

## 'EVIL CULTS' AND HOLY WRIT

Benjamin Penny

**T**WENTY YEARS AGO, a dramatic event brought the Falun Gong to the world's attention. Early on Sunday morning, 25 April 1999, around 10,000 practitioners of the banned religious group gathered to meditate in silence outside the northern and western walls of Zhongnanhai, the compound in which the leaders of the People's Republic of China (PRC) live and work. They were protesting the detention of forty-five of their co-religionists in Tianjin the previous week following another, much smaller, demonstration. After some hours, and much consternation on the part of the officials inside Zhongnanhai, who had no warning that such a demonstration was planned, five

designated leaders of the protest were allowed in to meet premier Zhu Rongji 朱镕基. Afterwards, all the demonstrators departed peacefully, apparently satisfied. But whatever assurances were given on that day proved empty. Only three months later, on 20 July, the Party-state launched a brutal suppression of Falun Gong. In October, a new law was passed banning Falun Gong and other 'evil cults', as the official translation of *xiejiao* 邪教 (literally, 'heterodox teachings') has it.

Unsurprisingly, the twentieth anniversary of these events was not observed in Beijing, although groups of Falun Gong practitioners commemorated it in different

countries around the world. Coincidentally, on 17 July 2019, Zhang Yuhua 张玉华, an adherent of Falun Gong who had been imprisoned in China, became one of twenty-seven 'survivors of religious persecution' from around the world invited to the White House to meet US President Donald Trump. Two days later, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman commented:

Those the US invited to the so-called religious meeting include a member of the Falun Gong cult and some other people who have been smearing China's religious policy ... It [the United States] should stop using religion as a pretext to interfere in other countries' internal affairs.<sup>1</sup>

Although Falun Gong is still illegal in China — and anyone still practising it there does so in secret for fear of certain arrest — the government is now more concerned about another of the religions that features on their list of 'evil cults'. This is the Church of Almighty God 全能神教会, more popularly known as Eastern Lightning 东方闪电. The latter name derives from a verse in the

Gospel of Matthew: 'For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.' Followers quote this verse to justify their assertion that Jesus has returned to Earth, this time in the form of a Chinese woman. The founders of this millenarian group seem to have been originally affiliated with the Local Church of Watchman Nee, an evangelical group founded in China in the 1930s by Ni Tuosheng 倪柝声, whom the Communists imprisoned for twenty years until his death in 1972. The Church of Almighty God's primary teachings now derive from a new scripture, *The Word Appears in the Flesh* 或在肉身显现, which began to be 'revealed' in 1991. For China's more mainstream Protestant churches, both official and unofficial, the beliefs of the Church of Almighty God are heretical. The government focuses on the alleged crimes of church members, including the alleged kidnapping in the early 2000s of members of another church to convert them, and the murder of a woman in a McDonald's restaurant in Zhaoyuan 招远, Shandong province, in 2014. The fact of the murder is not disputed, nor is the fact that the six people who committed it represented



Poster of the Twelve Core Socialist Values  
Source: Benjamin Penny

themselves as missionaries of Almighty God. What remains contested is whether the killers ever belonged to the church. Some foreign scholars, such as Massimo Introvigne, agree with the church's position that the six were never members,<sup>2</sup> while others, such as Australian scholar Emily Dunn, have concluded that the six had once been members but at the time of the murder they belonged to a kind of schismatic microsect who believed they had received their own, new revelations.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the case, the Church of Almighty God, along with several other new religions that grew out of Protestant Christianity, as well as Falun Gong, remain firmly defined as 'evil cults' according to the Chinese government and continue to be subject to the full force of state suppression.

A more pervasive influence on the realm of religion in 2019 — one less violent and confrontational — is President Xi Jinping's signature injunction to religions to 'Sinicise' 中国化.<sup>4</sup> Inseparable from his vision of China moving into a New Era, the policy of Sinicisation applies both to religions of foreign origin and to religions that are Chinese or have been present in China for millennia. For Christianity and Islam, this means adopting a 'Chinese style' of architecture, music, and other cultural expressions of faith as well as reworking their liturgies and theology to emphasise what is compatible with Chinese ideas and morality as defined by the Party. For Daoism and Buddhism — for whom an order to Sinicise would appear to be redundant — official pronouncements

make the direction of the policy as a whole very clear: religions must keep up with the times and be relevant for today's China. How? By 'firmly upholding the Party's leadership' and 'profoundly understanding Xi Jinping's thinking on socialism with Chinese characteristics', and digging deeply into their traditions to find elements that bolster Xi's Twelve Core Socialist Values (prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship). By so doing, religions can thus 'participate in the national

rejuvenation and the fulfillment of the Chinese Dream'.<sup>5</sup>

For many religious believers in China, as well as most scholars of religious studies in Chinese universities and think tanks, these prescriptions are as banal and doctrinaire as they may appear to foreign observers. Yet the weight of official fiat means even officially sanctioned religious groups and their leaders must discuss them, implement them, and report on their fulfillment as if they were great profundities — or holy writ.



# 图说我们的社会主义核心价值观

## 社会主义核心价值

### 国家层面

**富强**  
Prosperity



**国家富强 民族复兴**  
国家富强，是建设社会主义现代化国家的物质基础。只有国家富强，才能为民族复兴提供坚实的物质支撑。实现中华民族伟大复兴，是近代以来中国人民最伟大的梦想。

**民主**  
Democracy



**人民至上 权为民享**  
民主是社会主义的生命。发展社会主义民主政治，是中国特色社会主义政治文明建设的核心任务。要坚持人民主体地位，保证人民依法通过各种途径和形式管理国家事务、管理经济文化事业、管理社会事务。

**文明**  
Civility



**彬彬有礼 仁德有伴**  
文明是人类进步的标志。培育和弘扬社会主义核心价值观，是建设社会主义文化强国的必然要求。要坚持以人民为中心，培育和践行社会主义核心价值观，推动社会主义文化繁荣兴盛。

**和谐**  
Harmony



**多元包容 以和为贵**  
和谐是中国特色社会主义的本质属性。构建社会主义和谐社会，是中国特色社会主义事业总体布局的重要组成部分。要坚持尊重差异、包容多样，最大限度地增加和谐因素，最大限度地减少不和谐因素。

### 社会层面

**自由**  
Freedom



**海阔天空 任我驰骋**  
自由是人类的天赋权利。坚持和发展中国特色社会主义，必须尊重和保障人权。要坚持以人民为中心，尊重和保障人权，促进人的全面发展。

**平等**  
Equality



**众生平等 自强不息**  
平等是社会主义的内在要求。坚持和发展中国特色社会主义，必须促进社会公平正义。要坚持以人民为中心，促进社会公平正义，让人民群众获得感、幸福感、安全感更加充实、更有保障、更可持续。

**公正**  
Justice



**公道在心 不偏不倚**  
公正是社会主义法治的生命线。坚持和发展中国特色社会主义，必须坚持依法治国、依法执政、依法行政共同推进，坚持法治国家、法治政府、法治社会一体建设。

**法治**  
Rule of Law



**章法有度 自成方圆**  
法治是治国理政的基本方式。坚持和发展中国特色社会主义，必须坚持依法治国、依法执政、依法行政共同推进，坚持法治国家、法治政府、法治社会一体建设。

### 公民层面

**爱国**  
Patriotism



**国家兴亡 匹夫有责**  
爱国主义是中华民族精神的核心。坚持和发展中国特色社会主义，必须大力弘扬爱国主义精神。要坚持以人民为中心，培育和践行社会主义核心价值观，增强民族凝聚力、向心力和战斗力。

**敬业**  
Dedication



**精益求精 乐业奉献**  
敬业是社会主义核心价值观的基石。坚持和发展中国特色社会主义，必须大力弘扬敬业精神。要坚持以人民为中心，培育和践行社会主义核心价值观，推动全社会形成崇尚劳动、热爱劳动、辛勤劳动、诚实劳动的风尚。

**诚信**  
Integrity



**一言九鼎 童叟无欺**  
诚信是社会主义核心价值观的精髓。坚持和发展中国特色社会主义，必须大力弘扬诚信精神。要坚持以人民为中心，培育和践行社会主义核心价值观，推动全社会形成诚实守信、一诺千金的良好风尚。

**友善**  
Friendship



**推己及人 善心善行**  
友善是社会主义核心价值观的归宿。坚持和发展中国特色社会主义，必须大力弘扬友善精神。要坚持以人民为中心，培育和践行社会主义核心价值观，推动全社会形成互帮互助、守望相助的良好风尚。

Xi's Twelve Core Socialist Values: Prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship  
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