

**Chinese Religious Innovation in the *Qigong* Movement:
The Case of Zhonggong**

David A. Palmer

The University of Hong Kong

PRE-PUBLICATION VERSION

Published in Adam Yuet Chau ed., *Religion in Contemporary China: Revitalization and Innovation*.
London: Routledge, pp. 182-202.

Three incredible Oriental characters are shaking China and the world:

Zhang — Hong — Bao!

Zhang Hongbao, a man tormented by illness.

Zhang Hongbao, a man with a brilliant official career.

Zhang Hongbao, a man of mystery and enigmas.

Zhang Hongbao, a man with unlimited magical powers.

Is he a man, or a god?

Where did he come from, and where is he going?

The power of his thought and concentration, the power of his wisdom and the power of his spirit, the power of his magical technique, his powers of communication and of spiritual transformation.... Has he obtained them from a famous Master? From the Heavenly Way? From a god?

Who knows? Do you? Do I? Does he?

A heavenly phenomenon? An earthly phenomenon? A human phenomenon?

The Universe. The Universe. The Universe.

Transformation. Transformation. Transformation.

A quest begun during his illness, his eyes opened during his search, a complete and total awakening to all that exists in the universe, he realizes his mission to bring good to the people of the three worlds,¹ and to save humans and all beings.

There is no Law in the world. [...] Total enlightenment is the Law.

Here, then, is Zhang Hongbao. In the darkness, sitting on the ground, he becomes a god. He unites in the palm of his hand all the functions and magical powers transmitted and documented in written and oral history, including the magical techniques of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, therapy, martial arts, popular [magic], as well as Indian Yoga and Western Christianity..."(Ji 1990: 66-67)

The best-selling *The Great Qigong Master Comes out of the Mountain*, a book on the paranormal feats, healings and scientific discoveries of Zhang Hongbao (1954-2006), was one of dozens of hagiographical publications on contemporary *qigong* miracle makers, usually written by hired journalists, which flooded China's bookstalls in the early 1990s. Through these books, as well as sensational newspaper reports and television documentaries, the purportedly state-controlled mass media played a pivotal role in fanning a nationwide craze for the paranormal phenomena linked to the practice of *qigong*. "*Qigong fever*" (*qigong re*) can be considered the most widespread expression of urban religiosity in post-Mao China, from 1979, when *qigong* was officially legitimated, to 1999, when the crackdown on Falungong led to the disbanding of most popular *qigong* groups. Although it is impossible to determine the exact number of *qigong* practitioners during this period, it is safe to say that at least one in five urban Chinese had direct exposure to the movement at some time or another, either by practicing *qigong* exercises, attending healing activities, or reading *qigong*-related literature. This popular movement reached its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when mass *qi*-emission lectures held in sports stadiums drew audiences in the thousands, while millions congregated every morning to practice *qigong* in urban parks and public spaces.

A visit to a *qigong* training station

Zhang Hongbao was one of the three most famous of the *qigong* masters.² I first came across his organization, Zhonggong (an abbreviation for *Zhonghua yangsheng yizhigong*, "Chinese *qigong* for nourishing life and increasing intelligence"), when conducting preliminary field research on *qigong* in the Chinese city of Chengdu in April 1994. The "No. 9251 training station" of the Zhonggong organization was located in a converted old temple building on Dragon King Temple Lane, a narrow alley branching out of a broad avenue

lined with shady French plane trees, with its flows of bicycles jostling for space with cars, buses and lorries, in a cacophony of horns, beeps and bells. The Lane served as the front yard, living room and laundry area for hundreds of residents who lived in its dilapidated one-story houses; in the lane, they took tea, cooked noodles, played chess and mah-jong, sold cabbages and peppers, or repaired their bicycles. On the grey brick walls of a larger, old building – the Dragon King temple of a bygone era – posters showing yin-yang symbols and mythological animals indicated that the place continued to be used for a spiritual function.

Inside, at the back end of the temple courtyard, a little bookstall sold books on *qigong* and glass pendants containing a holographic image of Zhang Hongbao sitting in the lotus position, wearing a business suit, and with an aura around his head, his hair oiled and slicked back.

“Would you like me to send you some power (fagong)?” asked a smiling middle-aged woman, who invited me into a small room adjoining what had, long ago, been the main altar hall of the temple. Low wooden benches were set against three of the walls, while a portrait of Zhang Hongbao was placed on the back wall, under which burned a few incense sticks. Syrupy traditional-sounding Chinese instrumental music crackled out of an old tape recorder, while two Zhonggong masters went around the room, “sending qi” through their hands, which they waved in front of a few old people sitting on the benches.

I was told to be seated and close my eyes. I had no idea what was going to happen so I kept my eyes slightly open just to see, and I saw the qigong master’s legs in front of me, then he walked away, then he came back; all I could think about was my bag that was beside me and what if they stole it while my eyes were closed and I couldn’t concentrate in the slightest and was I supposed to concentrate? And the music sounded so cheesy, and how long was this supposed to last, maybe I should just get up now, but I couldn’t stand up, I felt like a stone, all right I’ll stay a little longer, funny it seems I can’t move, and I tried again but I couldn’t muster enough willpower, and this went on for what seemed like an eternity, until with a big effort I “shook” myself loose.

“Did you feel the qi?”, asked the smiling woman after the session.

“I couldn’t move.”

“You felt heavy?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“You have good receptivity to qi. You are welcome here, come often! We practice qigong dance here every Saturday evening. You are welcome!”

A few weeks later, I returned to the station to attend the Saturday night *qigong* dances. This time, the activity was being held in the central hall: some sixty people of all ages and both sexes were sitting on the benches against the walls, their eyes closed, the *qigong* masters going around sending *qi*, while in the middle, about fifteen people were “dancing,” floating freely to the same taped Chinese music.

Another woman in her thirties wearing bell-bottomed pants found me a space on a bench and told me to close my eyes, and tried the same routine as the previous time, sending me qi; it didn’t have as much effect this time.

Then she told me to come up and dance. In spite of my reluctance, she managed to persuade me into getting up, and told me to close my eyes and relax, and just let all the parts of my body flow with the music, to stretch and expand fluidly, so I let myself go like a jellyfish, bobbing and sinking, expanding and shrinking. The bell-bottomed woman stood near me the whole time, emitting qi and stopping other dancers from bumping into the “foreign guest.”

Finally everyone was asked to sit down and relax and close their eyes, and the leader began a sermon in a soft voice, and many people began to burp, releasing qi. The session ended around 9 pm.

Training stations (*fudaozhan*) such as this one were places where practitioners could meet and socialize as well as practice *qigong*. They were also enterprises offering a range of Zhonggong products, healing services, and basic training courses. Anyone could go to the station at any time to practice the method. The station offered first and second-level Zhonggong workshops, treatment of illnesses by Zhonggong therapists who claimed to have paranormal powers (*teyi gongneng*), diagnosis and therapy from a distance (with *qi*-filled prescriptions sent by post and long-distance emission of *qi*), divination, and assistance in

making travel arrangements for co-practitioners coming from afar. Station personnel included Zhonggong disciples who had completed level four of the eight Zhonggong training levels, some of whom claimed to be able to see auras or to see through the human body (Zhonggong nd).

The local station's activities were primarily social and therapeutic. They were the means by which, in a systematic fashion, through the standardized *qigong* method of Zhang Hongbao, the masses of practitioners at the grassroots could be connected to a centralized organization which claimed 30 million adherents and was, during the early 1990s, the largest social organization in China outside the Chinese Communist Party (henceforth CCP) and its associated organizations.

***Qigong* and religious innovation**

Qigong is a modern catch-all term for traditional Chinese breathing, meditation, and gymnastic exercises. As a technology of the body designed to improve practitioners' health and mental abilities, *qigong* acquired a legitimate status as a secular form of sport and therapy, while becoming a gateway into the religious worlds within which *qigong*-like techniques had been traditionally practiced for millennia. As a realm of discourse which combined traditional symbols and cosmologies with the language, practices and utopian promise of science, *qigong* became a field in which miraculous experiences, magical lore and the charisma of famous masters could be recast in the idiom of energy, waves, particles, information, laboratory experiments and "somatic science."

As a recent creation which was formed and flourished outside of any formal religious institution – and was thus unconstrained by religious orthodoxy -- *qigong* opened the widest space for religious innovation available in socialist China. *Qigong* discourses and practices presented an infinitely extensible mixture of traditional self-cultivation, physics, diet, Daoist immortals, morality, sports, UFOlogy, nationalism, military science, Buddhism, master-disciple relations, corporate management, apocalypticism, sexual cultivation, neo-Marxism, martial arts, mass trances and quiet sitting, tooth grinding and saliva swallowing, and so on.

The range of innovations brought to Chinese religion in the *qigong* movement is too broad to be adequately dealt with comprehensively here, and I have described many of the phenomena in detail elsewhere (Palmer 2007). This chapter is a case study of one especially

innovative *qigong* denomination, Zhonggong, which, more systematically than any other group, framed traditional practices within a new theory and corporate organization. After describing Zhonggong's master, its philosophy, its training system and its organization, I will then situate Zhonggong in the context of the *qigong* movement as a whole, considering innovations in *qigong* in light of the sociology of innovation pioneered by Gabriel Tarde.

The case of Zhonggong

Building on the image of the charismatic *qigong* grandmaster who acquired the status of a pop star and could heal thousands in mass *qi*-emission sessions in China's sports stadiums,³ Zhonggong developed the model of a national organization with its own system of human resource training, making it possible to consolidate and deepen the practitioners' commitment and transform the human energy released by *qigong* into financial profits. While many other *qigong* masters had created their own transmission networks covering all of China, with national, regional and local training stations, none had gone as far as Zhang Hongbao in a strategy of propagation, commercialization, and management. Zhonggong can be described as a commercial-bureaucratic organization modeled on the CCP that managed a vast commercial enterprise. Its chief activity was the sale of *qigong* workshops. This system of administration, partly inspired by Western commercial management theories, was elaborated at the beginning of the 1990s, when such notions were just beginning to appear in China.

In the case of Zhonggong, the strategies were at first amazingly effective: For a while Zhonggong became the largest mass organization in China outside the Communist Party. In fact, the name Zhonggong itself is a homophone of the abbreviated name of the CCP, Zhonggong. Rumours circulated that Zhang Hongbao was trying to co-opt the *qigong* movement to build a popular movement capable of transforming itself into a political party.

The rise of Zhang Hongbao

Indeed, as "*qigong* fever" reached its peak in the late 1980s, Zhang Hongbao devised a strategy to organize and systematically conquer the bubbling world of *qigong* and of its mass of practitioners. Through his Zhonggong, Zhang Hongbao would attempt to integrate the *qigong* movement into a modern commercial enterprise.

Born in Harbin on 5 January 1954 in a family of coal miners, Zhang Hongbao spent ten years, from the ages of 14 to 24, on a state farm during the Cultural Revolution. During that time, he began to practice martial arts with some youth sent down from Beijing and Shanghai. He also quickly moved up the farm hierarchy: from breaker of stones, he was promoted to security guard, then statistician, technician, and finally teacher at the farm school. In 1977, he was sent to the Harbin School of Metallurgy, after which he joined the CCP and was appointed as a high-school physics teacher in a mining region. He devoted himself to Party work, and rapidly rose up the mine's political hierarchy. He missed no opportunity to continue his studies: cadres' training sessions, night classes, distance learning program in management psychology. In 1985, he was admitted to the Economic Management Program at the Beijing University of Science and Technology (Ji 1990: 46-52, Zhang 2001: 1-2).

In Beijing, Zhang Hongbao did not obtain high grades. His thesis on leadership theory was not much appreciated by his professors. His interests were many: he took law courses at Peoples' University, studied Chinese and Western medicine, and registered at the Chinese *Qigong* Further Education Academy. He became a passionate *qigong* practitioner, and took lessons from several masters. Finally, he developed his own method, "Zhonggong," characterized by its use of civil engineering jargon: it included a "principal project" (*zhubi gongcheng*) and "auxiliary projects" (*jushu gongcheng*), and drew on the theories of automation, physics, informatics, relativity, systems, and bionics (Ji 1990: 57, Zhang 2001: 2).

Zhang Hongbao's abilities as a seer earned him a reputation that began to spread beyond his campus. His powers were "discovered" by one of his roommates, who shared a bunkbed with Zhang: when his stomach ache suddenly disappeared, he attributed the healing to his "upstairs" bunkmate's *qigong* practice. After graduating, Zhang was hired by the university to conduct research on *qigong* (ZQB 88/1/2: 2). One spring day of 1987, he was invited to give his first lecture at the university, at which he demonstrated his *teyigongneng* – "Extraordinary Powers"-- by asking volunteers to come onto the stage and meditate, and then by making their bodies shake without touching them (Ji 1990: 59).

On an auspicious day, the eighth day of August (the eighth month) of 1987, Zhang Hongbao "came out of the mountain" for the official launch of his *qigong* system, by founding the Beijing Haidian District *Qigong* Science Research Institute. During the following year, he carried out a strategy to systematically infiltrate the elite academic, media and legal

communities in the capital. After teaching Zhonggong in various schools and universities, he was invited in November 1987 to Beijing University, where he gave two week-long “accelerated workshops” to over one thousand participants, many of whom were faculty members and researchers from various universities, including the President of Beijing University. After the workshop, many of them could emit, collect, and transform *qi*. Several became diehard *qigong* practitioners. The event was reported in the *Peoples’ Daily*, giving Zhang Hongbao a national reputation (RR 88/1/10: 3).

Zhang’s second target was the heart of the Chinese scientific community: the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences. He gave workshops in each establishment. One of these seminars was the subject of a three-minute report on the national CCTV news program. In the report, Zhang was shown making five or six persons wobble by pointing his finger at them, from a distance of several metres. This made him into a celebrity (BQB 88/01/08: 7).

Such media attention enabled Zhang to penetrate his third target: Beijing’s media elite. On January 4, 1988, he organized a five-day fast-track workshop for members of the media and cultural circles. One hundred and thirty people signed up, including a deputy minister of Culture, leaders of the China Writers’ Association, and a famous singer (Ji 1990: 75). The *Peoples’ Daily* reported that in a few months, over 7000 persons had attended Zhang Hongbao’s trainings, which had even been held in the offices of the *Daily* itself (RR 88:1:10: 3). Several other major newspapers ran articles on Zhang Hongbao: the *China Youth News* (ZQB 88/1/2: 2), the *Beijing Youth News* (BQB 88/01/08 : 7), the *China Electronics News* (ZDB 88/1/22 : 4), etc. Thanks to Zhang Hongbao, wrote the *Beijing Youth News*, intellectuals could take *qigong* seriously. “His lectures shook the intellectual world. It is obviously not so difficult to open the gate of *qigong*.” But as soon as the gate opens, continued the article’s author, one’s mental and spiritual abilities are strengthened, and one’s illnesses can heal (BQB 88/01/08 : 7).

Having charmed the media, Zhang Hongbao set his sights on the centers of political power. On 10 January 1988, he gave a “power-inducing lecture” (*daigong baogao*)⁴ at the Central Party School’s main auditorium, which was filled to capacity; hundreds had to follow the event on closed-circuit television in other rooms. Zhang Hongbao invited the president of the school onto the stage and to send *qi* towards the audience, which was instructed to receive the *qi* with one hand: only five minutes later, audience members were amazed to

discover that the fingers of their “receiving” hand were now longer than those of the other hand! A minister claimed that his leg pain had disappeared (Ji 1990: 76). Zhang then gave a one-week workshop at the Central Party School (ZDB 88/1/22: 4).

Then it was the turn of the police and justice ministries to invite Zhang to give workshops. Altogether, from 1987 to 1990, he held some fifty fast-track workshops in various government agencies in Beijing (Zhang 2001: 3). People talked of a “Zhonggong fever” (*zhonggong re*) in the capital. A personality cult began, fanned by the best-selling hagiographic novel *The Great Qigong Master Comes out of the Mountain* by Ji Yi, released in 1990, which told of Zhang’s miracles, of Extraordinary Powers, and of the Zhonggong method. The book’s total sales were estimated to have reached 10 million (Li & Zheng 1996: 132). It is full of stories of miraculous phenomena: masters who heal from a thousand miles away, who kill goldfish by their glance, whose anger can make tires pop ... it tells of the weight of the human soul (7.1 g), of the aura around every person’s head, of the first human (an Asian woman), of the conquest of the citadel of science by the spirit of *qigong*, of the “mental war” (*sixiang zhanzheng*) that will take place in 2020... and of the “miraculous swirl” of Zhonggong, whose master is described as nothing less than a god.

Zhang Hongbao had begun by establishing his organization in the capital and cultivated his ties with the centers of power. In July 1989, he founded one of the first incorporated *qigong* enterprises, which presented itself as a Sino-American joint venture (Wu ed. 1993: 556). Then, from November 3 to 6, 1990, in a series of lectures on “The Science of Life and the Order of the Great Dao” at the Beijing Great Hall of Sciences, he officially launched his new philosophical system, “Qilin Culture” (*qilin wenhua*).⁵ The list of audience members read like a roster of the capital’s political elite: the secretary-general of the Central Propaganda Ministry, a vice-president of the Central Party School, a vice-president of the Military Sciences Academy, several retired provincial governors and military commanders, etc.

The Grandmaster then moved to expand in the provinces. Using his ties with regional political and military leaders, Sichuan, Shaanxi and Tianjin became the key bases of his empire. In June 1989 – in the wake of the Tiananmen pro-democracy movement – Zhang Hongbao left Beijing for Sichuan, where he established the Zhonggong headquarters in some converted army barracks at Mt. Qingcheng, known as the birthplace of Daoism. The Qingcheng barracks were refurbished as a retreat for Zhonggong workshops, and as a post-secondary college for “extraordinary talents” (*teyi rencai peiyang xuexiao*) (QL 1: 55, 59). In December 1990, Zhang

Hongbao also established the International Academy of Life Sciences (*guoji shengming kexueyuan*) for the management training of cadres for the Zhonggong organization, and to house research units such as a center for reincarnation research (*zhaisheng xianxiang yanjiushi*) (QL 1: 27). For the first intake of students, he chose a group of devoted and talented disciples, who learned the Zhonggong management system with him. This group of disciples then became the core managers of the growing number of Zhonggong provincial branches and commercial enterprises, such as the Longfei International Trade Co. located on the border with Siberia, the Euro-America-Asia-Australia Multinational Enterprise Ltd. (*Oumeiya'ao kuaguo shiye youxian gongsi*), the Changjiang Life Technology Service Co., etc. (QL 1: 53). In April 1991, he established the Qilin Culture University in Xi'an, which offered programs in tourism, hotel management, economics, commerce, finance, traditional healing, public relations, educational management, martial arts, and marketing. The university's mission was to raise human resources for the expanding number of Zhonggong training centers and enterprises. Distance learning courses were also provided, in association with Zhonggong branches in Hong Kong and Australia (QL 1: 53). Also in Shaanxi province, Zhang Hongbao founded a "Center for Extraordinary Medicine Research" (*teyi yanjiu zhongxin*)⁶ based in a sanatorium reserved for provincial government top officials (QL 1: 32).

The Zhonggong philosophy

The journalist Ji Yi, author of two books on Zhang Hongbao, wrote that "if we can connect the essences of Oriental and Western civilizations, and to integrate ancient and modern cultures, a new scientific and technological revolution will erupt [which] will trigger an explosion of human knowledge" (Ji 1990: 57-58). Like many other *qigong* methods,⁷ Zhang Hongbao's "Qilin Culture" aimed to integrate all forms of knowledge into a single, integrated system:

"During the lectures [at the Beijing Great Hall of Sciences], Mr. Zhang solemnly proclaimed to China and the world that the Zhonggong cultural system, which came to him by inspiration, would be formally named Qilin Culture. This creature known to the Chinese nation as a bringer of good fortune, thus found a new luster. The *qilin* combines in a single body the essence of different species of living beings: the dragon's head, the

pig's nose, the serpent's scales, the deer's body, the tiger's back, the bear's thighs, the ox's hooves and the lion's tail. It belongs to none of these species, but combines the powers of each. By thus naming his scientific research system, this symbolizes that Qilin Culture is the spark produced by the clashing and grinding between ancient and modern cultures, and the fruit of the integration of Western and Eastern philosophies. It absorbs the essence of the Chinese nation, and rests on the shoulders of the giants of the history of science. From the heights of cosmology and methodology, and based on the different aspects of philosophy and the natural and social sciences, it explores the different laws of life and movement. It is a deep wisdom with rich contents.

Qilin Culture is the crystallization of the great inspiration, the great enlightenment and the great wisdom of Master Zhang Hongbao. [...] It smelts in a single furnace the Way of Heaven, the Way of Earth, the Way of Man, government, economy, military affairs, art, and philosophy. It covers virtue, intelligence and the body; it neglects neither the natural sciences, nor the social sciences, nor the life sciences. [...] It rests on the soil of the Divine Realm⁸; it is a remarkable contribution of the Chinese nation to the universe and to the human race (Ji 1991: 155-160).

Zhang Hongbao's Qilin Culture included eight systems:

(1) a philosophical system based on the "Supreme Whirl" (*xuanji*), a modification of the traditional Chinese "Supreme Ultimate," known as the *taiji* figure or yin-yang symbol. While the *taiji* figure looks like two fish, the Supreme Whirl symbol looks like two eagle heads, taking inspiration from Marxist and Maoist dialectics to "reflect the inevitable struggle in the process of the development of things" (Zhang n.d.: 151-152). The Supreme Whirl was said to explain the origin of creatures, their functioning, and their final destiny."⁹



Fig. 3. The *taiji* symbol (top) and the Supreme Whirl Symbol (bottom)

(2) A *vita scientia*, which was the application of Qilin philosophy to pierce the secrets of life. The system included two parts: a methodology, which includes the theories of the biological machine, of the control of the categories of *qi* sensation, of the power of total biological information, of the nature of mental powers. Second, a theory of Extraordinary Powers, including the different types of powers, the six ways to make them appear, the methods to refine them, their precise locations in the body, and the eight types of superhuman.

(3) A system of “extraordinary medicine” which differed in seven ways from Chinese medicine, Western medicine, and *qigong* therapy.

(4) A system of art and therapy, including a style of architecture and sculpture, *qigong* dance, *qigong* music, *qigong* painting, martial arts, spontaneous poetry, etc.

(5) A system of education, including an accelerated method for the improvement of intelligence and for the training of individuals with paranormal powers.

(6) A system of industrial and political administration: a science of leadership, management, behaviour, and commercial psychology, combining the political and strategic arts of ancient China and of the *Book of Changes* with modern corporate management.

(7) A system of behavior: rules for walking, sitting and lying down; a work ethic; a discipline for creating a new man.

(8) A system of body practices in eight levels, known as Zhonggong (Liu Zhidong ed. 1993: 219).

Qilin Culture's sixth component – the modern management theory, clothed in the idiom of the traditional yin-yang and five-elements cosmology -- was the basis for the Zhonggong organization, and aimed to be applicable to family, business, or government. It aimed to synthesize the best aspects of the five phases of human social development: primitive society, slave society, feudal society, capitalist society, and communist society. This schema accepted the Marxist phases of history, but rejected the notion of a dialectical opposition between phases: “each type of society had its excellent methods of administration, which one can borrow.” Thus the notion of the collective (*gong*) of the primitive and communist phases were retained, as well as the private interests (*si*) of the slave, feudal, and capitalist phases, and their notions of the hierarchy between juniors and seniors and between ministers and the prince. Finally, capitalist management methods were adopted. Interpersonal relations were to be based on the equality and mutual help of primitive society, the paternalistic authority of the clan system, and the ritual hierarchy of Confucian culture. The “profit sharing system” made profit the sole criterion for revenue distribution. Even if a person worked with dedication all day long, if he didn't make profits, he would earn nothing and would even be punished. Salary included three components: remuneration based on profits earned, a fixed annual salary, and a salary based on seniority. The “personnel management system” planned for the hiring of staff on fixed-term contracts of six months to one year; after several successive contracts, the employee could be hired indefinitely and be provided with housing, retirement pension, and health insurance. (Lü n.d.: 221-226).

Overall, Qilin Culture aimed to meet human needs at three levels. Materially, it would solve concrete problems and advocated the use of market laws, using notions of enterprise, capital, price, profit, etc., which were just being introduced to China in the early 1990s. Then at the level of “spirit” and “values,” it attempted to create different types of “collective forms” (*shehui qunti xingshi*) and “rites” that would nurture the values of family and society, and a thirst for perfection which would generate faith, beauty and morality. The third level involved

“saving and enlightening mankind, healing illness and increasing the body’s powers” (*duren kaibui, zhibing zhanggong*): a transcendence that would allow people to experience “sudden enlightenment,” and to understand the nature of man and the universe (Lü n.d.: 223-226).

The training system

Like the thousands of other *qigong* methods, but more systematically than most, Zhonggong proposed a training structure in several ascending levels, giving the practitioner a clear path of progression, which could stimulate him to advance even higher. Zhonggong workshops were each geared to the acquisition of specific skills which the participant could master with satisfaction at the end of a few days of training. In addition, the workshops trained participants in Zhonggong organizational and managerial techniques as early as the second level, allowing them to integrate into the corporate structure and giving them the skills to set up what we might call their own local Zhonggong franchises – in which they had to put up the investment to establish training stations, then pay 30% of revenues to the Zhonggong headquarters in exchange for use of the Zhonggong brand, training system and intellectual property (Palmer 2007: 216). The first five ascending levels of Zhonggong were promoted as including the following contents:

Stage One: basic techniques and postures; manipulation of *qi* (collecting, emitting, receiving and exchange of *qi*); meditation on the “microscopic orbit”; Zhonggong diagnostic and therapy techniques, etc.

Stage Two: methods for the organization and control of collective sessions; *qigong* performance arts (walking on a sheet of paper suspended in the air, standing on a light bulb, changing the alcohol content of wine, etc.); correction of eight types of *qigong* deviation; the “secrets of secrets” of Buddhist and Daoist techniques; specific types of therapy for over thirty diseases, etc.

Stage Three: still meditation and visualization methods; *qigong* hypnosis; spontaneous motion *qigong* (dance, music, poetry and spontaneous boxing); additional healing techniques, etc.

Stage Four: Electric *qigong*; hard *qigong*; Extraordinary Powers: telepathy, distant vision, predicting the future.

Stage Five: Concepts and methods for the creation of living space (Chinese geomancy); arts of the bedchamber (sexual techniques); dietetics – the art of regaining one’s youth; massage techniques; regulation of the emotions; debunking of the eight “evil arts”: the demon who knocks on the door; piercing one’s cheeks with nails; the egg that walks; swallowing fire, etc (Qingchengshan 1997a).

The contents of the sixth, seventh and eighth levels were not publicly disclosed. They involved training in the higher-level management of Zhonggong organizations. Each level corresponded to a one or two week workshop. Stages One and Two were taught at local training stations or at centers such as Qingchengshan, which also offered Stages Three, Four, and Five. The price of room, board and tuition for residential workshops was 144 yuan per week in 1994, equivalent to approximately one weeks’ wages for the average salaried urban Chinese at the time.

It was a standardized training model, with its set curriculum and manuals, replicable in thousands of stations and centers across China. The stress was on output, with quantified targets for the sale of workshops. Workshops had a highly structured organization of time, in which each task, as well as the moment of its execution, was clearly assigned in written procedural manuals. Trainers were to systematically induce participants into a state of suggestibility, which was presented as a method for entering a “state of receptivity to *qigong* power” (*jiegongtai*). The training regimen focused on the transmission of concepts by means of body techniques. For instance, a technique in which one lengthens one’s finger by a few millimetres through mental effort, is used as the support for teaching the “mental force theory” (*yinianli lilun*), one of the elements of Zhonggong philosophy. Seeing himself able to visibly prolong his finger, the participant saw himself as already in possession of a minor paranormal ability or “Extraordinary Power”; he could now believe in all paranormal phenomena, for which Zhonggong theory provided a conceptual framework. The idea that persistence in practicing Zhonggong would allow him to acquire even more paranormal

abilities would motivate him to continue the training and practice with enthusiasm (Qingchengshan 1997a: 13-14).

Trainers were given their own systematic training. The insistence was on loyalty toward the master and Zhonggong: “become a model for respecting the master and loving the cause; make group interest one’s first criteria, be loyal to the cause of Qilin Culture, have the courage to sacrifice...” (Qingchengshan 1997a: 16). Workshops were highly structured and standardized. Trainers’ responsibilities were spelled out in detail in their training manuals. Among their duties, they had to ensure doctrinal purity and orthopraxis: transmit the methods by following the correct organization of time, content, method and order of presentation, without errors and without straying from the instructional materials; without teaching elements from a higher-level workshop; without mixing in elements from other *qigong* methods; and to explain Extraordinary Powers phenomena in a scientific manner, without using superstitious or mystical terms. Each trainer was given numerical sales targets. They were required to teach Stage One to a minimum of 600 persons per year, from among whom a minimum target of 50% were to sign up for a Stage Two workshop; and a target of 60% of Stage Two students were to progress to Stage Three. For the sale of books and tapes, the target was 100% of Stage One and 85% of Stage Two participants; for the sale of souvenirs, the target was 40% of level one and 60% of level two participants (100% in the more affluent Special Economic Zones – Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen and Hainan). Trainers were also expected to identify and recruit human resources from among workshop participants, including persons with Extraordinary Powers and individuals with teaching and management abilities. At least 50% of Stage One participants were to be recorded as having experienced extraordinary healing during training, and 20% of Stage Two participants (Qingchengshan 1997 b: 16).

The management system

A national Zhonggong organization, integrating the various organs and branches throughout China, was put into place in 1994, through a business enterprise owned by Zhang Hongbao: the Taiweike Nourishing Life Services Co (*Taiweike yangsheng fuwu gongsi*). In April 1995, the Mt. Qingcheng and Chongqing institutes then united to establish, with the approval of the State Economic Reforms Commission, the Qilin Group (*Qilin jituan*), a business

conglomerate based in Tianjin, under which the three “systems” of Zhonggong were integrated: training institutes, affiliated products (medicines, teas, liquors, etc.), and real estate. In total, the Group claimed to manage over 3000 Zhonggong branches, 30 properties, over 100,000 *qigong* practice points, and as many employees (SMK 21: 16-17).

In the summer of 1995, Zhang Hongbao declared the end of Zhonggong’s initial phase of growth, and decided to enter an “adjustment period” (*tiaozheng jieduan*) of three years, with the purpose of consolidating the management of the millions of practitioners, the thousands of practice sites, and the dozens of branches, organs and businesses into a well-run, profitable enterprise. Zhang Hongbao asked his provincial and national cadres to study business administration, using Harvard Business School materials, with the goal of reaching an MBA level within three years (Zhang 2001: 5).

Zhonggong’s systematic organization allowed it to draw into its orbit a large number of practitioners of other, less well organized methods: by 1995, Zhonggong claimed to have 30 million practitioners – a figure that is certainly exaggerated, but it would not be unreasonable to estimate that Zhonggong did have at least several million. If Zhonggong was able to expand so massively, it was largely thanks to its comprehensive management and transmission system.

At the national and international levels, the organization’s activities were directed by the “International Zhonggong General Assembly” (*Guoji Zhonggong zonghui*). Regional organizations based in Beijing, Xi’an, Chengdu, etc. coordinated the network’s expansion in areas covering several provinces. The Chengdu region, for instance, covered Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Hubei, Guangxi, and Tibet. General training stations (*zong fudaozhan*) and / or “Life science schools” (*shengming kexue xuexiao*), based in major cities, coordinated networks of local training stations. Each local organization was, in theory, registered with the local authorities.¹⁰

Besides this basic structure, Zhonggong had its central training and marketing organs in Beijing, Xi’an, Sichuan, and Hong Kong. Leading cadres were trained in Zhonggong management at the Chongqing International Academy of Life Sciences. The Xi’an Qilin Culture University (*Qilin wenhua daxue*) taught Zhonggong philosophy and methods. The Mt. Qingcheng institutes organized research, publication, and workshop activities, and trained people with Extraordinary Powers to master and increase their powers. The Qilin Group, based in Tianjin, as well as several subsidiaries and other companies, marketed books, audiovisual products, “*qigong* holiday retreats,” *qi*-imbued “information tea” (*xinxi cha*), etc.

From Hong Kong, Zhonggong products and services were promoted toward overseas Chinese communities (Wu ed. 1993: 556).

At the summit of the Zhonggong hierarchy were the master's personal disciples, who led a career within the organization. They accumulated positions, progressed from one organ to another, and founded new branches or enterprises. The central core was made up of about ten individuals, who were members of the International Zhonggong General Assembly. Prior to joining Zhonggong, most of them had come from three different circles: academia, media, and the Chengdu district of the Peoples' Liberation Army.¹¹

The higher levels of the Zhonggong organization were modeled on the structure of the Chinese socialist work-unit system. Their organizational culture had the same emphasis on ideology and boilerplate propaganda, the same bureaucratic hierarchy of work units, the same domination by a core of cadres who were the protégés of the Master, the same style of meetings and speeches, the same inflamed rhetoric against the outside enemies of the organization and against "erroneous" thoughts and behaviors within it (SKD, Mar. 1994: 2, 3).

The central leadership directed an internal supervisory system to ensure that Zhonggong cadres followed organization rules: "The state has its laws, the lineage has its rules" (*guo you guofa, men you mengui*), said one leader. Three methods, based on CCP disciplinary procedures, were used to punish the wayward: (1) self-criticism; (2) loss of titles and positions; (3) expulsion (SKD, Mar. 1994: 3). In one case, for instance, Zhang Hongbao published a circular distributed to all trainers, expelling from Zhonggong a local-station leader who had made apocalyptic prophecies, and had proclaimed himself Zhang's successor and Amitabha Buddha (Qingchengshan 1997b: 39).

An organisation as large as Zhonggong could not avoid attracting the suspicion and opposition of the government. As early as March 1994, Beijing municipal authorities closed Zhang Hongbao's Sino-American joint venture enterprise, the Beijing International *Qigong* Service Co., and the local police received order to arrest him. The reasons for this arrest warrant are not clear. Zhang fled and continued to lead his movement in hiding. But his organization continued to exist in other parts of China, indicating that the Beijing incident was only the result of a local government decision. From 1995 to 1998, many Zhonggong organizations were investigated by the police. But there was no general crackdown or ban on Zhonggong, and Zhang Hongbao remained missing. According to Zhang, the authorities began to plan a crackdown at the end of 1998 – but the Falungong crisis, which erupted

after the April 1999 Zhongnanhai protest, diverted the governments' energies away from Zhonggong for a few extra months (Zhang 2001: 4-7). But not for long: On December 13, 1999, in the wake of the suppression of Falungong, the central authorities decided to eliminate Zhonggong (Zhang 2001: 7). Investigations were opened on three cases of rape allegedly committed by Zhang Hongbao in 1990, 1991 and 1994, and on false documents used by him in 1993. Zhonggong offices and properties were sealed up. Zhang Hongbao, who had disappeared in 1995, resurfaced on the American Pacific island of Guam in Feb. 2000. After six months of detention on the island, his request for asylum was rejected, but he was given temporary permission to remain in the U.S., where he settled in Washington (Reuters 2000). In the United States, Zhang became active in the democratic dissident movement, and, with his top disciples, who had also emigrated to America, established his own "government-in-exile" as 'President of the China Shadow Government' and 'His Holiness Hongbao of World Religion the Vatican,' causing many controversies in Chinese dissident circles. (Thornton, 2008, 192-195; http://www.tianhuaculture.net/eng/a0_2_060831.html, accessed on 17 Jan. 2010.). His relations with his associates deteriorated over time, he was embroiled in several legal cases, and finally died in a car accident, under mysterious circumstances, in 2006.

Discussion: Zhonggong and innovation in the *qigong* movement

Zhonggong lasted only a dozen years. It had its moment of glory in the early 1990s as China's largest *qigong* group and popular organization, and then fell into complete oblivion. It presented, in the most fully developed form, many of the innovations found in most *qigong* groups to varying degrees, and which revolutionized the dissemination of traditional body technologies. *Qigong* is an imitative discipline: the body exercises are most often learned by watching and literally imitating an instructor and fellow practitioners. But the type of imitation propagated by *qigong* organizations was radically different from the traditional norms in which the transmission of body technologies had been couched since antiquity: in master-disciple relationships, the transmission of techniques was only part of a total relationship between the student and his teacher, in which the former was expected to imitate the *whole person* of the latter – a process that was to continue as long as the master was alive, and even after his death, through worshipping him as an ancestor in the teaching

lineage. The drawn-out nature of this process, in addition to limitations in communication technologies, necessarily limited the number of students who could receive the transmission. *Qigong* groups, on the other hand, adopted methods of mass propagation. They renewed a trend which had already begun with the “redemptive societies,” a wave of new Chinese religious movements of the early 20th century, which had established centralized organizations and networks of branches throughout China, each of which combined, under a single roof and with varying degrees of modern reformulations, the study of classical scriptures, spirit writing, the practice of body technologies, and philanthropy (Duara 2003: 89-123; Goossaert and Palmer forthcoming: chap. 4). These trends had their parallels in Buddhist reform movements and new religious movements in Japan, Southeast Asia and India. *Qigong* groups went even further by isolating the body technologies from the other activities, and devising methods to maximize their diffusion using modern media and organizational forms, in order to systematically increase the production of health, power, and profits.

The innovations in the *qigong* movement largely involved the application to Chinese body technologies of forms of discourse, propagation, and organization which were already widespread in post-Mao Chinese society. In the realm of discourse, for example, terminologies and forms of reasoning from the scientific domain were used to explain and conceptualize the mechanisms and effects of *qigong* practice. In the field of propagation, *qigong* adopted the format of the simplified, standardized, ordered *sequences of postures* and the *collective practice* sessions of the *ticao* (calisthenics) morning exercise routines which were practiced in all Chinese schools since the 1950s. To this was added *classroom instruction* in the form of multiple-day workshops combining theoretical and practical learning. The *public lecture* was used for the exposition of scientific *qigong* theory by “star” masters who emitted healing energy while speaking. The *mass media* – TV, newspapers, specialized *qigong* magazines and videotapes -- were used to spread sensational stories about *qigong* masters and healings, as well as to provide didactic instruction in specific *qigong* methods, and to explore the origins of various techniques in Daoism, Buddhism, or the *Book of Changes*. In addition to propagation through the mass media, one of the main vehicles for the dissemination of *qigong* methods was through word-of-mouth, through networks of friends, colleagues and family members, who were then integrated into complex, centralized training systems which, in the case of Zhonggong, were the backbone of highly sophisticated marketing strategies. There are many similarities between this

type of structure and the *direct sales* and pyramid schemes that were popular in China in the 1990s (and which were banned in 1998 [Jeffreys 2001], around the time that government support for *qigong* was fading and several groups, including Zhonggong and Falungong, came under police investigation). This is an area which remains to be investigated, but it is significant that Zhonggong rapidly adopted some of the most “cutting-edge” sales and management techniques at a time, in the early 1990s, when they were still quite a novelty in China. In terms of organization, the *commercial enterprise* was but one of the forms of bureaucratic forms adopted to structure the dissemination of *qigong* practices and discourses: *qigong* groups also typically adopted, or combined elements of, the state-sponsored *academic society*, the *school*, and the socialist *work unit*.

What we see, then, is innovation occurring through new combinations of pre-existing cultural elements: body technologies, discourses, dissemination techniques, and forms of organization. Such types of combinations can be analyzed using the theory of innovation proposed by the early French sociologist and criminologist Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904).¹² The interest of Tarde’s work for the study of transformations of traditional practices lies in his stress on *imitation* – understood here in a broad sense of replicating or copying ideas and practices -- as the essential characteristic of social life, his focus on tracing *waves* of replications as they propagate in society, and on the points of collision between such waves, which produce *innovations* that in turn become new waves of imitation (Tarde 2001). A Tardean approach involves a historical micro-sociology of practices, in which the analyst follows through time the trajectories of specific practices, locate the points of intersection of trajectories, and describe the resulting innovations and modified trajectories.

In the *qigong* movement in socialist China, we witness the conjunction of several waves of replication: (1) the propagation through time and space of hundreds of traditional body technologies through thousands of lines of transmission; (2) the dissemination of religious, notably Daoist and Buddhist, cosmologies of the body and the universe, through extra-institutional channels; (3) the imposition, by the intellectual class and by the state, of scientism and secularism as normative ideologies; (4) the expansion of the modern state, combining forms of bureaucratic administration with rational taxonomies intended to aid the work of social regulation (“religion,” “health,” “sports,” “science”) and deploying specialized institutions (schools, hospitals, research institutes) to standardize practices in each field; (5) the spread of mass media technologies including newspapers, magazines and television

networks,¹³ integrated into a single country-wide propaganda system; (6) the introduction of rationalized forms of business enterprise and corporate management.

Each of these waves can be unpacked into countless secondary processes, but it is sufficient for our purpose to bear in mind that what emerged as the *qigong* movement is a product of the intersection of the elements enumerated above. Although some of them, such as body technologies and religious cosmologies, can be placed under the rubric of the “traditional,” and others, such as ideologies, institutions, media, and organizational practices, could be classified as “modern,” a Tardean approach points away from a focus on relations between an abstracted and reified “tradition” and “modernity,” “China” and the “West”; and instead leads us to look at the concrete innovations produced by the conjunction of specific elements. In the *qigong* movement, these conjunctions were at times harmonious, at times antagonistic: what Tarde, in his “laws of imitation,” called “coupling” (*accouplement*) or “accumulation” on the one hand, and “duels” (*duel*) on the other (Tarde 2001: 199-246).

As a manifestation of the “accumulation” pattern, there was theoretically no end to the number of body techniques that could be propagated through systems of transmission combining media publicity around famous masters, mass publication in book form of training manuals, multi-level study courses, and nationwide networks of trainers deployed to parks and public spaces. Through the adoption of modernized forms of communication, diffusion and organization, they could reach a level of propagation unequalled in previous historical eras. At the same time, *qigong* organizations were penetrated by industrial and commercial norms of maximizing productivity, efficiency and profitability, as shown in the case of Zhonggong. As a result, *qigong* exercises, in contrast with other formulations of traditional body technologies such as *taijiquan* or Daoist inner alchemy, often zero in on the rapid accumulation and mastery of *qi*, and are structured into simple sets of exercises which are easily replicated on a massive scale. These techniques could be added to the repertoire of practices promoted by sports and health authorities to meet the goals of training the bodies of the Chinese people, alongside modern calisthenics, ping pong, basketball, bodybuilding or biomedicine. Once the reformulation of traditional practices and concepts around the theory of *qi* using a scientific-sounding vocabulary appeared to work to describe concrete techniques of the body and their effects on metabolism or blood oxygen levels, and even the nature of “external *qi*” and its effects, it became possible to discursively recast and “scientize” an infinitely extensible array of elements of Chinese culture, from the divinatory

properties of the *Book of Changes* and the occult signification of oracle-bone inscriptions, to the hidden teachings of the *Journey to the West* and the physiological stages of Daoist inner alchemy.

Harnessing the powers of a scientifically packaged *qi* offered the hope, held by many proponents of *qigong*, to trigger a new, Chinese-led scientific revolution that would unleash the paranormal powers of the human mind and body. I have argued elsewhere that much of the enthusiasm for *qigong*, especially in intellectual circles, could be attributed to the way *qigong* seemed to solve, through a powerful merger, the painful conflict between Chinese tradition and Western science (Palmer 2007: 300). And yet, this seemingly harmonious “coupling” or “accumulation” of cultural elements could not avoid triggering a “duel” with conventional scientific paradigms. In Tarde’s theory, accumulation can be compared to the absorption of new or foreign words by a language, while duels tend to occur at the level of basic grammatical structures, to which one can’t simply add new rules. At this fundamental level, innovation can only involve the complete substitution of one logical structure for another. In this case, the ontology, epistemology, and methodology that form the core of *qigong* “science” were incompatible with those of conventional science: as remarked by one Chinese scientist, if, through the projection of *qi*, a master could truly move an object at a distance, “all the laws of physics go to naught.” In 1979, within weeks of the first press reports of the “Extraordinary Powers” of children who claimed to read with their ears, a group of scientists challenged *qigong* advocates in a “duel” in the press which would last, with varying degrees of intensity, until the end of the 1990s -- the defenders of scientific orthodoxy launching a fierce polemic against those who would replace Newtonian science with a revolutionary new paradigm (Palmer 2007: 158-181). Until the mid 1990s, however, these criticisms were only sporadically effective in curtailing *qigong*’s popularity, and were even effectively banned from the press for most of the period from 1982 to 1995, thanks to high-level support for *qigong* in China’s scientific, military and political establishments (Palmer 2007: 71-72). These powerful supporters did not wish to see such a duel, or if they did, they hoped for the victory of this new Chinese science within a broader duel between China and the West.

As Tarde stressed, cultural forms are more likely to be diffused downward and in stages, radiating from those perceived to be more powerful, and who are imitated by the less powerful (Tarde 2001: 271-300). Indeed, merging Chinese traditions and Western science is a

project far more often advocated by the promoters of traditional practices than by scientific institutions: the weak, in this case the advocates of marginalized traditional body techniques, sought to enter the mainstream by adopting the forms of the powerful institutions of science and of the modern state. Although there was no consensus on these questions, there was a widespread obsession with the relationship between *qigong* and science and with the imitation or adoption of scientific terminologies, methodologies and organizational structures. The degree to which *qigong* conformed to or transformed scientific standards, and the implications of this for the nature of science itself and the future of world civilization – was a subject of impassioned debate, both within *qigong* circles and among supporters and critics. The debate perpetually oscillated between an “accumulation” unthreatening to China’s institutional organization of knowledge and power, and a “duel” between two modalities of embodiment, perception, and power over the world.

While some of the innovations in *qigong* could fit into the “accumulation” pattern and others into the “duel” pattern, discussions of *qigong* by participants or opponents of the movement tended to stress one or the other, in sweeping terms that reflected how they perceived *qigong* within an imagined ideological and cultural battleground: either as the means to merge Western science and Chinese tradition, or, on the contrary, as a revival of superstition threatening the achievements of science and rationality, or, back again, as promising the ultimate victory of Chinese wisdom over the West (or in the case of Falungong, of a victory of moral goodness over spiritual corruption). By the late 1990s, it was the duel pattern that prevailed. With the banning of Falungong and Zhonggong and the dismantling of other groups, *qigong* advocates seemed to have lost the battle. With the *qigong* label politically stigmatized, however, body practices and self-cultivation regimens simply shifted to other domains, leading to new combinations of body technologies, discourses, and forms of dissemination. By the early 2000s, some of these combinations could be seen in new waves of innovation rippling through a dispersed constellation of fields, ranging from Confucian quiet sitting and scripture recitation in parks, to yoga centers and training seminars offered by management gurus.

Chinese Character List

daigong baogao 帶功報告

duren kaihui, zhibing

zhanggong 度人開慧，治病長功

fagong 發功

Falungong 法輪功

fudaozhan 輔導站

Guoji Zhonggong zonghui

國際中功總會

Guoji shengming kexueyuan

國際生命科學院

jielogongtai 接功態

guo you guofa, men you mengui

國有國法，門有門規

Oumeiya'ao kuaguo shiye youxian gongsi

歐美亞奧跨國實業有限公司

qi 氣

qigong 氣功

qigong re 氣功熱

Qilin jituan 麒麟集團

Qilin wenhua 麒麟文化

Qilin wenhua daxue 麒麟文化大學

shengming kexue xuexiao 生命科學學校

Taiweike yangsheng fuwu

gongsi 泰威克養生服务公司

teyi gongneng 特異功能

teyi rencai peiyang xuexiao

特異人才培養學校

teyi yanjiu zhongxin 特醫研究中心

ticao 體操

xinxi cha 信息茶

xuanji 玄極

yinianli lilun 意念力理論

zaisheng xianxiang

yanjiushi 再生現象研究室

Zhonggong 中功

Zhonghua yangsheng yizhigong

中華養生益智功

Zhang Hongbao 張洪寶/張宏堡

Index Items

- academic society
 Beijing University
Beijing Youth News (Beijing qingnianbao)
 bureaucracy
Book of Changes
 Buddhism
 CCP
 charisma
 classroom instruction
 collective practice sessions
 Chinese Academy of Sciences
 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
 Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences
 CCTV
 Central Party School
 commercialization
 Deleuze, Gilles
 direct-sales and pyramid schemes
 Durkheim, Emile
 Extraordinary Powers (*teyi gongneng*)
 Falungong
 Harvard MBA
 hypnosis
 imitation
 information tea
 inner alchemy
 innovations
 International Academy of Life Sciences
 International Zhonggong General
 Assembly
 Internet
 Ji Yi
 Latour, Bruno
 Li Hongzhi
 management theory
 Marxist phases of history
 mass media
 meditation
 microscopic orbit
 paranormal phenomena
People's Daily (renmin ribao)
 Peoples' Liberation Army
 power-inducing lectures
 public lectures
qi
qigong
qigong fever
 Qilin culture
 Qilin Group
 Qilin Culture University
 redemptive societies
 replication
 science
 scientism
 self-cultivation
 spontaneous motion
taiji figure
taijiquan
 Daoism
 Tarde, Gabriel

telepathy

Tiananmen pro-democracy movement

traditional body technologies

training station (Zhonggong)

training workshop

transmission networks

UFOlogy

work unit

Yan Xin

Zhang Hongbao

Zhonggong

References

Abbreviations for newspaper and magazine titles: (page references are given in the following order: year/month/date/page no.)

BQB: *Beijing qingnianbao* (*Beijing Youth News*), Beijing.

RR: *Renmin ribao* (*Peoples' Daily*), Beijing.

QL: *Qilin wenhua huicui* (*Qilin Culture Collectanea*), Chongqing.

SKD: *Shengming kexue daobao* (*Life Science Herald*), Chengdu.

SMK: *Qigong yu shengming kexue* (*Qigong and Life Science*), Beijing.

ZQB: *Zhongguo qingnianbao* (*China Youth News*), Beijing.

Books and articles:

Chen, Hsi-yuan. (1999) "Confucianism Encounters Religion: The Formation of Religious Discourse and the Confucian Movement," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University.

Duara, P.(2003) *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Goossaert, V. and D. A. Palmer (forthcoming) *The Religious Question in Modern China, 1898-2008*.

Jeffreys, L. (2001) "Placing Practices: Transnational Network Marketing in Mainland China." In N. Chen (ed.), *China Urban : Ethnographies of Contemporary Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 23-43.

Ji, Yi. (1990) *Da qigongshi chushan – Zhang Hongbao he tade gongfa mizong* (The qigong grandmaster comes out of the mountain: Zhang Hongbao and the esoteric secrets of his qigong method). Beijing: Hualing chubanshe.

Ji, Yi. (1991) *Chao shengming xianxiang* (Phenomena transcending life), Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe.

Li, Jianxin and Qin Zheng (1996) *1995 – Qigong da lunzhan* [1995, the great qigong controversy], Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe.

Lü, Feng. (n.d.): "Dongfang wenhua de shengteng" [The rise of Oriental culture], in Zhidong Liu, (ed.) (n.d.) *Zhang Hongbao Qilin zhexue daodu* (Handbook on Zhang

- Hongbao's Qilin philosophy). Xi'an: Zhonghua chuantong wenhua jinxiu daxue, pp. 192-233.
- Palmer, D. A. (2002) *La fièvre du qigong. Guérison, religion et politique en Chine, 1949-1999*. Ph.D. diss., Ecole pratique des hautes études.
- Palmer, D. A. (2007) *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China*. London: Hurst and New York: Columbia University Press.
- Palmer, D. A. (2008) "Embodying Utopia: Charisma in the Post-Mao *Qigong* Craze" *Nova Religio* (thematic issue on charisma in Chinese societies), Volume 12, Issue 2, pp. 69–89.
- Qingchengshan renti kexue peixun xuexiao (Qingchengshan Somatic Science Training School) (2004), "Changnian juban Zhang Hongbao "Zhonggong" babu gaoji gongfa yi, er, san, si bu gong sucheng ban" (Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the advanced eight-level Zhonggong accelerated workshops offered year round), advertising flyer.
- Qingchengshan renti kexue peixun xuexiao (Qingchengshan Somatic Science Training School) (1997a), *Zhonghua yangsheng yizhi gong yibu gong jiaoshi xuexi ziliao* (Study manual for trainers of level 1 of the Chinese *Qigong* for Nourishing Life and Increasing Intelligence), Dujiangyan, internal publication.
- Qingchengshan renti kexue peixun xuexiao (Qingchengshan Somatic Science Training School) (1997b), *Zhonghua yangsheng yizhi gong erbu gong jiaoshi xuexi ziliao* [Study manual for trainers of level 2 of the Chinese *Qigong* for Nourishing Life and Increasing Intelligence], Dujiangyan, internal publication .
- Reuters (2000) "China Demands that U.S. Hand Over *Qigong* Guru," Reuters report, http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/200000924/wl/religion_china_dc_1.html.
- Tarde, G. (2001) *Les lois de l'imitation*, Paris: Les empêcheurs de penser en rond/Editions du Seuil.
- Wu, Hao. (ed.) (1993) *Zhongguo dangdai qigong quanshu*. (The complete book of contemporary Chinese *qigong*), Beijing: Renmin tiyu chubanshe.
- Zhang, Hongbao. (2001) "Wode jianli" (My resume), www.goldkylin.net/zunshipian/zunshijianli, (accessed in July 2001).
- Zhang, Hongbao. (n.d.): "Shengming qi yuan yu yundong guilu" (The origin of life and the laws of movement), in Liu, Z. (ed.) (n.d.): *Zhang Hongbao Qilin zhexue daodu* (Handbook on Zhang Hongbao's Qilin philosophy). Xi'an: Zhonghua chuantong wenhua jinxiu daxue, pp. 137-53.

Zhonggong Chengdu Longwangmiao Zhengjie 9251 Fudaozhan (No. 9251 Zhonggong training station, Dragon King Temple St., Chengdu) *Jianjie* (Brief introduction), advertising flyer, Chengdu.

Notes

The assistance of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the French Center for Research on Contemporary China in conducting the research discussed here is gratefully acknowledged. The historical and organizational data on Zhonggong presented in this chapter is condensed from several dispersed sections of Palmer 2007, esp. pp. 112-15, 146-50, 208-17.

¹ Reference to the Buddhist *triloka*: the world of sensual desire, the material and sensible world, and the formless world of the spirit.

² The other two were Yan Xin, known for his mass healing lectures, and Li Hongzhi, the founder of Falungong.

³ On the “charisma” of *qigong* masters, see Palmer 2008.

⁴ For a discussion of the notion of the “power-inducing lecture, see Palmer 2007: 143-45.

⁵ The *qilin* is the Chinese mythological unicorn. Its appearance presages the coming of a great sage. On modern Confucian interpretations of the *qilin*, see Chen 1999: 247-69.

⁶ “Extraordinary medicine” was Zhonggong’s therapeutic system.

⁷ See for instance Yan Xin’s formulations, quoted in Palmer 2007: 112

⁸ *Shenzhou*: China. The expression can also be translated as “Realm of the gods.”

⁹ Although Zhang Hongbao claimed to have invented the Supreme Whirl symbol, Adam Yuet Chau had seen renditions of the *taiji* symbol on the ceilings of some of the cave temples in Shaanbei (northern Shaanxi Province) that closely resembled the Supreme Whirl symbol (personal communication).

¹⁰ When the local center was registered with the Industrial and Commercial Bureau, it was called “training station”; but if it was registered with the Education Commission, it was called “school.”

¹¹ For biographic details on the Zhonggong leadership, see Palmer 2002: 456-58.

¹² Even though Tarde’s work has long been eclipsed by that of his rival and contemporary, Emile Durkheim, it influenced the thought of Gilles Deleuze in the late 1960s, and, more recently, that of the sociologist of science Bruno Latour.

¹³ The Internet, which became widespread in China in the late 1990s, was not a significant factor in the spread of the *qigong* movement, with the exception of its use by Falungong in the year preceding the group's banning in 1999.