in local supply chain. As with Taiwan 30 years ago, China’s labour NGOs have offered legal aid to victimised workers. Taiwanese labour activists were organisationally linked to the democratic movement, and their political strength enabled them to build new labour unions free of government control, whereas their contemporary Chinese counterparts continue to chafe under the watchful authorities. Both Russia and China embarked on post-socialist transition in the 1980s; the sudden collapse of Russia’s Communist regime allowed union leaders to assert their political independence and enabled alternative unionism, whereas the post-Tiananmen CCP strengthened its control over unions. Vietnam is another transitional economy with entrenched Communist rule. Compared with Chinese workers, Vietnamese are less overworked and but also paid less. While Vietnamese unionists have engaged in sector-specific collective bargaining, Chinese workers are more likely to resort to wildcat strikes to improve their treatment. An interesting chapter on soccer ball production brings India, Pakistan, and China together, with the sombre conclusion that the corporate social responsibility campaign has been largely ineffective, since local manufacturers have been able to shield their problematic production from public scrutiny by using home-based child labour in South Asia and prison labour in China.

This volume demonstrates the rich repertoire of comparative labour studies, which can proceed on the firm, sectoral, regional, or national level. Methodologically speaking, most comparativists adopt the design of “most similar system method” by selecting more similar country cases. In this regard, two chapters that compare the effect of neoliberal globalisation in the United States and the legalisation of strikes in Australia appear unex-

pected and unconventional, since China shares little common ground with these two advanced capitalist countries. Moreover, with the on-going economic transition from world factory to world market, service-sector employment is quickly eclipsing that in manufacturing. This volume mostly looks at factory manual workers, arguably the classical research topic in labour research; more studies are needed on service workers and skilled professionals in order to bring out a fuller picture of China’s working class.

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This book, which has been recently translated into English,⁽¹⁾ sets out a new paradigm for studies on Confucianism. Unlike currently available works, which despite their high quality tend to reduce the complex “Confucian” phenomenon (an all too accommodating, not to say ambiguous, label) to various partial aspects such as philosophy, ethics, official ideology, or worship practices, this book stands out for its approach to the phenomenon as a whole, which enables it to avoid reductionism. Based on ethnographic material garnered over several years’ research in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, the two authors provide a panoramic description of the many social expressions of Confucianism in the first decade of the twenty-first century, along with a critical analysis of their moral and political preconditions. The two authors call these manifold expressions “popular Confucianism,” which is a term borrowed from Chinese activists but in no way refers to a purely anti-elitist or simply unofficial movement. On the contrary, elitist initiatives and governmental interventions are closely involved and are therefore given equal weight by the two authors. Their insistence on the “popular” aspects corresponds above all to their purely heuristic stance. This enables them to take into account the polarity of a “popular” component, which on the one hand comprises a value term and a complex of many-faceted forces, and on the other the image of a “sage,” which having been refracted through many cultural inputs in the past and badly abused in the twentieth century, continues to haunt Chinese modernity. But there is also an anthropological ambition here: to study “the confrontation of individuals from popular social milieus with their image of Confucius and, in

1. Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval, *The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, 352 pp.

addition, to identify the practical lessons for life that they attempt to restore and put into practice" (p. 18).

This rich material is carefully organised into three sections corresponding to the educational, religious, and political dimensions of the phenomenon being studied, and this tripartite division itself amounts to a clarification as it displaces the customary framework. The first section, comprising three chapters, deals with educational projects claiming to be based on "Confucianism." After a brief survey of the development of the role of education in Chinese society during the first half of the twentieth century, the authors expound on various attempts to re-institutionalise Confucian education in the early 2000s, from the "Confucian studies" and "national studies" projects in the universities to the movements for "children reading the classics" launched by the Taiwanese. To these they add the "traditional" education offered by private schools as an alternative to official education, as well as associations for cultural self-cultivation among adults. They also study the appropriation of similar projects by private firms and government bodies. Finally, the authors show how these different educational projects (particularly those outside university structures) contain an implicit anti-intellectualism that gives weight to "the people's" capacity to incorporate a traditional form of knowledge, rather than the theoretical studies of the elite.

The second section tackles the religious dimension of Confucianism, starting with individual case studies in the fourth chapter, which show how "conversion" to Confucianism comes about, and is narrated through lived experience in which Buddhist faith may sometimes play an intermediary role. The fifth and sixth chapters constitute a study of the "religious question" posed by the contemporary Confucian phenomenon: namely, why is it difficult to correlate its actual initiatives with the imported Western norms for classifying a "religion," and what are the terms used by its proponents to make their claim for the religious nature of their undertakings? Attempts at a religious institutionalisation of Confucianism in contemporary China, which form part of its ongoing history, are diverse and creative, as well as problematic. While projects aimed at restoring Confucianism as a "state religion" or a "civil religion" are still largely theoretical, some new religious movements (especially the *Yiguandao*) have already recycled Confucian elements among their fundamental tenets. Yet none of these attempts has gained legal recognition from the PRC state, and there is still a long way to go before reaching a consensus on the relationship between Confucianism and politics, or between Confucianism and other religions.

The four chapters comprising the third section begin by following the shifts in the cult of Confucius, from his "deritualisation" under Republican and Maoist rule to the return of the "sacrificial rites" in the reform period. This is followed by a detailed report on the development of the Festival of Confucius orchestrated in 2007 by the Chinese government, in which the authors draw attention to both official handiwork and initiatives deemed to arise from "popular" sources. In the first case, the aim is to make use of Confucius without any real respect for Confucianism, which reveals the continuing "Maoist *habitus*" or mind-set of political campaigning. The second set of initiatives embodies a historical ideal that goes far beyond the current political horizons by seeking to ground their legitimacy in recognition by the people. These two ways of restoring ritual are both mutually competitive and mutually supportive. The last chapter compares politico-religious rituals in Mainland China and Taiwan, and analyses the different possible ways of correlating the traditional cosmology with modern poli-

tics. This comparison allows the authors to give further consideration to the socio-political implications of pronouncements on the religious nature of Confucianism that they discussed in the second section.

Finally, in the epilogue the two authors throw light on recent developments in popular Confucianism in its quest for continuity and autonomy. They argue that the state, Buddhism, and the associations promoting syncretism are without a doubt the major external factors exerting pressure on the reshaping of the relationship between the Sage and the people.

Thanks to its richness and its detailed descriptions (supported by a large number of photos taken *in situ*), as well as the pertinence of its insightful and lucid analyses, this erudite but accessible work is invaluable for any reader concerned with the attitudes currently prevalent in the "Chinese world." In 2015 it was awarded the Bernheim Prize in the history of religions by the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, and it sets a new benchmark and encouragement for the anthropological study of China as it faces the challenge of grasping the direction taken by the great traditions in an immense society undergoing transition. The authors' proposal for an "anthropological reflection on the present" (p. 400) will be an inspiration for historians of both Confucianism and Chinese religion in general, because there is no doubt that the "popular" movement and the relations between the state, the Sage, and the people studied in this work have long been present in the ancient traditions of China.

■ Translated by Jonathan Hall.

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Hai Ren,
The Middle Class in Neoliberal China: Governing Risk, Life-Building, and Themed Spaces,

London, New York, Routledge, 2013,
xvi & 192 pp.

MARTIN MINOST

The Chinese middle classes – and the question of their definition – are a recurring subject of research. In recent years, many sociologists and anthropologists from all over the world have tackled this thorny question. These include, among others, Jean-Louis Rocca, to whom we owe translations of work on the subject by well-known Chinese scholars such as Li Chunling and Zhou Xiaohong,⁽¹⁾ as well as recent work by David Goodman.⁽²⁾

1. Jean-Louis Rocca (ed.), *La Société chinoise vue par ses sociologues. Migrations, villes, classes moyennes, drogue, sida* (Chinese Society as Seen by its Sociologists: Migration, Cities, Middle Classes, Drugs and AIDS), Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2008, 319 pp. (see Chapters 1, 4 and 5).
2. David S.G. Goodman & Minglu Chen (eds), *Middle Class China: Identity and Behaviour*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2013, 204 pp.; David S.G. Goodman, *Class in Contemporary China*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2014, 233 pp.