Religious Life in Chinese Modernity

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I. Modernity, Semi-Colonialism, & Secular Nationalism

Late Imperial China

- Imperial court in Beijing; the Qing emperor had a ritual calendar to offer sacrifices in different seasons to his royal ancestors and to major deities: Heaven (Grand Sacrifice); Earth, Sun, Moon, Spirits of Land and Grain, Sacred Farmer, Confucius, mountain and river gods, spirits of former emperors, etc.
- Emperor alone had access to highest deity, Heaven; imperial officials at local levels also conducted sacrifices to lesser gods to protect the population in their jurisdiction
- Buddhist and Daoist monasteries and temples were allowed to own land, and rent it out to tenant farmers
- Imperial state controlled the numbers of new monks who could be ordained and new temples that could be built each year; however, the state often had trouble implementing its rules and policy at the lower levels
- There were virtually no empire-wide religious organizations outside the imperial state, which was basically theocratic, where the emperor was the Son of Heaven, a sacred person
- Buddhism and Daoism operated in terms of lineages of master-disciples over many generations, they were locally based
- Imperial state had a system of conferring honorific titles and giving imperial recognition of influential gods: a local god emerges and commands a following; when the cult spreads, officials at the Ministry of Ritual will investigate and may grant a title to the god, funding to build a state temple, thus appropriating the cult and bringing it under imperial control;
- Imperial state may also decide that a cult or religious movement is “heterodox” or “lascivious”, it may be perceived to have rebellious tendencies, so it is banned, its leaders put to death, etc.
- For the most part, the imperial state seldom reached down to grassroots level, where there was a de facto system of local governance by village and town elders, by the local educated gentry and wealthy landowners
- Among peasants, craftsmen, traders, and even some members of gentry, Chinese popular religion was the basic religious life: shamanism and spirit possession, countless deities and
deity temples, some were only local gods and goddesses, others with cults spread across the empire; ancestor worship; placating of ghosts; demons; lunar calendar festivals

**Semi-colonialism** –
- China was never fully colonized by European powers, Qing Dynasty was not overthrown by Europeans, but by China’s own nationalists in 1911
- Westerners stayed mainly along Eastern seaboard and in cities;
- After China’s defeat in Opium Wars, it was forced to allow missionaries to enter the interior and convert poor Chinese
- Later, a bigger imperialist threat was from Japan, beginning in 1920’s in Manchuria, with Japanese colonial settlements
- full-scale invasion by Japanese troops into rest of China in 1937
- Western & Japanese presence in China were resented by China’s modern educated elite; thus was born a strong and defensive posture of nationalism; the violation of China’s sovereignty by the West and Japan, which for centuries was China’s tributary state, was humiliating and maddening
- These nationalist elites settled on three approaches to save China:
  1. learn from the West in order to counter the West (must learn its science, technology, industry), build up China’s industry, military, and modern education in science and technology
  2. attack Chinese tradition in order to save China -- change Chinese society and the people – attacked Confucianism and popular religion; elites thought China’s vast ignorant peasantry were “backward” and “superstitious” – must be forced to break with their old ways, and be pulled into the 20th century
  3. nation-building -- elites thought the Chinese masses were not concerned about the fate of the nation, not nationalistic enough; Sun Yatsen: China is a “plate of loose sand”, must unite into a nation, promote patriotism, minimize local identities and kinship loyalties

**Evolutionism and Social Darwinism**
- Confucian scholar Yan Fu translated Aldous Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* (in 1898) and Herbert Spencer’s *A Study of Sociology* (in 1902), both are social evolutionary texts and made huge impact in China
- introduced to China at end of 19th century, social evolutionism took deep root throughout the 20th century –
  - unilinear evolutionism – notion of progress, all cultures will follow the same path and stages of development that the West has already gone through
  - struggle for existence -- whereas in the West, Social Darwinism was used to affirm individualism and capitalist competition of the big firms swallowing the weak as part of nature, in China the message was different: weak nations and weak races like China are in danger of extinction; strong sense of external threats and fear of both physical and cultural extinction
• Chinese people need to rally around the nation and seek to change their society -- attack tradition and backward aspects in order to make the nation strong and to catch up with the West
• loss of confidence in Chinese culture, and a growing self-hatred for Chinese traditions
• so Chinese elite reaction to Western imperialism was quite different from Middle Eastern religious cultures in late 20th century – instead of fundamentalism, clinging to the ancient Chinese teachings, Chinese modernity opted to abandon them, castigate them, and build up secular nationalism

**Henry Lewis Morgan** – 19th century American anthropologist; evolution of human technology: three stages of social evolution based mainly on material technology: savagery, barbarism, civilization

**Ernst Haeckel**: 19th c. German biologist; some of his work was published in China; wrote on racial theories and evolution of religions:
1. **Savages**: fetishism – Veddahs of Ceylon, African Bushmen; Australian “negroes”; Andaman Islanders, Hottentots
2. **Barbarians**: animism, worshipping gods in the form of men and animals, immortal soul
3. **civilization**: subordination of all gods under chief god, monotheism – this is highest attainment of religion, until Reformation (forget that Jews invented monotheism when they were stateless tribal people)

**Historical materialism, Marxist-Leninism**

• **Historical materialism** is the notion that history is made through the propelling force of material processes such as technological innovation, economic division of labor, economic structures which shape social organization, which then give shape to ideologies, worldviews, and religious cultures, ethics, and cosmology; religions, worldviews, and ideas do not drive history, they are only secondary derivative forces
• In Soviet Union, **Joseph Stalin's 5-stage theory of history**: primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, capitalism, socialism
• Stalin’s scheme was adopted by Chinese Communist Party, and from 1949-1980’s this view of human history was enshrined as both state orthodoxy and scientific and academic knowledge; used to study and classify minorities in China, and in Chinese archaeology; a straitjacket on thought

**Guomindang Party’s anti-superstition campaigns in the 1930’s**
Rebecca Nedostup
• Tried to introduce the Gregorian solar calendar over the Chinese lunar calendar
• Discouraged traditional religious festivals and tried to ban the Ghost Festival (in the seventh lunar month) in Nanjing
• Wasteful expenditures – money should be spent in nation-building, not on life-cycle rituals, temple-building, or religious festivals
• Tried to introduce new national rituals and holidays; but these did not take root very well; too many official speeches telling people how to be patriotic; did not appeal to people’s emotions; not “hot and noisy” like traditional festivals
• So the Communists were not the first to suppress traditional religions, but they were the most radical and destructive, went much further than Guomindang

II. The Maoist Era (1949-79)

• Under the influence of the Leninist state in Soviet Union, Chinese Communists adopted a command economy and social structure where every single social organization, large or small, was made an appendage of the state, subject to official orders from above,
• a severe top-down model where all decisions are made at the highest levels of the state, where often they do not understand the needs and specific situations of local areas; thus a gargantuan state bureaucracy was formed, which departs from late imperial China, where there was much local autonomy
• Land Reform (1949-53) -- Buddhist and Daoist temples and monasteries, Christian Churches lost their land and some of their properties and sites of worship; this meant that they would starve unless they agreed to either go back to lay life, or stay in monastery and become state employees, highly controlled and watched
• Chinese Constitution of 1954 guarantees “freedom of religion”, but during the Mao years, the Constitution was just a piece of paper, ignored by the sovereign power of Chairman Mao and CCP; now, there are still violations of the Constitution, many extrajudicial state interventions, but not as bad as before
• Marxist notion of “opiate of the people” – religion is weapon of the ruling class to keep the ignorant and oppressed masses quiescent and cover over inequalities of wealth; once China has revolution that equalizes wealth, there will be no more reason for religion, just a matter of time before religion disappears forever; meanwhile, ignorant people will cling to it, but the end is in sight
• Mao Zedong in 1959 had distinguished between “antagonistic contradictions” which are against the people, the Revolution, and the state; and “non-antagonistic contradictions,” which are contradictions among the people, and therefore less harmful, to be treated more mildly – in this distinction’s application in the realm of religion, Buddhism and Daoism were often treated as the latter, while Christianity often was dealt with as the former, along with Tibetan Buddhism at different times
• “religion” vs. “superstition,” – this opposition came fr Protestant Reformation; it privileges religion against the latter, which is considered backward; notion of “superstition” caused great destruction for Chinese popular religion, which strengthens local identity and community solidarity; local communities are the foundations of modern democratic societies, local initiatives to solve local problems; grassroots social activism and local initiatives are very important for a bottom-up model of politics
• Religion was understood as of ancient heritage, with strong written tradition of scriptures and liturgies, having its own institutions and ordained clerics; continuing with Republican era, only five religions were officially recognized, down to today: Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Islam, Christianity
• “superstitions” were made illegal, and not even dealt with by the state Bureau of Religion, but by either Public Security (police) or Bureau of Civil Organizations; examples of superstition included: geomancy or feng-shui, shamanism and spirit-possession, deity-worship, ancestor worship, ghosts, divination, demons, etc.
• First massive persecution of religion occurred during the Great Leap Forward Movement, a mass mobilization campaign to speed up industrialization, form the People’s Commune Movement; many temples, churches, mosques, were confiscated, sites of worship turned into storage rooms, public schools, government offices, granaries

The Cult of Mao

• Cultural Revolution was the second massive persecution of religion, especially during first three years
• 1966-69 – most radical period; Mao creates the Red Guards, appeals to the revolutionary zeal of the youth to speed up the Revolution and attain the ultimate stage of Communism
• Also the period of the “Smash the Four Olds Campaign”: against Old Customs, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Ideas; religious persecutions, destruction of temples, statues of gods and buddhas, churches; beating up and terrorizing of religious clerics and devout worshippers
• Historical Irony: despite its anti-religious rhetoric and tremendous destruction of religious properties, the “cult of Mao,” attained its zenith during this period. It contained strong religious dimensions:

1. the sacredness of the leader’s body;
2. the interiority of guilt;
3. the faith, submission, and obedience;
4. the manicheanism of revolutionary virtue vs. counter-revolutionary evil;
5. the moral-political righteousness and violence;
6. the self-sacrifice and revolutionary martyrdom;
7. the daily rituals of loyalty, confession, and recitation of sacred text;
8. the apocalyptic teleology

Hyper-Visibility of Mao

- Portraits of Mao on walls and buildings, busts of Mao on tables, statues of Mao in city squares, Mao buttons
- Loyalty dance 忠字舞
- Quotations of Chairman Mao <<毛主席语录>> “Little Red Book”
- Daily ritual: “asking for instructions in the morning; reporting back in the evening” 早请示晚汇报

Centering of State Subjects
1. gratitude
2. denigration of the self
3. hero worship
4. love of country, nationalism
5. fear
6. hatred of cadres, class enemies, imperialist West

**Internal Division of Self**

The self is divided into two: the harsh judge and the guilty and selfish other; One part of the self judges the other part mercilessly.

Examples:
“struggling against the private/selfish and criticizing the Revisionist” 斗私批修

Red diaries
Oral and written confessions

**Jokes and Their Unconscious – the Death of Chairman Mao**

Mao jokes:
1. Mao has to go to the toilet and has sexual organs too; funny bec. It shows he is human after all, not a god – great relief
2. Mao and his mistresses – woman claims that her son is Chairman Mao’s; guard at gate says that if we accept all such claims, then we would soon be running a nursery; Mao possesses human weaknesses too;
3. going to see Mao’s body at the Mao Memorial – man from provinces wants to see Chairman Mao in the Mausoleum; guard says on three occasions to him: why do you keep on coming? Chairman Mao is dead! You cannot see him. Man wants to hear that repeated many times, to assure himself that the nightmare is over. Mao is truly dead, the people can finally find some relief (from political campaigns); but his body is still not buried

**III. Post-Mao Religious Revival: Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, & Qigong**

In post-Mao era, there are five forms of state control of religious organizations and religious movements:
1. Re-activation of the **Bureau of Religious Affairs**, 1954, under the State Council in Beijing, with lower branch offices at provincial and local levels to oversee the implementation of religious policy
2. **Propaganda Department**, Chinese Communist Party; this is “thought work”
3. **United Front Ministry** – promote relations with overseas Chinese, returned Chinese, Taiwan and Hong Kong people; maintain government links with Chinese diaspora, and attempts to influence them, sometimes through religious activities: pilgrimages, religious
festivals, temple-building by overseas Chinese

4. **Five national religious associations**, part state organization, part civil society (but leaders generally chosen by Party or influenced by it):
   a) Chinese Buddhist Association 1953
   b) National Daoist Association in 1957
   c) Three Self Patriotic Movement (for Protestants) in 1954
   d) Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association in 1957
   e) Islamic Association of China in 1953

   - These 5 Associations were to facilitate the downward movement of Party directives to local religious leaders and to channel up concerns from the grassroots to Party leaders. All these government associations published their own journals and held national meetings annually
   - charged with both protecting the rights of religious groups, as well as constraining and monitoring religious activity
   - during the Cultural Revolution, even these government agencies were unacceptable; they were all disbanded, along with their journals. They were only revived in the 1980’s
   - they were all reinstated around 1980, after Cultural Revolution, and their journals restarted

5. **Public Security** – police – some forms of religion are labeled “evil cult” (xiejiao); endangerment to state security: Tibetan Buddhist monks, Xinjiang Uyghur Islam, Falungong

   - “**Document 19**” in 1982 by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, admitted “Leftist errors”; allowed religious activities; return places of worship to their congregations

   - Post-Mao religious revival in China since the 1980’s: famous Buddhist and Daoist temples and monasteries across the country have opened their doors to dense crowds of tourists and worshippers, who pay entrance fees and make donations.

   - this revival is also carefully managed and monitored by state authorities at all levels. All religious groups are required to register with the state and accept the authority of one of the relevant five official state patriotic religious organizations.

   - places of worship built without government permits, whether temples, churches, or mosques, may be seized, dismantled, or even at times blown up with dynamite
   - in some areas, the local authorities are willing to look the other way, so sometimes underground religious organizations carry out their activities in the open

   “**Regulations on Religious Affairs**” promulgated by the State Council in Beijing in 2005: contains new provisions that bode well for the continued development of religious activities in China
explicitly permit religious bodies to publish and disseminate religious literature (Article 7),
to establish religious schools (Article 8),
to send members abroad for religious study (Article 10),
to conduct large-scale religious activities (and processions) outside of religious sites, after
government approval (Article 22),
to operate public undertakings and keep the proceeds for religious expenditures (Article 34),
to accept donations from individuals and organizations, domestic and foreign (Article 35),
to enjoy tax exemption or reduction (Article 36)
permits religious education for children under age 18
forbids any organization or individual from encroaching upon, damaging, or confiscating the
legal property of a religious body (Article 30), but not clear whether the state exempts itself
from Article 30

but religion’s appearance in the media is still strictly controlled – print publishing, television,
film, and large-scale public religious gatherings are generally restricted

Religious Role of the State

instead of banning and persecuting religion, now the state sometimes takes a leading role in
developing religion; this means that the state selectively supports those religious activities
and leaders it approves of
in 2011, state allocated huge sum of money to each of the Five Religions to expand their
religious academies and improve training of religious leaders
since the Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan in 2008, the state now recognizes that religious
charities and disaster relief are very important in helping the state, and the state can rely on
relig organizations to help in social welfare
however, the state heavily regulates relig charities disaster relief too, does not want to look
bad – acc. to Chinese professor
local governments eagerly look to religion for tourism/pilgrimage/relig festival income;
they charge entrance fees to famous temples, and take the profits away from monks; they
insert fake monks to promote business
UNESCO World Heritage Program – protection of “Intangible Cultural Heritage” – has
been a savior for Chinese popular religion which receives no protection in China

1. Buddhism

this is the most successful and powerful religion right now, of China’s 5 religions
there are now about 50 Buddhist academies across China, training aspiring monks and nuns
with Buddhist version of college education
ordination has been revived, with new rituals, but still the numbers of clergy are not
sufficient to serve the population
Buddhist summer camps

World Buddhist Forums 世界佛教論壇
First World Buddhist Forum 世界佛教論壇 April 2006 in Hangzhou; sponsored by the
Buddhist Association of China and the new Religious Cultural Communication Association
of China. Never in modern history had China sponsored such a large-scale religious
conference which gathered one thousand Buddhist monks and scholars from thirty-seven countries, and was reported in major media outlets in China

- 2009: Second World Buddhist Forum in Wuxi (Mainland) and Taiwan
- 2012: Third World Buddhist Forum in Hong Kong – 1000 monks from 50 countries attended

Transnational Connections

- Chinese pilgrim/tourists go to Lumbini, birthplace of Buddha and Bodhgaya, where he attained enlightenment in India
- Buddhist monks’ lectures and sermons on CD’s and internet – from Taiwan, Australia
- Many overseas Chinese visit famous Buddhist temples and pilgrimage sites in China, donate money to build up these sites
- Monks at these famous temples are very wealthy, drive around in cars
- Contacts with Buddhist institutions in Taiwan, HK, Singapore, SE Asia

Proliferation of lay Buddhists

- Growth of Buddhist lay organizations called “Buddhist laity groves”
- lay Buddhist investiture ceremony at Buddhist temple to obtain “lay certificate” 归依證
- Meditation societies at university campuses; Buddhist philosophy groups
- Revival of practice of releasing captured fish, birds, and animals 放生
- Buddhist officiated funerals; and Buddhist festivals in local communities
- Organize charity drives (earthquake victims)
- Emerging vegetarianism, vegetarian restaurants in major cities; coincides with concerns for food and meat safety

Problems and Controversies

- Problems: commercialization (Shaolin Monastery, where monks have MBA’s, active promotion of pilgrims/donors)
- With much controversy in Buddhist circles, some Buddhist centers, such as Shaolin Monastery in Henan Province, birthplace of Chan Buddhism, even resemble profitable commercial corporations, their monks with MBA degrees jetting around and engaged more in accounting and promoting tourism than in meditation
- Monks who live a married life with children on the side
- Lack of education (including religious knowledge) among monks and nuns, and in Buddhist religious leadership

2. Confucianism

- new leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao since 2002: “harmonious society” 和谐社会 -- this is a term used in Confucian thought, also compatible with Buddhist and Daoist thought
- revival of sacrifices to Confucius in his hometown Qufu; sponsored by provincial govt and Qufu city govt
- “national learning” guoxue 國學 books and television programs on Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophy
International Confucian Studies conferences
Nongovernmental popular Confucian societies: learn the classics, teach children to recite and memorize, discuss Confucian ethics and thought
Grassroots Confucian after-school programs, private boarding schools for elementary and middle school students – memorize the Confucian classical texts, play traditional Chinese music, perform rituals, calligraphy
Lineage ancestor worship rituals in rural areas, and lineage organizations and surname associations revive across China, especially in southeast China (Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong)
Popular television program hosted by Yu Dan CCTV – mixed in with some popular psychology and self-help teachings from the West
University Confucius Institutes and scholarly conferences and books on Confucian thought, about 400+ across the world in all continents except Antarctica
Statue of Confucius at People’s University, Beijing in 2003, in Tiananmen Square in Jan. 2011, but later removed at night

3. Daoism and Popular Religion

rural areas and small towns all over China have revived the old system of ritual territoriality as expressions of local community identity, through the worship of tutelary deities and community rituals (Adam Chau’s work in Shaanxi; my work in Wenzhou)
Expanding by incorporating hundreds of thousands of small local deity temples; this is the only way they can register and get state approval for their existence, by joining Daoist Assoc.; learn Daoist chants and rituals
Contacts with overseas Chinese Daoist communities in HK, Taiwan, SE Asia
University Daoist thought societies and associations
Suffered setback from state crackdown on qigong (body cultivation/exercise) since 1999
Revival of Daoist hermits in the mountains
Fengshui: not just rural tombs and houses, but also urban real estate development; Daoist scholar in Chengdu who is often called across the country to site new urban real estate developments, apartment complexes, and public tombsites; some are very wealthy, he bought several apartments
Daoist scholarly conferences
New studies of Daoism and environmentalism; Daoism and “nurturing life” (yangsheng)
Popular religion revivals in local communities: lunar festivals; tutelary deities; deity processions; new temples and old people running temple committees; Daoist priests officiate at funerals and other community rituals
Organize charity drives (earthquake victims)

4. Christianity

Chinese historian Gu Changsheng estimates that betw 1950 and 1978 during Maoist era, 500,000 Christians (Cath & Protes) died of persecution in China, half of them during Cult Rev.
In 1960s to 70’s, Christianity was driven underground, where it took root in many rural communities and became like imperial era secret societies; state persecution caused Chinese
Christians to draw from Christianity’s long tradition of strategies to deal with persecution, making them adopt discourses of end-time messianism; and also have emphasis on evangelical transmission and conversion.

- Chinese Catholics missed out on the Church reforms of Vatican Council II in 1965.

**Post-Mao Christian Revival and Growth**

- **Document 19** (∙ 十九號文件) – issued by CCP Central Committee in March 1982; said that religious problems are not counter-revolutionary, but are merely “contradictions among the people”; decreed that religious and ethnic communities can still contribute to China’s modernization; called for religious sites of worship to be returned to their congregations if they can provide historical evidence that the site belonged to them.

- Since 1980’s, revival has been mainly by Chinese natives, not many Western missionaries, since it is illegal for foreigners to proselytize any religion in China; although many Mormons pretend to be English teachers; also many South Korean Christians missionizing in secret.

- Official Churches: Three-Self Patriotic Movement; China Christian Council; Catholic Patriotic Association; all Chinese Christians are required to join one of these organizations.

- State does not allow divisions of Chinese Protestants into denominations.

- Christianity, espec. Protestantism of all kinds in the post-Mao era has been spreading like wildfire in countryside; According to Yu Jianrong in 2011, of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, there are 100 million Christians in China (including Protestants & Catholics), which is 13% of the total population of China, and larger than the number of Party members; 70% of these Christians are “underground Christians”

**“Underground” or “House Churches”** (家庭教会)

- “underground” (dixia 地下教會) Christians and other religious groups: either they refuse to join state Christian organizations or they are refused registration or recognition by the state; they are subject to selective state persecution.

- The State wants all Christians to join state churches, but vast majority of Christians are “underground” or in “house churches”, refuse to join; there are conflicts and power struggles between aboveground and underground, competition for membership; sometimes the former will inform on the latter, causing much internal hostility among Christians.

- Some Underground or unregistered churches are like aboveground, pursue moderate teachings that fits in well with secular society, and they enjoy the tolerance of state authorities; like Wenzhou “boss Christians” in the reading.

- However, most underground churches are rural, give birth to many spin-off secret sects, with Pentecostal exuberance, apocalyptic teachings about the end-times, magical practices such as ritual healing and exorcism borrowed from Chinese popular religion; healers and demon exorcists speak in tongues and go into trance, their bodies tremble in prayer; some are militantly anti-state; culture of martyrdom.

- In past two decades, various rural problems such as increasing wealth gap with urbanites, state land seizures of peasant land, environmental degradation, rapacious and corrupt officials, have all made rural underground Christians more apocalyptic, more militantly anti-
state, more messianic and ready to accept local charismatic leaders; prophecies of floods, fire, and earthquakes, collapse of Heaven and Earth

**Watchman Nee 倪柝聲 (1903-1972) “Local Church” or “Little Flock”**

- In the 1930’s, seeing the grim violence and death and suffering of the wars, he taught that one must penetrate the mysteries of God by becoming dead with Christ, become broken and destroy the self to become one with the Cross; wait for the coming of Christ
- Li Changshou, aka “Witness Lee” (1905-1997) was Nee’s disciple who moved to Taiwan, then Orange County in California; founded Huhanpai, the **Shouters Sect**; yell the name of Jesus in the middle of the night;
- Founded Local Church in Anaheim, Calif.
- Various groups in the U.S. accused them of being a “cult” and brainwashing their members, Local Church filed suit and won
- American court case to determine whether they are a “cult”
- With opening up of China in 1980’s, these California Chinese-American church members spread their faith rapidly in SE China and Henan
- Today in China, their members are often raided and imprisoned by police
- Problems with Catholics over their loyalty to Vatican, in selection of bishops and archbishops
- Chinese Catholics are very conservative, have for the most part not accepted Vatican II; they must abide by Chinese birth control law, but Vatican is against birth control and abortion
- “cultural Christians” 文化基督徒 educated non-believers who are interested in and supportive of Christianity as a form of advanced culture; study Christian doctrines and history and social values, but do not believe in God; many urbanites are interested in celebrating Christmas and giving X’mas cards

5. **Qigong and Falungong**

- David Palmer’s work shows the new enthusiasm for ancient Chinese systems of body cultivation, breathing exercises, gymnastics, yogic exercises, and meditation, which in modern China comes to be collectively called “qigong” 氣功, or the art or technique of Qi
- Qigong Attracted people of all occupations, age groups, and educational levels, especially the elderly in urban areas who wanted to keep healthy, given the decline of work unit pension plans and healthcare; growing “qigong fever” in the 1980’s and 90’s
- He shows how the qigong craze sought and won much scientific interest and support, as well as the support of different state organs, whether Sports Commission, Public Security, military, or media; many scientific experiments and lectures at elite institutions including Beijing and Qinghua Universities
- Many qigong masters became famous and gathered large followers with their charismatic appeal and “Extraordinary Powers” 特异功能, special magical or supernatural abilities to emit qi and move objects at a distance, walk through walls, inject people with qi and put them into
At the same time, secularized qigong also frequently gave way to religious frenzy, trance, speaking in tongues, and “qigong deviation” (走火入魔), when exercise and breathing exercises were overdone, or not performed correctly, it could hurt the minds and bodies of practitioners, causing them not to wake up from trance, or to suffer aches and pains.

In 1994, Li Hongzhi from Changchun, an ordinary urban worker, started Falungong, which claimed superiority over other qigong groups and techniques. Falungong had a much more systematic doctrine and set of teachings than other qigong groups; some features of Falungong teachings:

- **apocalyptic** – we are living at the end of the Age of Dharma or age of degeneration prophesied by Sakyamuni Buddha, everything in the universe will become extinct, because scientific development has outstripped moral development; and a new universe will be born with the help of Great Awakened Ones.
- **messianic** – Li Hongzhi taught that he himself was the savior for humankind in this transformation of worlds and he was omniscient.
- **spiritual discipline** – each follower must practice and cultivate their own bodies rigorously, and was forbidden to learn or practice any other type of qigong.
- **paranoid** – some living beings will elude the apocalypse and go off to other planets, where they become extra-terrestrials who wish to return to Earth; these beings use the weapon of science to return and invade and take over control and possession of human bodies; these E.T.s turn humans into slaves of computers and machines; every human who uses a computer is assigned a serial number and their mind falls under their control; science is enemy of morality – it is ignorant of gods and virtue, and of the moral retribution and karmic causality.

Li said that humans do not need modern medicine, can heal oneself through exercise, Li Hongzhi inserts the Dharma wheel inside people, which rotates inside and heals people.

Many academics and scientists became converted into practitioners, but others were skeptical and wrote articles in journals and newspapers attacking Falungong as return to “superstition”, as quackery fooling the people, they asked the gov’t to ban it.

Falungong urged its followers to write and petition government offices, journals, and universities to punish those who maligned Falungong.

June 1999 outside Zhongnanhai, thousands of Falungong members from across the country gathered in silent protest outside the Party central headquarters, Zhongnanhai in Beijing; they were protesting the attacks on them and petitioning the gov’t and Party to stop the attacks.

This was the last straw for the state; it suddenly realized to their dismay that Falungong was highly organized and had mass popular support; thus followed the shrill state persecution and banning of Falungong through all channels of mass media; the state accused Falungong of being an “evil cult” 邪教 (xiéjiào); this was a term taken from late imperial Chinese state, which used this label on sectarian religious and millenarian movements that it felt threatened by; it was grafted onto an American social science term “cult”, which applies to any religion that is socially disapproved of or unacceptable.

Many Falungong members were forcibly sent to insane asylums or prison to de-program them; they were accused of harming people and not allowing them to see doctors; Falungong accuses gov’t of beating and torturing them.

Falungong has gone underground in China, hard to study them because of the gov’t persecution campaign; they survive and flourish abroad, and have added new recruits among overseas scholars.
Chinese and non-Chinese around the world

6. Tibetan Buddhism

- In the 1950’s, CCP was very tolerant with the religious cultures of China’s minorities, knowing that it must woo the minorities and not alienate them; that means giving special accommodations to the religions of minorities that was not given to Han Chinese
- In China, while the Han areas were forcibly secularized through state confiscation of religious properties and land, and through making the clerics return to lay life, Tibetan people were not asked to give up their religious life, even after the full-scale military occupation of Tibet in 1959
- Unlike Han areas which had become secularized throughout the 20th century, Tibet missed all that secularization, and its people were especially religious – Han officials applied their Western social evolutionary view and regarded Tibetans as especially backward, with their strong Buddhist faith and Bon shamanistic and demonic religion
- Cultural Revolution – Red Guards got to Tibet and wreaked religious destruction; great majority of Tibetan Buddhist temples were damaged or destroyed
- In post-Mao era, at first there was more liberal and tolerant policy towards Tibet, by Hu Yaobang, who died; then there was a small uprising by Tibetan monks, and the hardliners thought it proved the failure of Hu’s tolerant policy
- 1994 – hardening of state policy towards Tibet – new thinking due to fear that China might go the way of former Soviet block; blamed religion for the collapse of the Soviet order – Catholic Church in Poland, Russian Orthodox Church in Russia, fear the rise of Islamism among the Uyghurs in Xinjiang
- New thinking of Tibetan policy – attachment to Dalai Lamma is not just ordinary religion, it is a religion that preaches rebellion and secession against the state, Tibetan religion became a form of anti-state sedition; Tibetan religion no longer just “backward”, an obstacle to Tibetan people’s modernization, but more importantly, it threatened state security
- Harsh treatment of Tibetan monastics as ringleaders of secession, with ties to the West
- In Tibetan area of western Sichuan, there are now well over 100 cases of self-immolation, started around 2011, mainly by clerics