

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF DAOISM IN QINGCHENGSHAN, SICHUAN PROVINCE

A chapter translated by Donald MacInnis from the book, Religious Issues Under Socialism in China, Luo Zhufeng, editor, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 1987

(Editor's Note: These published results of a three-year research project will give our readers an appreciation of how a Marxist value system understands religious faith.)

Qingchengshan is located fifteen kilometers southwest of Guan County in Sichuan Province. Daoists call it "The Fifth Wonderland", or "The Wonderland of Nine Rooms for Celestials". According to legend Zhang Lin of the Han Dynasty climbed the mountain, preached there and erected buildings. This is said to be the way in which Qingchengshan became a Daoist centre.

Qingcheng means "green city." The two peaks, Qingcheng and Pengzu form an axis with two lines of green ridges running southward, embracing what seems like outer city walls from both sides like a chair or dustpan. Outside the walls are crimson cliffs that even strong and vigorous monkeys cannot surmount. Inside the walls there are green trees the year round. The place looks exactly like a city, and so it is called Qingcheng.

Through dynasty after dynasty about seventy temples and monasteries have been built there. Six principal temples still exist: they are Jiafu Temple, Guchang Temple at the Tianshi Cave, Zushi Hall, Shanqing Temple, Yuanmin Temple and Yuqing Temple.

During the "ten years of chaos" (the "Cultural Revolution"), the temples and monasteries were closed and the Daoist priests were dismissed and driven out. When the Party's policy on religion was eventually reinstated after the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress, temples and economic production facilities have been gradually returned to the Daoist priests, and religious activities have resumed. Guchang Temple at Tianshi Cave, where the local Daoist Association is located, has been repaired with the help of the government. The mountain path from Qingchengshan to Shangqing Palace has also been repaired and widened. The "Nine Turns" which made access very difficult are now wide enough for two people to climb abreast safely.

There are about fifty Daoist priests and nuns now living in the temples at Qingchengshan. Ten of them are elderly, while the rest are young men and women. In addition there are about one hundred lay Daoists and workers of different ages helping them maintain the temples.

Not long ago Qingchengshan enrolled a number of young believers who had offered themselves as candidates for a permanent commitment to religious life. Candidates must meet the following criteria: they must be willing volunteers, have family approval, be unmarried, under the age of 30, and be senior high school graduates. In lieu of an examination, they must write an article explaining what they know about Daoism. After moving into the temple for three months of study, manual labor and community life, paying for their own board, they are examined by the head priests.

The young novices wear Daoist clerical robes. Master Zhang Zhilin teaches them Chinese while Master Zhang Zhiyi teaches Wugong. They chant the scriptures each morning and evening, accompanied by drums and gongs. During the day they work at various jobs. Ten of the students have been sent to Beijing for further study under sponsorship of the Chinese Daoist Association. The first graduates have already returned and are now in charge of daily routines at Guchang Temple.

One young nun had been orphaned during the "Cultural Revolution" when her mother, a teacher, died under the unbearable pressure of public denunciation and insult. With no means of livelihood and despairing of a life in the outside world, she decided to become a nun. Another nun, formerly a junior high school teacher of Chinese language and literature, came to the mountain to recuperate from a prolonged illness. After her convalescence, she stayed on to become a nun.

When asked why they had become Daoist believers, the young novices said they did so to provide the older generation with successors. Of course, there were other reasons. Some liked the freedom and quiet of the mountain, some wanted to become skilled in Taiji wugong, while others came to find a livelihood.

There are two kinds of income-producing projects at Qingchengshan. They produce wine, soda water and tea, and provide services for visitors and tourists. The milky wine is made from zonghua yangtao (actinidia chinensis) and pure water from a mountain spring, using a secret recipe. The wine has a sweet fragrance and taste, is pure in color, highly nutritious and not harmful to health. With an initial loan of rmb\$30,000, the monks built a factory, and began marketing their Dongtian brand wine in 1982--a wine which has become de rigueur for

high-class banquets. Dongtian Wine has won an award for significant scientific and technological achievement from the Sichuan provincial government. Every cent of the loan was paid back after one year of production. At present Qingcheng produces 60,000 kilograms of yangtao which, when converted into 100,000 kilograms of yangtao juice, translates into 200,000 kilograms of wine.

Gong Tea leaves come from the Daoist tea plantations of Qingcheng which has ideal conditions--the right altitude and temperatures and a cloudy, foggy climate--for producing this species of tea. Tea production began here in the Tang Dynasty. Subsequently, the tea was designated as "Gong Tea" (meaning tea used for tribute) in the reign of the Kangxi Emperor during the Qing Dynasty. The tea processing factory is now furnished with modern equipment and has an annual output of 2,000 kilograms, which barely meets the demands of the market.

Services for visitors to the monastery provide another source of income. These include admission fees, a restaurant, overnight accommodations, etc. With a million visitors a year, the admission tickets alone, at 20 cents each, bring in rmb\$200,000 annually. Overnight lodging alone brings in significant revenues.

These solutions for the problem of self-support offer great potential for development. Fu Tianyuan, chairman of the Qingchengshan Daoist Association said, "After Liberation, Daoism could no longer rely upon donations and temple fees for casting lots (a form of divinization based on classic scriptural texts selected at random by worshippers) as before. Daoism had to be self-supporting and create ways of sustaining itself."

Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Chen Yi, Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders are among those who have visited the mountain since Liberation. Foreign dignitaries, such as the Royal Couple of Sweden, are also drawn to this scenic spot as well as are people from as far away as Canada, Australia, France and West Germany. Premier Zhao Ziyang came to the Qingchengshan Tianshi Cave on June 21 1985 and showed great interest in its scenery, its historical relics and its recent development.

The lingering problems of Qingchengshan were resolved at the end of 1985 when the government intervened with a plan for allocating responsibilities. The government takes care of the mountain, the monks manage the temples, and the tourist trade is conducted outside the temple areas. By resolving problems in this way, the doubts of religious believers were effectively alleviated, unity was strengthened, patriotism reinforced and support for the four modernizations as a common goal was brought effectively into play.