

*Falun Gong: The End of Days*. By MARIA HSIA CHANG. [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 188 pp. \$25.00; £16.99. ISBN 0-300-10227-5.]

Since 1999, *falun gong* has been one of the most burning and sensitive political and religious issues in China, brought to the attention of the public around the world by demonstrations and media reports. Until Maria Hsia Chang's book, *Falun Gong: The End of Days*, was released this spring, no balanced book-length account of the facts surrounding *falun gong* was available. Chang's book provides the general public with an informative summary of the development of *falun gong*, its basic beliefs, the history of its repression by the Chinese state, and its connection with millenarian and sectarian traditions in Chinese religious history. However, the journalistic style and sources of the book underline the need for a thorough academic study of the phenomenon.

Chapter one, "A religious sect defies the state," outlines the story of *falun gong* from its foundation in 1992 to its continued repression today following the Zhongnanhai demonstration of 1999. In chapter two, "Chinese religions and millenarian movements," Chang summarizes the history of Chinese religions, secret societies, and millennial and apocalyptic movements, including the Eight Trigram, Taiping and Boxer rebellions, and argues that the Chinese Communists tapped into China's millenarian tradition in order to gain power. She then stresses that *falun gong*, contrary to its claims that it is not a religion, draws heavily from Chinese religion, and particularly its millennial and apocalyptic strands. *Falun gong* teachings are described in chapter three, "Beliefs and practices," in which *falun gong*'s cosmology, theology and eschatology are outlined with ample reference to the writings of Li Hongzhi. The next chapter, "The state vs. *falun gong*," goes through the Chinese state's charges against *falun gong*. Chapter five, "The persecution of other faiths," begins with a critique of the "rule of law" purportedly called on by the CCP to deal with *falun gong*, and argues that the accusations made against *falun gong* could just as well be made against the CCP itself. It then discusses the vast social dislocations in contemporary China that create a fertile soil for the emergence of apocalyptic movements such as *falun gong*, and describes how the persecution of *falun gong* is part of a larger policy to eradicate underground religious groups, several of which are presented. Finally, Chang concludes that, in the face of widespread social dissatisfaction, the fear of millenarian uprisings is the main motivation for the CCP's fierce suppression of *falun gong* – but its intolerance of "heterodox" faiths only reinforces their politicization into oppositional movements, increasing the likelihood of the CCP "reaping the fate" it so dreads.

In its general lines, *Falun Gong: The End of Days* is accurate and balanced in its presentation of the *falun gong* issue. Short (a little more than 150 pages long) and well written, it will appeal to the general reader and to journalists and undergraduates. Unfortunately, while an editorial preference for accessibility to a mass audience – evident in the format of

the book itself (no bibliography) – is understandable, the book offers few pointers for readers interested in more in-depth research. Besides Li Hongzhi's works, almost all of the sources cited are Western media accounts. The small but growing academic literature on *falun gong* by authors such as David Ownby on the sectarian roots of *falun gong* (see the special thematic issue of *Nova Religio* 6, 2002), James Tong on *falun gong*'s organizational structure (*The China Quarterly*, No. 171, 2002, pp. 636–660), and Benjamin Penny on Li Hongzhi (*The China Quarterly*, No. 175, 2003, pp. 643–661), to name but a few, is never referred to or referenced. The same goes for her treatment of sectarian and millenarian movements, which, based on early authors such as de Groot and Chesnaux, completely ignores, with the exception of Naquin's book on the Eight Trigrams rebellion, four decades of more recent scholarship. The section on the "White Lotus Society," for instance, does not take into account Barend ter Haar's authoritative work (*The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History*, 1992) which has demonstrated how the so-called "White Lotus" became a label used by the imperial state to stigmatize a wide variety of otherwise unrelated unorthodox groups. Although there is as yet no book-length academic study of *falun gong*, Chang, a professor of political science at the University of Nevada at Reno, seems to be either unaware of almost the entire body of scholarly literature on the related issues she discusses, or to consider it irrelevant for her purposes. Either way, it is a disservice to readers who might otherwise have used her book as a gateway for more in-depth research. Chang's book thus can hardly be considered an academic work, in spite of its publication by a distinguished university press.

As a result of Chang's almost exclusive reliance on journalistic accounts, rather than first-hand research or primary sources (other than Li Hongzhi's major works), she departs little from the standard Western media "script" on *falun gong*, i.e. the brutal repression by a totalitarian state of innocent meditators with weird ideas. There is little critical evaluation of the sources used or of alleged but unverified "facts" used as critical weapons in the propaganda war between *falun gong* and the CCP. For example, the alleged self-immolation of *falun gong* practitioners on Tiananmen Square on 23 January 2001 was highly effective in turning Chinese public opinion against *falun gong*. Chang briefly mentions *falun gong*'s denial of involvement in the event, but makes no mention of the *falun gong* claim that the event was staged by the CCP, or of the attempts to back up this claim through a meticulous deconstruction of video footage of the self-immolation – even less does she attempt to evaluate the opposing claims or their use by the two camps' propaganda arsenal. Indeed, while it is easy to identify CCP propaganda for what it is, there is nothing in Chang's book on *falun gong*'s masterful use of a variety of propagandistic methods, both in the classical socialist Chinese context prior to the 1999 repression and on the global stage of cyberspace and human rights activism afterwards. This raises questions as to the avowed "apolitical" nature of the sect. The organizational effectiveness of *falun gong*, and the political consciousness of its leaders and activists, is a topic

still in need of research. Overall, then, Chang's book is a useful and relatively balanced synthesis of what Western journalists and human rights organizations have been writing on *falun gong* in the past five years. Readers should not expect new data or critical analysis.

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*Chinese Scientists and Responsibility: Ethical Issues of Human Genetics in Chinese International Contexts.* Edited by OLE DÖRING. [Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde, 1999. 257 pp. DM 38.00. ISBN 3-88910-227-1.]

It has been more than 80 years since Chinese intellectuals, struggling with the complexities of "science and philosophy of life," debated the challenges of finding the moral wisdom needed to apply new scientific knowledge in ethically responsible ways. Could a moral compass be found? Would it be discovered in Chinese culture, or would it come from the West?

Advances in science and technology during the course of the 20th century have often outpaced progress in understanding "science and philosophy of life." Nevertheless, the importance of the ethical dimensions of science and technology has increased in all countries, and there is little doubt that the new technologies of the early 21st century are already bestowing on us new moral conundrums. As advanced technologies and scientific research capabilities diffuse around the world, the ethical traditions which inform moral choice seemingly become more heterogeneous, and the need for reasoned, cross-cultural moral discourse increases. The Institut für Asienkunde in Hamburg is therefore to be congratulated for convening the "First International and Interdisciplinary Symposium on Aspects of Medical Ethics in China," from which the 15 papers in this volume come.

There is no easy way to summarize the diversity of views presented in this provocative conference report. The authors include practising scientists from China and students of bioethics from China, Malaysia, Germany and the United States. But, the theme of eugenics – especially the ways in which advances in human genetics affect our moral stance towards eugenics – link a number of the papers. The atrocities of Nazi Germany strongly condition the views of the Western authors. Reacting, perhaps, to China's 1994 Law on Maternal and Infant Health Care, the latter seem to be urging Chinese researchers, medical practitioners, ethicists and policymakers to take the German experience to heart – even as China embraces the promises of the new genetic technologies. Thus, historian Sheila Faith Weiss' "Prelude to the maelstrom," an informative account of the origins of Nazi eugenics in the 19th and early 20th-century culture of German medicine, is not so subtly subtitled, "A cautionary tale for contemporary China?" The Chinese authors acknowledge this "cautionary tale," but also speak to the ethical challenges of new genetic