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## Modernist Iconoclasm, Resilience, and Divine Power among the Mangghuer of the Northeast Tibetan Plateau

Resilience, a concept derived from ecological theory, refers to the capacity of an entity or system to persist despite externally imposed shocks. This article uses resilience theory to examine how certain ideas persist when encountering antagonistic concepts that are backed by superior social and material forces. Such resilience is explored in the context of the Mangghuer people of the Sanchuan region of the Northeast Tibetan Plateau in China. Resilience is exemplified in the concept of divine power, the foundational concept in the Mangghuer version of Chinese popular religion, and its persistence in the face of Chinese state modernism. This research suggests that the content and ontological assumptions of concepts are important in determining the cultural outcomes of social interactions. Understanding cultural reproduction, resilience, and change therefore requires descriptive ethnographic understandings of concepts, not just of the power dynamics and social and material forces involved in their interaction.

KEYWORDS: modernism—resilience—Chinese popular/folk religion—Mangghuer (Monguor/Tu)—Mao Zedong

**M**AO ZEDONG (1893–1976), avowed atheist and revolutionary modernizer, is becoming a god.

A person who does many good things for others will become a deity.... Chairman Mao did great things for people and so he will become a deity in the future.<sup>1</sup>

This article explores the underlying cultural dynamic at work in Mao's deification, within the broader context of modernism in the Sanchuan Region of the northeastern Tibetan Plateau. The Sanchuan region consists of several valleys radiating from a broad plain on the north bank of the Yellow River, in southern Minhe Hui and Tu<sup>2</sup> Autonomous County (Haidong Region, Qinghai Province, China). The majority of Sanchuan's inhabitants are Mangghuer.<sup>3</sup> Officially classified as Tu, the Mangghuer are part of a complex ethnic mosaic that also includes Tibetans, Han Chinese, and various Muslim populations. All these populations practice agro-pastoralism, and, despite differences in language and ethnicity, the non-Islamic populations to a large extent also participate in a shared, trans-ethnic culture (ROCHE, forthcoming a). Furthermore, though the Mangghuer's Mongolic language (SLATER 2003) almost certainly originated with Mongol soldiers settling in the area during the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), village and clan oral histories indicate that the ancestry of present Mangghuer populations can also be traced to Tibetan, Muslim, and Han origins (ROCHE 2011).

Reflecting this complex historical and ethnic setting, Mangghuer religion consists of elements of Tibetan Buddhism, tantric Daoism, and Chinese folk religion. This article focuses on the Mangghuer version of Chinese folk religion, which is based on the veneration of temple-based tutelary deities (*pughang*) who deploy their divine power (*ganyan*) to ensure peace and prosperity for the communities that venerate them. Divine power, I argue, is the conceptual foundation of Mangghuer popular religious life. The main religious specialists of this religion are *huala*, *huashi*, and *nianjiangui*. *Huala* are lay mediums through whom deities temporarily incarnate; they are not only the worldly embodiment of deities, but also the medium through which humans and deities communicate most directly.<sup>4</sup> *Huashi* also mediate communication with deities, but they do so by chanting, dancing, and beating drums to entertain deities and thus make them more amenable to granting human requests.<sup>5</sup> Finally, *nianjiangui* are seers who, though not able to

directly communicate with deities, can see the normally invisible deities and ghosts that populate the world.

Theoretically, my examination of modernity in Sanchuan relies on the work of SPERBER (1984; 1985; 1996), who proposes that anthropology should seek to understand how certain ideas assume their distribution in and among populations, using the analogy of epidemiology's exploration of the spread of diseases. In doing so, Sperber implies that concepts have intrinsic features, such as memorability and relevance, which impact their distribution. In this sense we can say that ideas have agency, as their distribution is at least partly determined by their internal characteristics. The central argument of this article builds on Sperber's observation:

Unlike genes, viruses, or bacteria, which normally reproduce, and only exceptionally undergo a mutation, mental representations have a basically unstable structure: the normal fate of an idea is to become altered or to merge with other ideas; what is exceptional is the reproduction of an idea. (SPERBER 1985, 31)

If reproduction is exceptional, then this study focuses on something even more remarkable: resilience. Resilience refers to the ability of an entity or system "to experience change and disturbance without catastrophic qualitative change in the basic functional organization" (LEVIN et al. 1998, 224), that is, persistence under conditions of stress. Originally derived from ecological theory (HOLLING 1973; PIMM 1984), resilience theory has since been applied to the study of economic (LEVIN et al. 1998) and social systems (ADGER 2000; CRANE 2010), among others. I apply resilience theory by construing Mao's modernist iconoclasm as an external shock to which divine power responded, and examine what intrinsic features made the concept of divine power resilient in this encounter. Since I am interested in concepts, I consistently speak of modernism, a conceptual construct, rather than modernity, its material and social counterpart. However, it is important to note that by modernism I do not mean the literary, artistic, and architectural movements, but the conceptual underpinnings of the modernist program, as outlined below.

This discussion is based on case-focused, multi-sited fieldwork I carried out in Sanchuan with Wen Xiangcheng between 2008 and 2010. This fieldwork consisted of collecting oral traditions both *in* and *ex situ*, observing and documenting rituals, and qualitative, semi-structured interviewing. The vast majority of consultants were elder (forty-five and above) male Mangghuer, as these people are locally viewed as legitimate representatives of valued cultural knowledge. The findings of this article therefore pertain only to the demographic represented by these respondents. Dates, but not locations or other demographic identifiers, are provided for interviews in order to ensure consultants' privacy. Although many Mangghuer terms have Chinese roots, I adopt spellings based on Mangghuer pronunciation, using SLATER's (2003) Mangghuer Romanization. Hanyu Pinyin equivalents are given for certain terms.

## MODERNISM

By modernism, I mean the intellectual project of modernity (rather than the practices, material and social conditions, and so on), including “a distinct social *imaginaire*, a combination of ontological vision [and] ... a distinct cultural program...” (EISENSTADT 2005, 31). Modernism is characterized primarily by an emphasis on rational human agency (EISENSTADT 2000; 2002), and temporal rupture with the past (GIDDENS 1990; CONNERTON 2009). MARTINELLI (2004, 6) traces the emphasis on discontinuity to the word’s etymological roots and original usage: “[Modern] was used in an antinomic sense compared to *antiquus*, particularly by St Augustine to contrast the new Christian era with pagan antiquity.” The twin emphases on rationality and rupture combine to create a master-narrative of perpetual progress, described by Scott as “a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the *development* of scientific and technical knowledge, the *expansion* of production, the rational design of social order, the *growing* satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an *increasing* control over nature (including human nature)” (SCOTT 1998, 89–90, emphasis added). Niebhur not only pre-empted Scott’s definition by half a century, but more subtly nuances the modernist master-narrative of progress: “Modern culture is distinguished by its confidence... in the *growing* power of reason and in its capacity, when rightly disciplined, to assure the *development* of every human power and virtue. The dominant note in modern culture is not so much confidence in reason as *faith in history*” (NIEBHUR 1945, 3, emphasis added). This faith in history, in a definitive rupture with the past and an orientation towards a better future, is frequently expressed through modernism’s signature act of iconoclasm—the deliberate destruction of the past<sup>6</sup>—and the construction of the artificial category of tradition to serve as a foil to modernism’s progress.

I contend that modernism arose in Western Europe, particularly with the French Enlightenment, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then spread across the globe with international commerce and colonialism. This initial wave of modernism was then adapted into a multitude of localized modernities as it took root around the world (EISENSTADT 2000). One reason for this was modernism’s unique relationship with nationalism: “Modernity authenticates the nation-state system as the only legitimate expression of sovereignty, with nations replacing gods and empires as the subject of history and linear progression superseding cyclical transcendence” (LEIBOLD 2007, 4). Furthermore, ONG (1996, 65) has noted how national master narratives “inextricably link modernization and modernist aspirations to the strengthening of the motherland and the territorial space of the nation-state.” China is no exception, and has, through successive regimes, consistently used modernism as a key aspect of its nation-building strategy. Here, I will mention only two salient aspects of the distinctly Chinese modernism that evolved.<sup>7</sup>

First is the importance placed on separating religion and superstition (NEDOSTUP 2009) in order to oppose “modernity” with “tradition” (ANAGNOST 1996). This distinction between religion and superstition is primarily a strategy for attaining

modernism's rupture with the past. A second way in which this has been achieved is through China's use of "ethnic minorities" in its nationalist modernist program. SCHEIN (1997), LITZINGER (1998), HILLMAN (2003), and HARRELL and LI (2003), among others, have argued that minorities have been deployed in the context of Chinese modernity as tokens of the remote past that must be overcome to attain modernity and hence advance the nation.<sup>8</sup>

Modernism arrived in the Mangghuer Sanchuan region in the early twentieth century, following the collapse of the Qing Dynasty (1911), after which Sanchuan came under Republican government administration. The Republican modernist campaign in Sanchuan included building schools<sup>9</sup> and holding campaigns to eradicate "harmful" traditional practices (see below). Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Sanchuan was subject to the sweeping modernist projects of the Communist government. In terms of a rupture with the past, this included the iconoclastic anti-religion, anti-tradition ideologies that impacted the area from 1958, intensified during the Cultural Revolution with the program to destroy the "four olds" (old culture, old customs, old habits, and old ideas), and lasted until the era of Deng Xiaoping's reforms, which began to impact the region in the early 1980s and focused on the "four modernizations": developments in industry, agriculture, science, and technology.

Although Republican and Communist regimes were explicitly opposed to one another, they both pursued similar modernist programs that included the propagation of secular education, the rationalization of production, and hostility to tradition, particularly "popular religion." YANG (2008) has also argued for continuity between the modernist projects of the Imperial, Republican, and Communist eras.<sup>10</sup> Shue makes a similar assertion regarding continuity between Mao-era ideology and early reform-era policy. Note the implicit emphasis on unidirectional, linear progress: "Mao, too, after all, had shared just that commitment to continuously renewing the vigor, the authority, and the revolutionary legitimacy of the party/state, so that it might continue confidently pointing the way to China's progress. His serious differences with the modernizers [of the reform era] on this were always over means, not ends" (SHUE 1988, 129). KOLÅS (2003) has also argued for the centrality of modernity in the Chinese Communist Party's political program, particularly with reference to Tibet. My argument, therefore, is that despite the veneer of ideological difference, the central program of successive Chinese regimes since the late nineteenth century has been one of radical modernism, what SCOTT (1998) calls "high modernism."

In Sanchuan, the peak of this modernist transformation was propelled by the policies and philosophies of Mao Zedong. Mao Zedong, the "Great Helmsman" of Communist China, was simultaneously its foremost engineer and its public leader. After sweeping to power following the Communist victory over the Republicans (1949), Mao initiated reform programs, based on his interpretations of Marxist theory, in order to hasten the country's economic development and transformation into a communist society. Although most contemporary sinological history divides Mao's regime according to state policy, for example, the Great Leap For-

ward (1958–1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), local discourse in Sanchuan amalgamates the entire period from 1958 to ca. 1980 into a single era of destruction.

It is unclear precisely why 1958, which MAKLEY (2007, 104) describes as a “point of historical rupture leading to unprecedented fear and suffering,” was such a definitive turning point. Earlier, in 1956, the institution of “democratic reforms” throughout Qinghai brought violent resistance that precipitated an aggressive reaction from the state (PATTERSON 1960). The destruction of 1958 may have been linked to the beginning of the Great Leap Forward and to the implementation of an anti-feudal campaign (MAKLEY 2007). It was certainly exacerbated by retaliation against CIA-sponsored Kham pa insurgents, especially for their involvement in the Nyemo incident in Lhasa in August 1958, in which seven hundred Chinese soldiers were killed (SHAKYA 2000; PEISSEL 1972). The year 1958 is also remembered because it was the beginning of a devastating four-year famine throughout China (BECKER 1998).

The iconoclastic storm of 1958 took place across the Tibetan Plateau and affected all ethnic groups in the region. Mangghuer typically referred to the post-1958 era as a period of absence: “During that time, there were no monks, no harvest festival, and no *huala*. The monasteries were empty. The government destroyed all the temples and statues inside the temples. Nothing was left.”<sup>11</sup> Temples and monasteries that were not destroyed survived only as storehouses. Religious activities were proscribed, and those who were discovered secretly carrying them out were severely punished, even killed. All religious practitioners were laicized and forced to offer self-criticisms. Religious icons and ritual paraphernalia were destroyed. Every trace of religious life was eradicated and the traditional order subordinated to a new, rational modernist regime of perpetual progress.

#### DIVINE POWER

DA COL (2007; 2012a; 2012b) argues for the importance of “economies of fortune” within Tibetan life, while I argue that central to Mangghuer life is an “economy of power,” rooted in the agency of *pughang* (tutelary deities) and their supply of *ganyan* (divine power). This section outlines certain key aspects of the concept of divine power.

CHAU (2006, 2008) discusses the concept of *ganying*, to which the Mangghuer term *ganyan* is related. However, whereas Chau states that *ganying* can be defined as “responding upon feeling” and is applicable to interpersonal contexts as well as supernatural ones, the concept of *ganyan* among the Mangghuer pertains exclusively to deities and their power to respond to human requests. In Sanchuan, *ganyan* is viewed as an exclusively divine property, though different deities may have larger or smaller *ganyan*. *Ganyan* is conceived primarily as the ability to help humans by sending suitable rain to nourish crops, but more generally by providing protection and ensuring prosperity to the communities, households, and individuals who worship them. The interview excerpt below recounts a speech given by a

deity while incarnated in a *buala* and outlines the promise of *ganyan* in conventional terms:<sup>12</sup>

I will give you gentle breezes and gentle rain showers. I will give you much grass. Livestock will fill your yard. I will keep evil winds and storms away and expel them to a distant place. I will give you a peaceful life.

A deity with much *ganyan* is described as *lingyan* or “efficacious.” CHAU (2006), BORETZ (2011), YU (2012), FEUCHTWANG (2001), and DEAN (1996) all discuss the Chinese concept of *ling* (or *lingyin*), from which the Mangghuer term *lingyan* is derived. *Lingyan* refers to a deity’s ability to bring about desired effects—for example, to cure disease or find lost livestock. A deity with a small *ganyan* cannot be *lingyan*.

Divine power and efficacy are related to the mundane forces of *kuji* and *benshi*. *Kuji*, “strength,” may be applied to humans, animals, or machines, and refers mostly to physical strength and stamina, whereas *benshi*, “skill,” is only applied to people. For ordinary people, *benshi* might refer to their success in earning money, passing exams, or achieving high yields in agriculture. For Mangghuer religious specialists, *benshi* refers to their ability to successfully dance, sing, chant, or otherwise perform in a skillful, imposing way. Strength and skill are unidirectionally transactable with *ganyan*; that is, the bestowal of *ganyan* by a deity may increase a person’s strength or skill, but not vice versa. Similarly transactable with divine power is *diandiar* or “luck,” which is conceived of vertically—rising when good, descending when bad—and is thought to reside on or around the head. As opposed to the relatively static and individual qualities of *kuji* and *benshi*, *diandiar* can be manipulated and may also be corporate, for example, within a household or lineage.

In order to facilitate *ganyan* transactions, Mangghuer may pray to deities by addressing them with such respectful terms as Daidi (Great Emperor) or Didi (Grandfather), then making a request, and concluding by saying, “Show your *ganyan*.” This is often abbreviated to a request to an anonymous deity or deities to show their *ganyan*.

Although such spoken formulae concentrate on the deity’s *ganyan*, ritual transactions focus on the deity, who is treated as an agent engaged in a dyadic social interaction. Johnson’s characterization of deities in North China can also be applied to Mangghuer *pughang*: “The gods were not far removed from this world; they entered it with ease and behaved much as ordinary men and women did” (JOHNSON 2009, 174). Deities behave like “ordinary men and women” in part because they are thought to have previously been humans who were later deified for their pious acts or spectacular achievements.

As such, *pughang* are engaged in interactions that closely resemble human sociality. Mangghuer often highlight the social nature of transacting with *pughang* by recourse to metaphors of cellphone signals: if the “signal” is good then the communication, and hence transaction of offerings for divine power, will be successful. The rank of the deity is unimportant in achieving success, contrary to the implication of FEUCHTWANG’s (2001) “imperial metaphor” that situates deities in



FIGURE 1. A *huala* has pierced his cheek with a skewer while incarnating the deity. Photograph by Wen Xiangcheng, 2010.

hierarchies of both rank and power.<sup>13</sup> Instead, what matters is that a connection is established between the supplicant and the deity, because deities are subject to human rules of etiquette, including obligatory reciprocity. However, deities are only obliged to grant supplicants' requests for divine power if the person has previously maintained a relationship with the deity, primarily by performing daily rituals in the home shrine. Such interactions mostly take the form of "feeding" the deity with offerings, including incense, votive papers (*qianliang*—literally "money and grain"), liquor, oil, and water.

When the obligatory reciprocity of such connections is activated in order to access *ganyan*, however, the ritual idiom changes to one of divine violence. For example, healing rituals involve displays of divine power to explicitly intimidate and overpower the malevolent entities that are thought to cause illness. Such rituals employ an idiom of spectacular violence that palpably manifests divine power "by recourse to a military metaphor of command, capture, control, and destruction" (DEAN 1996, 42).<sup>14</sup> Malevolent entities are located, captured (usually in a goatskin bag), and then confined (buried), exiled (thrown in a river and washed away), or destroyed (burned).

A key feature of almost all such rituals is the deity incarnating through a *huala*, who demonstrates the deity's divine power by piercing his body (usually cheek) with metal skewers.<sup>15</sup> Locals anxiously observe these dramatically charged moments, seeking indications of the extent of the deity's *ganyan*, including the number of metal skewers a *huala* pierces himself with, the size of the skewers,<sup>16</sup> the force with which these are pierced, the absence of pain felt by the *huala*, the



FIGURE 2. A *huala* demonstrates how, when incarnating the deity, he would run the blade of a hot sword across his tongue. Photograph by Gerald Roche, 2009.

lack of blood from the wound, and the absence of scars at the site pierced by the skewers. The significance of the metal skewers is attested to by the fact that they are forged over one hundred consecutive days, during which oil is poured on them rather than water (oil was, in the past, an extremely rare and valuable resource).<sup>17</sup> Once made, the skewers are kept in a temple and precautions are taken to maintain their purity, as contamination by sweat, blood, or garlic harms mediums and angers deities.

In addition to piercing with metal skewers, certain *huala* demonstrate divine power in other violent ways:

When the deity possesses me, I become very powerful, and beat myself with an iron flail.<sup>18</sup>

In the past, *huala* sometimes cut their foreheads with knives, and blood covered their face.<sup>19</sup>

*Huashi* can also access deities' divine power. They do this by engaging in intensified hospitality; whereas lay people "feed" deities daily, spreading small favors out across long periods of time, *huashi* hold rituals in which they beat drums, sing, and dance for deities, simultaneously delighting and flattering them and thus motivating, rather than obliging, the deity to respond by bestowing divine power in order to bring rain, heal, and so on.

In summary, the concept of divine power posits that deities have unique access to *ganyan*, divine power that enables them to impact human strength, skill, and luck, and also to intimidate, overpower, and violently manipulate the malevolent

beings that cause sickness and other calamities. In order to access this divine power, humans interact with deities in direct, unmediated relationships that involve both “feeding” and delighting deities. Displays of divine power are spectacularly violent, and focus on the *huala*’s embodiment of the deity.

#### THE RESILIENCE OF DIVINE POWER

Taken at its word, modernism is directly opposed to the concept of divine power as thus outlined. Modernism, with its sites set firmly on the future, requires progress through continually renewed destruction, first and foremost of its original foil, the catch-all construct of tradition, including concepts like divine power. Furthermore, modernism is an avowedly rational doctrine purportedly based on material mechanisms, whereas the concept of divine power is basically an extension of human sociality and its attendant mechanisms of reciprocity, obligation, and coercion (ROCHE 2011). In both its ontology and its content, modernism is in conflict with the concept of divine power.

ADAMS, SCHREMPF, and CRAIG (2010), in their discussion of interfaces between biomedicine and the Tibetan sciences of healing, point out that socially the situation is much more complex than the conflict I have claimed here. For example, a Western cancer patient in the biomedical system may adopt Tibetan meditative practices, and Tibetans primarily reliant on traditional healing methods may also resort to intravenous antibiotic injections. ADAMS, SCHREMPF, and CRAIG (2010) cite GARRET (2008) to position their statement within a broader framework in the history of science that has seen a shift from “conflict” to “complexity” approaches. “Complexity” and the general approach adopted by Adams, Schrepf, and Craig are certainly valid. However, it seems hasty to dismiss the potential for conflict arising from the ontological foundations and formal properties of different concepts. Doing so would reduce the massive violence of China’s modernist campaigns, not to mention history’s many other violent, conceptually-motivated conflicts, to nihilistic resource-grabbing, wanton destruction, and arbitrary massacre. Ideas, and their incompatibility with each other, matter.

Given that not only is modernism in fundamental conflict with such concepts as divine power, but furthermore that China expended vast social and material resources to pursue its iconoclastic modernist program across nearly a quarter of a century, it is significant to return to the following irony.

Images of Mao Zedong now adorn Mangghuer household shrines in Sanchuan, as they do throughout much of rural China. According to DA COL (2007), Tibetans in Bde chen Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Yunnan Province) venerate Mao as a *srung ma*, a class of protector deities. JENSEN (2008) has charted the incorporation of the Chairman into the folk religious system and the widespread belief that Mao will “be a god some day” among Han across China. CHAU (2006) also reports a room within the compound of a temple in Shaanxi in which lit cigarettes are placed between the fingers of a statue of Mao. This grassroots cult of Mao as an efficacious tutelary deity must, however, be considered separately from

the top-down manufacture of Mao's personality cult during the Cultural Revolution and afterwards (see, for example, LEESE 2011; FEUCHTWANG 2001). In fact, Landsberger has charted the relationship between the political and religious cults of Mao, demonstrating that the personality cult sought to incorporate religious imagery into the secular cult, whereas the later religious cult incorporates Mao into the Chinese folk pantheon: "As the ultimate Guardian, he was expected to render the same protection and blessing formerly associated with these deities [the God of Wealth; the God Longevity; the Well God; the God of the Granary, and so on]" (LANDSBERGER 2002, 156). Whereas Landsberger claims that the cult of Mao is modeled on the cult of the Stove God (CHARD 1990), I argue that Mao's deification in Sanchuan rests on more generalized models of divine power and efficacy.

Mao's deification relates partly to the scale and scope of his achievements in improving the basic economic conditions of the Chinese people. As a consultant stated: "We have such a nice life now because of Chairman Mao."<sup>20</sup> Since all *pughang* were once human, Mao is now being deified, like other *pughang* once were, essentially because he was efficaciously beneficial:

A person who does many good things for others will become a deity... Chairman Mao did great things for people and so he will become a deity in the future.<sup>21</sup>

However, the ultimate proof of Mao's power was not his ability to economically and socially transform China, but rather his suppression of religious specialists without any negative consequences, as explained by one *huala*:

Chairman Mao destroyed all religious things and nothing happened to him. The deities didn't punish him because Chairman Mao, Grandfather Mao, was more powerful than the deities. Grandfather Mao, Chairman Mao, controlled all religious specialists for thirty or forty years. He also made Muslims raise pigs at their own homes and nothing happened to him. Chairman Mao was more powerful than deities. He controlled them all.<sup>22</sup>

The tropes of power, violence, and domination seen in *huala's* public rituals are present here. In the same way that incarnated deities dominate malicious spirits in spectacularly violent healing rituals, Mao's regime of protracted anti-religious pogroms is viewed as an awe-inspiring display of immense power that makes him worthy of veneration and a potential source of efficacy. Mao's insistence that Muslims raise pigs is here taken for what it was largely intended to be—a display of spectacular power. Here we see an iconoclastic modernist icon being appropriated into the logic of divine power. Although Mao's material achievements are considered laudable, Mangghuer who enshrine him do so because of the implications his achievements have within the logic of divine power.

Another case study of the incorporation of a modernist figure into the logic of divine power illustrates the same process at work. Zhu Haishan was a Sanchuan Tibetan Buddhist monk who "was very powerful, and therefore able to control deities."<sup>23</sup> Also known as Zhu Lama, he was born in Jielong Village in Sanchuan's Puba Valley some time in the late 1800s. ZHU and STUART (1999b, 355) write:

His path to success seems to be based on the formula that other Monguor monks also applied: a winning personality plus fluency in Monguor, Mongol, Tibetan, and Chinese that allowed them to facilitate between different groups of Dge-lugs-pa devotees.... Knowledge of these languages was surely a major factor when the ninth Panchen Lama chose Zhu as his translator in 1923 while he was in Qinghai.<sup>24</sup>

In this capacity he traveled widely throughout Inner China and Tibetan regions, particularly within the Sino-Tibetan frontier region.<sup>25</sup> Zhu Haishan is said to have built the first school in Sanchuan, in addition to recruiting the teachers and students and designing its curriculum along Republican lines. He built a total of thirteen schools throughout the region, including a girls' school (a significant break with local gender norms), and established a library. Additionally, he implemented Republican anti-tradition campaigns, such as cutting men's pigtaails and unbinding women's feet, and engaged in patriotic nationalist activities, for example, staging anti-Japanese dramas in the schools that he built.

Zhu Haishan's worldly power as a modernist reformer overlapped with his locally extensive religious powers. He commissioned the building of temples and sanctioned the fission of communities formerly under the protection of a single tutelary deity. Probably his most significant religious achievements relate to Sanchuan's most important tutelary deity, Erlang Ye, also known as Huozhou Didi, as outlined in the following account:<sup>26</sup>

Zhu Lama became the Panchen Lama's number one aid. He had a lot of power and got lots of money from the central government. He built Erlang Ye's temple and also built many schools and a library. He had a lot of power, so after the harvest festival one year, he didn't allow people to take Erlang back to Huozhou. There was nothing the Huozhou temple keeper could do.

In addition to relocating Erlang Ye to Sanchuan, Zhu Lama is credited with organizing a linear, progressive schedule for the deity to tour Sanchuan villages in a series of annual post-harvest rituals (known as Nadun; see STUART and HU 1993; ROCHE 2011). Implied in all of this is that in the same way that the deities of Chinese popular religion were beholden to the edicts of the emperors, Erlang Ye and other local deities were beholden to the commands of Zhu Lama.

Although Zhu is not enshrined in the same way that Mao is, I assert that he has been incorporated into the logic of divine power in a way similar to Mao. Mangghuer discourse suggests that Zhu's secular powers extend into the divine realm. Because he could build schools and coerce locals into adopting a nationalist program, he could also build temples and coerce deities into relocating and rationalizing their schedules. Zhu Haishan manipulated deities without negative consequences in the same way that Mao suppressed them and remained unharmed. Where Mao was a radical iconoclast, Zhu was a moderate reformer, and yet, in many ways, their goals were commensurate. Both sought to open the Sanchuan region to modernism, a world view based on a disjuncture with tradition and the rationalization of every aspect of life. What Mao attempted to achieve through

destruction and repression, Zhu attempted to achieve through construction, reform, and the rationalization of religious practice. However, rather than being seen as antithetical to local traditions, the modernist figures of Mao Zedong and Zhu Haishan have now been incorporated into the concept of divine power in villagers' discourse.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF DIVINE POWER  
VERSUS THE FORCE OF MODERNISM

Let us now return to Sperber, who describes the reproduction of ideas as a problem, as ideas should be expected to alter or merge rather than be reproduced. The case studies above of Mao Zedong and Zhu Haishan present a more substantial quandary—that of resilience. The concept of divine power somehow persisted in the face of the massive social, material, and ideological force directed against it. In fact, even more remarkably, we saw the co-option of key modernist figures into the discourse of divine power, the absorption of iconoclasts into the logic they sought to reform or destroy.

In this section, I argue that the persistence of divine power in the face of the massive social and material force of modernism must, in some part, be due to the wide and deeply-rooted distribution of the concept of divine power within Mangghuer cultural space. This distribution might be demonstrated in various ways, for example, by looking at material culture and noting the ubiquity of temples, shrines, incense altars, and cairns at which divine power is accessed. Another way would be to look at behavior: making offerings to deities is a prominent part of Mangghuer daily life, and the most significant annual ritual in Sanchuan is the Nadun harvest festival, which focuses on local tutelary deities and their divine power. Here, however, I look at discourse to demonstrate the wide distribution of divine power. I therefore present examples from a variety of Mangghuer oral genres, including anecdotes,<sup>27</sup> oratory, song, and scripture, in order to demonstrate divine power's wide distribution through Mangghuer cultural space, as a partial explanation for the concept's resilience.

Anecdotal narratives were provided spontaneously in the course of interviews with Sanchuan Mangghuer from 2008–2010. Such anecdotes were typically the dramatic height of interviews, as demonstrated by their frequent use of onomatopoeia:

He put liquor in his mouth and, *pu*, spat it towards me.<sup>28</sup>

*Weng*, the deity possessed me.<sup>29</sup>

The *huashi* bit the rooster on the back, *pao*, and spat the blood out, *pu*.<sup>30</sup>

The following anecdotes focus on *ganyan*. The first two illustrate direct manifestations of deities' *ganyan* and concern Erlang Ye, also called Huozhou Didi.

Once I went with other villagers to mine gold. We didn't find any gold, but we used up all our money and everything else we had—food, everything. We couldn't get home, so I went to a mountaintop and burned paper offerings for

the deity. I shouted, “Please save us, Huozhou Didi!” Then Erlang Ye appeared and told me, “Go to the other valley. There is some gold there and each person will earn 3,000 RMB.”

I followed his instructions and led villagers to that valley. We found a lot of gold there; each of us dug out sixty to seventy grams per day. We dug like that for six weeks and thought we had done very well for ourselves, but Erlang Ye tricked us. Though he told us that we could each earn 3,000 RMB, the gold we found was worth much more. So one day, robbers came and stole most of our gold. Each person was left with only 3,000 RMB. Many people said, “This is a very good place to mine gold, we should dig more.” But I advised them, “It’s enough. Erlang Ye told me that each person could only make 3,000 RMB, so let’s go home.”<sup>31</sup>

Once, some Mangghuer people went to earn money in Huozhou.<sup>32</sup> However, when they arrived, a war broke out and everyone fled. People from here went to the temple in Huozhou and wrapped the statue of Erlang Ye in a sash. They carried Erlang Ye on their shoulders and held his hat in their hands. Eventually they reached the bank of the Yellow River, which was flooded. The men wanted to swim across, but they didn’t know how to swim. Then one of them put on Erlang Ye’s hat, placed the statue on his back, and said, “Erlang Ye, I will carry you across the Yellow River. If you don’t help me, we will die together. If you help me, we will arrive safely on the opposite bank, where I will build a temple for you.” Then he jumped into the Yellow River, and the water swept him to the opposite bank. Even though he couldn’t swim, Erlang Ye helped him. However, within a year, he was dead. Elders say that Erlang Ye was very powerful; he used his power to help a person who couldn’t even swim cross the flooded Yellow River, but that man shouldn’t have worn Erlang Ye’s hat. He couldn’t bear Erlang Ye’s power.<sup>33</sup>

Both these anecdotes attest to the deities’ efficaciousness and divine power. In the first anecdote, the deity benevolently assists villagers but also exercises arbitrary and spectacular control over their fortunes. In the second anecdote, the deity supplies divine power to bring about the miraculous crossing of the flooded Yellow River by a man who could not swim. However, the overwhelming intensity of the deity’s power was unbearable and the man died. Both anecdotes emphasize not only the deity’s efficaciousness in responding to human requests but also his spectacular power. The following anecdote focuses on this power, which in this case is not deployed to aid humans, but rather in a competitive demonstration of power:

Once, a Tibetan Buddhist tantrist<sup>34</sup> argued with the deity Niangniang Ye<sup>35</sup> about who was most powerful. Niangniang Ye said, “I will make a hail storm.” The tantrist answered, “Well, I can stop your hail storm, and you will not move even a single stalk of fodder drying on my roof.” Then, Niangniang Ye made a mighty hailstorm, and when the tantrist tried to stop the storm with his *dorji*,<sup>36</sup> it fell from his hand because of the deity’s power. The hail fell only on the shady side of the valley, so the tantrist asked the deity, “If you stop the storm, my descendants will give you paper offerings every year from now on.” So every year

during our harvest festival, people from the shady side of the valley bring paper offerings to our temple on the sunny side of the valley.<sup>37</sup>

On other occasions, anecdotes describe the manifestation of divine power as punishment to convince the unbelieving. The following anecdote describes a *huashi* choosing *sumuqi*, lay people that temporarily incarnate a deity. This is typically done when a *huala* is unavailable to incarnate the deity during healing rituals. After being enticed by the *huashi*'s chanting, the deity enters the *sumuqi*'s body through an arrow, spindle, rolling pin, or other wooden stick that they hold.

My grandfather was a *huashi*, and once he went to treat a patient in Sanfang Village. That's a big village, and so villagers there thought they were superior to my grandfather because he was from a small, poor, hinterland village. It was cloudy that day. My grandfather should have chosen some *sumuqi* himself, but several strong young villagers came and told him, "We want to hold sticks tonight." They didn't have faith in my grandfather.

My grandfather agreed, saying, "I will treat this sickness, but right now, you have chosen three strong men to be *sumuqi*. Let me first see if I can make the deity possess them or not." He then asked those three young men to look for wooden sticks. Usually people don't find very long, thick sticks, but those three men brought very long, thick sticks to show how strong they were.

The men returned to the main room of the house and asked my grandfather, "Master, should we wash our hands?"

He replied, "It's up to you. If you like, go, but if it isn't convenient, then, whatever..."

They said, "OK, we won't wash our hands."

Then they stood on the floor in the main room of the house and held the sticks in their hands. My grandfather hung up his deity image<sup>38</sup> and lit oil lamps in front of it. He then began chanting to invite all deities and to delight them.<sup>39</sup> He also burned three pieces of offering paper.

After he burned those three papers, he fanned his drum three times and those three men suddenly jumped very high into the air, until they almost touched the ceiling. My grandfather told his deities, "People in this village don't believe in you. Please chase these men out of the room. Make them jump here and there. Show your power so that everyone in the village may see it." Then he went out of the room and told the host to lock the courtyard gate. The host locked the gate immediately, and those three *sumuqi* jumped out of the room and danced around the courtyard. They jumped very high.

After a while, it started to rain and the ground became muddy. From time to time, one of the three men would collapse on the ground. They couldn't control themselves, and the sticks in their hands dragged them back to their feet; they couldn't let go. The men stood up and fell down, over and over again. They shouted, begging my grandfather, "Master, Master! We beg you, please help us stop."

At that time my grandfather went back inside, sat on the sleeping platform, and smoked his sheep-bone pipe. He said, "I just came here to treat the patient.

I have no time to help young people.” Village elders worried that the young men would die, so they begged my grandfather, who replied, “Now you elders have come to beg me, I’ll help you. If elders hadn’t come, I would have let them dance all night.” Then he burned another three offering papers and chanted again. When he finished chanting, those three young men bounded into the main room and stopped dancing immediately. For the next three months, they lay in bed and couldn’t move.<sup>40</sup>

This anecdote emphasizes the spectacular nature of divine power when the *huashi* says, “Show your power so that everyone in the village may see it.” The following anecdote, in contrast, emphasizes the violent and dramatic nature of such spectacular power. It concerns a *kurten*, a Tibetan Buddhist monastic medium. The term *kurten* is derived from the Tibetan *sku rten*, literally, the basis of the esteemed body. *Sku rten*, deity mediums mostly associated with Buddhist monasteries, are common throughout the Tibetan cultural realm; see ROCK (1935) for a popular account of *sku rten*, which he refers to as *srung ma*. Once famed for their dramatic displays of divine power, *kurten* have now disappeared from Sanchuan, though memory of them remains among elders:

*Kurten* are Tibetan *huala*, and they are very powerful. When I was very young, most of my family’s livestock died, and many of my family members got sick so we invited a *kurten* to treat the problem. The *kurten* plunged a sword into his belly, and then my father drove the sword in by knocking the hilt with a stone. When the tip of the sword hit his spine, I heard a sound, *keng*, and the *kurten* called out, “*Heng!*” Another time, I saw the same *kurten* put a spear into his belly. Then he ran into a wall to knock the shaft in, and the spear went through his body—about forty centimeters of it stuck out his back. I was very young at the time, but I can still remember that very clearly.<sup>41</sup>

All these anecdotes focus on the spectacular and tangible nature of divine power in times of crises (illness, drought, and so on). In response to individual requests, in competition with other deities, in retaliation for skepticism, and in pursuit of healing, divine power is spontaneously construed as awe-inspiring in all these anecdotes. In addition to appearing in anecdotes as explanatory models for healing, earning money, getting rain for crops and so on, the concept of divine power also appears in formal oral traditions, both scripted and improvised. The speech below was delivered to a deity in a village temple courtyard on the day of the local harvest festival. The Mangghuer text is given first, followed by the English translation.

*Zha, ninggesa qi ma Ghazher Suzong...*  
*Qimeidu shisansa jiaoduer, shisan shisi qini nadun bi sa.*  
*Qini baobuini nuoqighaji.*  
*Du zou shiwudu kuersa hai yao qimeidu nanshen geji.*  
*Ninggesa Ghazher Suzong...*  
*Qi ma shi nazherdu kuerji lan hong dang yu geji.*  
*Du zou wanmindu kuji kuerji.*

*Zhuangjiani baoyou shangchang gesa.*  
*Ghazher Suzong, du zou ningdu zhongxing rending jiajia huhuni*  
*pangong bang.*  
*Jiajia huhu dushi changqian baogai bang.*  
*Qimeidu ma shi xiezeng geser bang.*  
*Zai qimeidu shi shang you sanshisan tian ni Yuhuang Laoyesa jierbariji.*  
*Xiahuang ni Dizangwang Pusasa jierbariji.*  
*A, zou shi haiyou Mahanshanni Qinglong Daiwangsa jierbariji.*  
*Houshan Shanshen Daiwangsa jierbariji.*  
*Kanggeda Huaini Huoro Daiwangsa jierbariji.*  
*Ai, zai qimeidu muni ma shi chisi chimiao, benshi sizhusa jierbariji.*  
*Henan Erbei Xitian Dasheng Chuanshu Daidisa jierbariji.*  
*Laomiaoni hushusa jierbariji, yimiaodu luoshen.*  
*Qianshan Wobo Laoyesa jierbariji.*  
*Du zou benshan longkou longwangsa jierbariji.*  
*Zhaohua Shancheng, liang wan jiaojie Mojie Longwangsa jierbariji.*  
*Ninggesa hai qian you Shanshen, hou you Tuzhusa jierbariji.*  
*Ninggesa Ghazher Suzong, qi longnian guankan ge ma.*  
*Qini ma shi zou shi ni xia you baozhuang geji qini jiujiang pangong dajiadu*  
*daidao geba sha?*  
*Daidao geba gesa qi yige bai.*  
*Bi ge nao a. (shuoghor kerlalang).*

*Zha!*<sup>42</sup> Then you, local deity...  
 Since the thirteenth day we have venerated you every day; the thirteenth and  
 fourteenth days are your festival days.  
 We villagers gather today to hold your festival.  
 And then, on the fifteenth day we will hold a pacification ritual for you.  
 Then, local deity...  
 You stop wind and rain in summer.  
 And then, you help everyone.<sup>43</sup>  
 You protect crops until they reach the threshing ground.  
 Local deity! And now, here are offerings of steamed bread from people of all  
 surnames and all households.  
 All families give large paper offerings to you.  
 We thank you and give you such things.  
 And then, we worship the Jade Emperor of the thirty-third layer of Heaven.  
 We also pray to Dizangwang Pusa below.<sup>44</sup>  
*Ah!* We pray to Blue Dragon Emperor on Mahan Mountain.<sup>45</sup>  
 We pray to Mountain Deity Emperor in the hinterland.<sup>46</sup>  
 We pray to Huoro Emperor in Kanggeda Forest.<sup>47</sup>  
*Ai!* We pray to Buddhist deities enshrined in both monasteries and temples.  
 We pray to Chuanshu Daidi (Erlang Ye), Great Master of Western Heaven,  
 from Henan.  
 People from *laomia*<sup>48</sup> also pray to you, and bring their deity to our temple.  
 We pray to Wobo Laoye on Qian Mountain.<sup>49</sup>

And then, we pray to the deity living on this mountain pass.<sup>50</sup>  
 We pray to Mojie Dragon King from Zhaohua Fortress, which is the border of  
 two *wanzi*.<sup>51</sup>  
 Then we also pray to the Mountain Deity in front and the Earth Deity behind.  
 Then, local deity, please look with your dragon eyes.  
 Did you receive the steamed bread cooked by villagers down here and take it to  
 all the deities?  
 If you really did give it to all the deities, please rest awhile.  
 I will take a look.

The temple-keeper then throws divination blocks<sup>52</sup> and, upon receiving an affirmative answer, concludes the speech by calling out:

*Ai, hujiang, hujiang!*  
*Ai!* You have given, have given!

This speech differs from the spontaneous anecdotes above in that deities are frequently mentioned by name, and their unique personages, rather than their generic power, are significant. Though lines six to nine explicitly focus on *ganyan*, they do not emphasize the spectacular nature of divine power. Overall, the speech is structured around a gift of bread and paper to the deities, with the expectation of reciprocity through the bestowal of divine power. The multiplication of names represents a multiplication of potential sources of divine power. The speech concludes by saying, “You have given, have given,” indicating that the gift has been successfully distributed and, therefore, that divine power will be bestowed in the future. The following transcript of an interaction between villagers (A–D) and an incarnated deity, also focuses on the transaction of offerings in exchange for divine power. This dialog was recorded at the conclusion of a village harvest festival (Nadun).<sup>53</sup>

A: Burn offerings! Burn offerings!

B: Old Man, please tell us if you want to say anything.

*Huala:* Chuanhuang Erlang with seventy-two forms! Today you held your harvest festival in this village and both Sky and the Earth were pleased. However, villagers here don’t believe in me.

C: Deity, we believe in you! We believe in you! We trust you.<sup>54</sup>

*Huala:* Erlang comes to the human world and visits the festival ground. He sits in his sedan and watches your dances. Then he collects his paper offerings when the festival finishes, and goes up to Heaven and tells the Jade Emperor what happened. Afterwards, everyone benefits from great goodness and great auspiciousness, and everything goes well.

D: All of us believe in you very deeply. Please collect your offerings happily. Collect your offerings! Collect your offerings!

*Huala:* All of you invited Chuanhuang Erlang and Silang Daidi to your harvest festival. All the deities and people are delighted. The deities banish quarrels, battles, bad things, illnesses, pain, disasters, evil wind, storms, and hail to a wild,

empty, lifeless plain. From today on, all villages will benefit from great goodness and great auspiciousness, and everything will go well.

All: Very good!

As with the previous speech, the focus of the human-deity interaction here is a transaction of divine power. Villagers make offerings to delight the deity who, in return, reciprocates by ensuring peace and prosperity for villagers.

Found within the same harvest festival, *qixing* songs focus on divine power. Such songs are typically sung by two people and describe how deities protect people and prevent disasters, and also beseech deities to continue offering protection. The lyrics of two *qixing* are provided below in Chinese with English translation.<sup>55</sup>

二郎爷 *Erlang Ye*

七星,远来的七星	Seven Stars, Seven Stars from far away.
叫了七星开天门	Ask Seven Stars to open Heaven's gates.
开了天门开神门	Having opened Heaven's gates, open the deities' gate.
开了神门请万神	Having opened the deities' gate, invite all <sup>56</sup> the deities.
请了万神请二郎	Having invited all the deities, invite Erlang.
二郎爷头戴三山帽	Erlang Ye wears a three mountain hat on his head.
二郎爷身穿黄蟒袍	Erlang Ye wears a robe embroidered with yellow pythons.
二郎爷腰系金龙带	Erlang Ye wears a golden dragon belt around his waist.
二郎爷脚穿登云靴	Erlang Ye wears a pair of cloud-mounting boots. <sup>57</sup>
二郎爷手拿济救万民牌	Erlang Ye holds <i>jijiu wanmin pai</i> <sup>58</sup> in his hands.
二郎爷骑的是白龙马	Erlang Ye rides a white dragon horse. <sup>59</sup>
白龙马吃的是灵芝草	The white dragon horse eats efficacious grass. <sup>60</sup>
白龙马饮的是五江水	The white dragon horse drinks the water of five rivers.
白龙马戴的是霸王叉	The white dragon horse wears a regal bit.
白龙马备的是景泰蓝	The white dragon horse has an enamel saddle.
二郎爷骑上龙马下会坛	Erlang Ye rides a dragon horse and comes to the festival ground.
二郎爷下了会坛点会手	Erlang Ye arrives at the festival ground and summons performers.
三姓会手都有喜	All performers become happy.
点罢会手请神位	Having finished summoning performers, the deity takes his seat.
某某年的七月十五	The fifteenth day of the seventh month of xx <sup>61</sup> year.
三姓人等跳宝会	All the people dance in your festival.

龙堂宝会谢神恩	We dance in your festival to repay the deity's kindness.
无数钱粮谢神恩	We give countless paper offerings to repay the deity's kindness.
长久宝盖谢神恩	We give eternal paper offerings to repay the deity's kindness.
头缸头酒谢神恩	We give the first jar of the first batch of liquor to repay the deity's kindness.
九江蟠龙谢神恩	We give steamed breads to repay the deity's kindness.
谢了神恩谢万神	Having repaid the deity's kindness, we repay all deities.
锁脚爷 <i>Suojie Ye</i>	
七星,远来的七星	Seven Stars, Seven Stars from far away.
叫了七星开天门	Ask Seven Stars to open Heaven's gates.
开了天门开神门	Having opened Heaven's gates, open the deities' gate.
开了神门请万神	Having opened the deities' gate, invite all the deities.
请了万神请锁脚	Having invited all the deities, invite Suojie.
锁脚爷头戴九龙帽	Suojie Ye wears a nine-dragon hat on his head.
锁脚爷身穿红蟒袍	Suojie Ye wears a robe embroidered with red pythons.
锁脚爷腰系金龙带	Suojie Ye wears a golden dragon belt on his waist.
锁脚爷脚踏风火轮	Suojie Ye stands on wheels of wind and fire.
锁脚爷手拿济救万民牌	Suojie Ye holds a <i>jijiu wanmin pai</i> .
锁脚爷骑的是黑龙马	Suojie Ye rides a black dragon horse.
黑龙马吃的是宝山的草	The black dragon horse eats grass from Treasure Mountain.
黑龙马饮的是宝泉的水	The black dragon horse drinks water from Treasure Spring.
黑龙马戴的是霸王叉	The black dragon horse wears a regal bit.
黑龙马备的是景泰蓝	The black dragon horse has an enamel saddle.
锁脚爷骑上龙马下会坛	Suojie Ye rides a dragon horse to the festival ground.
锁脚爷下了会坛点会手	Suojie Ye arrives at the festival ground and summons performers.
三姓会手都有喜	All performers become happy.
点罢会手请神位	Having finished summoning performers, the deity takes his seat.
某某年的七月十五	The fifteenth day of the seventh month of xx year.
三姓人等跳宝会	The people of three surnames dance at your festival.
龙堂宝会谢神恩	We dance at your festival to repay the deity's kindness.

无数钱粮谢神恩	We give countless paper offerings to repay the deity's kindness.
长久宝盖谢神恩	We give eternal paper offerings to repay the deity's kindness.
头缸头酒谢神恩	We give the first jar of the first batch of liquor to repay the deity's kindness.
九江蟠龙谢神恩	We give steamed bread to repay the deity's kindness.
谢了神恩谢万神	Having repaid the deity's kindness, we repay all deities.

These songs employ much detail in portraying the deities as powerful, awe-inspiring figures. The deities' grandeur is established by lavishing attention on every detail of their attire and even the attributes of the horse. This wealth of specifics indexes the deity's power by creating an ornate, imposing image within what FEUCHTWANG (2011, 65), calls a "regime of visibility":

By "regime," I mean a disposition of political authority, in a narrow sense, and more broadly, an habitual ordering of the world into what can and what cannot be seen, a regime which also entails ways of making the invisible apparent, of imagining it. Behind visualization is an invisible authority that makes it possible, an authority that reveals hidden principles and forces, of good or of malice, of truth or of error.

This "regime of visibility" and its ornately graphic construction of deities' divine power is also present in *hao* "invocation scriptures"<sup>62</sup> used by religious specialists and lay people to summon deities during rituals. A Mangghuer consultant summarized the general content of *hao* as follows:

Some *hao* are about a deity's power, and some are about their power and their dress. Some *hao* are only about the deity's dress, but most are about deities' power and dress.<sup>63</sup>

The following text of the *hao* of Heichi Longwang or "Black Lake Dragon King" was transcribed from an unpublished handwritten manuscript.

青石宝山黑池龙王	Green Stone Treasure Mountain Black Lake Dragon King!
身穿红袍显威灵	You wear a red robe, and appear very majestic.
又骑黄龙驾祥云	You ride a yellow dragon that floats on auspicious clouds.
头顶玉皇掌乾坤	The Jade Emperor above your head controls the sky and earth.
卫城小将玉帝门	Little generals who defend the Jade Emperor's city live just inside the city entrance,
唯有我主在西山	But our deity lives on West Mountain.
二查山顶有龙宫	The Dragon Palace where you live is atop Ercha Peak.

行风风调	When you direct wind, the wind is very gentle.
行雨雨顺	When you command rain, the rainfall is well distributed.
掌上感应显神通	You use your hands to direct wind and rain.
手指杨柳一枝春	When you point your finger at a poplar or a willow, its branches turn green.
大悲大愿	With infinite compassion and the capacity to fulfill wishes!
大圣大慈	With supreme holiness and unparalleled mercy!
青石宝山黑池威灵龙王	Green Stone Treasure Mountain, Magical Black Lake Dragon King!

This scripture describes in detail the extent and nature of the deity's divine power—the ability to direct wind and rain judiciously and even to cause trees to bloom. Although the deity is described as compassionate and merciful, it is clear that his primary features are power and efficacy, evident in the deity's abilities, appearance, and even place of residence.

These various texts, formal and informal, spontaneous and scripted, oral and written, demonstrate the reoccurrence of the concept of divine power, particularly emphasizing its awesomely violent and highly visible nature. This is indicative of the concept's wide and deeply-rooted distribution in Mangghuer cultural space, and this, in part, must account for divine power's resilience to the onslaught of modernism.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS:

##### DIVINE POWER'S RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF MODERNISM

I have asserted that ideas have agency and that cultural change occurs (or not) in part because of this agency, not only because of the political and material force associated with the ideas. The present case is illustrative. The political power and material resources of the parties involved are so asymmetrical that the outcome should be taken for granted. The concept of divine power is socially backed by elder males in Sanchuan and materially supported by limited infrastructure and meager capital. Despite the local prestige and influence of elders (especially in domestic contexts), it is difficult to see how these men could compete with the social groups that advocated modernism—social agents empowered by superior technology, supported by the entirety of the cash economy, and sanctioned by state legitimacy. I find it unfeasible that the persistence of divine power is a matter of political, social, or material resistance. In fact, the events from 1958 onward demonstrated that divine power and its sociopolitical backers were helpless in the face of modernism. The physical destruction was total—"nothing was left." Divine power's resilience therefore presents a problem, and I look to the concepts of modernism and divine power themselves to understand what has happened.

I noted above that the concept of divine power is widespread in Mangghuer cultural space. To say that something is widespread, however, does not necessarily mean it is resilient—consider the carrier pigeon. So while the widespread nature

of the concept of divine power must have contributed to its resilience, I also think we must look elsewhere for further explanation. Sperber suggests that some ideas spread more easily because they are more evocative and relevant than others, and I argue that certain ideas may be more resilient for these same reasons. He elaborates on the concepts of evocativeness and relevance as follows: “The most evocative representations are those which... are closely related to the subject’s other mental representations” (SPERBER 1984, 85).

My assertion is that modernism inadvertently lent greater relevance and evocativeness to the concept of divine power by reproducing its tropes and logic. Firstly, we can note the importance of spectacle and violence within the logic of divine power, and the ways in which Chinese modernism relied heavily on these same methods. The anecdotes of gold miners, refugees crossing the Yellow River, and arrogant *sumuqi* all attest to the ability of deities to unleash arbitrary and extreme violence, almost spontaneously. Chinese state modernism, particularly post-1958, reproduced this same extreme and arbitrary violence.

Not just in its violence but also in its exercise of total control, the politics of Chinese state modernism also reproduced the dynamics of domination so important to the logic of divine power, through the total reorganization of social, spiritual, economic, and personal life. In the same way that modernism seeks to obliterate the past, divine power contains, exiles, or destroys antithetical forces. Furthermore, both the violence and control of Chinese modernism descended, like the authority of deities, from beyond an unbreachable divide. Both regimes, divine and modernist, were highly authoritarian.

These resemblances between modernism and divine power, I argue, bestowed greater relevance and evocativeness upon the concept of divine power. To borrow Sperber’s words mentioned above, modernism was closely related to “the subject’s other mental representations”—to divine power. Whilst aggressively attacking the concept of divine power through spectacular, violent, authoritative means, modernism inevitably confirmed to the Mangghuer what they already knew—that great accomplishment is due to spectacular violence. The resilience of the concept of divine power can therefore be explained by its widespread and deeply engrained nature within Mangghuer cultural space, coupled with modernism’s unintentional replication of divine power’s authoritarianism and spectacular violence.

Finally, I suggest that another feature of divine power made it resilient. In addition to deploying spectacular violence against antithetical elements, rituals in which divine power is manifest also turn violence against the medium and the deity. Mediums beat themselves with metal flails, cut their foreheads, pierce their face with skewers, plunge swords into their abdomen, and drive spears through their body, all without any later sign of damage. Contained in these acts is a vivid demonstration of the possibility for resilience in the face of extreme violence. This may have also contributed to the resilience of the concept of divine power in the face of modernism’s vicious onslaught.

To sum up, I have privileged concepts over material and social power in my analysis of modernism’s impact among the Mangghuer of Sanchuan. My aim was

to demonstrate that the content of concepts are significant in the cultural outcomes of social interactions. Without a nuanced understanding of divine power and modernism as concepts, it is difficult to explain why divine power has proved so resilient and therefore why Mao is being deified. If the content of concepts determines the cultural outcomes of social interactions, then ideas in some sense have agency. Different concepts will interact differently, and an understanding of social and material relations is insufficient to understand the cultural outcomes of social interactions. This suggests that we need descriptive, interpretive ethnography that seeks to understand and unpack the content of concepts like modernism and divine power. Such ethnography has an important role to play in understanding cultural reproduction, resilience, and change in the turbulent twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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#### NOTES

\* “I” as used throughout this article refers to Gerald Roche. I collaborated with Wen Xiangcheng on the research on which this article is based, and Wen Xiangcheng provided all transcriptions and translations. The remainder of the work is mine. I wish to thank Timothy Thurston, C. K. Stuart, Elena McKinlay, Ligaya Beebe, and anonymous reviewers for their comments. I am also indebted to Charles Ramble for introducing me to the work of Dan Sperber.

1. Interview, 22 August 2008.

2. Tu is an official ethnic designation in China. The term “Monguor” is often employed synonymously in Western literature. The Tu/Monguor population of Sanchuan are referred to as Mangghuer, to distinguish them from other Monguor populations in the region.

3. For more on the Mangghuer, see HU and STUART (1992a, 1992b); STUART and HU (1992, 1993); ZHU and STUART (1999a, 1999b); ZHU et al. (1994–1995); ZHU et al. (1997); WANG and STUART (1995a, 1995b); WANG, ZHU, and STUART (1995); SLATER (2003).

4. Images of *huala* can be seen at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/geraldroche/sets/72157629091077420/>. See OVERMEYER (2009) for a review of the literature on spirit mediums in northern China. For more on mediums in the surrounding area, see BUFETRILLE (2008); BEROUNSKÝ (2008); HA and STUART (2008); and SNYING BO RGYAL and RINO (2009). The term *huala* is likely related to the local Chinese term *fala*.

5. Images of *huashi* can be seen at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/geraldroche/sets/72157629093050934/>. The term *huashi* is likely derived from the local Chinese term *fashi*.

6. This does not suggest, of course, that all iconoclasm is modernist. See SIMPSON (2010) for a general discussion of iconoclasm and VAN DER VEER (2012) for a comparative study of modernist iconoclasm in India and China.

7. See YANG (2008) and ONG (1996) for overviews of China’s modernist program. For literature on modernism in China as an aesthetic movement, see LIU and TANG (1993) and ZHANG (1997). Literature also exists for specifically ethnic visions of modernity in China, particularly in the case of Tibetan modernity (for example, GAYLEY 2011, HARTLEY 2002).

8. Beyond these two features of Chinese modernism, ONG (1996) notes that in the second half of the twentieth century, China’s modernist program continued to evolve by assuming culturally Confucian characteristics. HILLMAN (2003) also describes how the perception of minorities shifted from their being used as foils to modernism, to their difference, and

modernism's visible persistence, being integrated into state development initiatives focused on ethnic tourism.

9. ZHU and STUART (1999b) provide a history of education in the region.

10. GOOSSAERT (2006) discusses the iconoclastic Imperial modernization program launched in 1898, and DUARA (1991) deals with the Republican modernization project and its targetting of "popular religion."

11. Interview, 19 November 2009.

12. Interview, 20 December 2008.

13. AHERN (1981) also discusses the imperial model. HYMES (2002) discusses at length the distinction between "imperial/ bureaucratic" and "personal" models of deities in China.

14. I am indebted to the work of BORETZ (1995; 2011) for drawing my attention to the significance of martial violence in Chinese popular religion. YU's (2012) work on self-inflicted violence is also relevant in this context.

15. To some extent, piercing with such skewers also demonstrates that the *huala* is a "real" *huala* rather than a "fake."

16. A consultant interviewed on 7 March 2009 stated, "Our skewers are much thicker than others—they would kill a person if the deity didn't help him."

17. Interview, 28 November 2009.

18. Interview, 19 November 2009.

19. Interview, 5 October 2009. In this case, the presence of blood and the *huala*'s ability to withstand pain are proof of his genuine possession and the deity's power. This contrasts with the use of skewers, which should not produce bleeding. Cutting the forehead was also done by Tibetan mediums (*lha pa*; see SNYING BO RGYAL and RINO 2009) and Chinese mediums (*fala*) in the region.

20. Interview, 8 April 2010.

21. Interview, 22 August 2008.

22. Interview, 21 November 2009.

23. Interview, 6 March 2010.

24. For more on Zhu Haishan see ROCHE (forthcoming b).

25. See TUTTLE (2005) for a description of the Panchen Lama's activities in the Sino-Tibetan frontier regions, preaching Buddhism and agitating for the Republican government, and his reliance on local translators and intermediaries.

26. See WANG (2006) and HINTON (2001) for a discussion of this deity. The name Huozhou Didi refers to the deity's local origin in the Huozhou region, on the southern bank of the Yellow River—contemporary Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province.

27. Following CASHMAN (2008), I define anecdotes as narratives that emerge spontaneously within conversation as opposed to other, more deliberately framed performance events, such as epic recitation. I do not intend the pejorative implications of "anecdote" as an unverifiable narrative.

28. Interview, 25 October 2005.

29. Interview, 10 April 2010.

30. Interview, 18 December 2008.

31. Interview, 8 March 2009.

32. See note 26 for details on the location of Huozhou.

33. Interview, 20 November 2009.

34. The speaker used the local Chinese/Mangghuer term *benbenzi*. The literary Tibetan term is *sngags pa*, though local Tibetans typically use the oral term *dpon*.

35. Niangniang is a term of address equivalent to “Lady” and is a general term applied to female deities. See HA and STUART (2008) for details regarding a Niangniang deity in Hawan Mongghul village.

36. Tibetan: *rdo rje*. This ritual implement is used by Tibetan Buddhist tantrists while performing rituals.

37. Interview, 4 October 2009.

38. *Huashi* venerate the deity Zhenwu Zushi. See GROOTAERS (1952) for more on this deity.

39. This follows a ritual formula whereby a specific named deity, and then a multitude of nameless deities, are invited.

40. Interview, 20 November 2009.

41. Interview, 29 November 2010.

42. *Zha* is a vocable without identifiable lexical meaning. The vocables *ah* and *ai* also appear in this speech. Such vocables add emphasis rather than metrical symmetry.

43. The term *wanmin* literally means ten thousand people but figuratively means many or all people—humanity in general.

44. The expression used for “below” is Xiahuang, referring to the underworld where souls go after death for judgment. The name is often glossed as “hell,” but is better rendered as “purgatory” since the souls are eventually released rather than trapped for eternal damnation. Here we use the value-neutral “below.” Dizangwang Pusa is the King of Xiahuang who judges the souls of the deceased based on their actions while living.

45. A mountain in Gansu Province.

46. *Houshan*, literally “behind mountain.”

47. Mount Kanggeda is located on the border of Gangou Township and Manping Town in Minhe County. The lower slopes are forested and the upper slopes and peak are rocky.

48. *Laomiao* literally means “old temple” and here refers to the ancestral temple of which the local temple is a branch.

49. We were unable to identify this mountain. Wobo Laoye refers to a deity residing in a cairn on the mountain.

50. The village is located near a col on an unnamed hillside. “The deity on this mountain pass” does not refer to any specific deity.

51. A *wanzi* is a bowl-shaped depression or cirque on a mountain or hillside where villages are often located.

52. Such divination blocks are widely used throughout East Asia. KUAH-PEARCE (2006) reports that they are called *mubei* in Fujian province. BUFFETRILLE (2008) identifies them as *rwa mo* in the Tibetan communities of Reb gong, whereas SNYING BO RGYAL and RINO (2009) call them *gua* for the same region. AHERN (1981) gives a detailed account of the use of divination blocks in Chinese folk religion and FADIMAN (1998) attests to their usage among the Hmong. HANSEN (1990) cites Cheng Dachang (1123–1195) as positing their origin in divining with oyster shells.

53. Reconstruction and transcription based on video taken in Lajia, 26 October 2001. This video is available online (accessed 12 February 2012) at <http://www.archive.org/details/MinheMangghuerTuNadunInBaojiaVillageWithGaishangAndLajiaVillages>.

54. Rather than being tempted to interpret this focus on sincerity as the result of anxiety in the face of growing secularism and so on, it is probably more accurate to read it within the

broader concern for sincerity as an important condition of efficacy within Chinese folk religion, for example, as described by SNYDER-REINKE (2009).

55. Transcribed from recordings made 8 April 2010. ZHU and STUART (1996) present five transcribed and translated *qixing*. See WANG and STUART (1995a, 1995b); WANG et al. (1995); and ZHU et al. (1997) for more on other genres of Mangghuer song.

56. Literally ten thousand.

57. These are called *Dengyun xue*. Such footwear is often said to be worn by deities and to enable the wearer to fly. Such boots are generally depicted as being black with white soles and having upturned toes.

58. This is literally a “ten-thousand-people-saving-board.”

59. A *bailong ma* or “white dragon horse” is said to have the ability to shape-shift and take the form of a horse or a dragon. In the form of a horse, the *bailong ma* retains its dragon strength and stamina.

60. *Lingzhi cao*, literally “efficacious grass” (*Ganoderma spp.*, polypore bracket fungi) does not grow in the Sanchuan area. Sanchuan people believe it is only consumed by magical animals. For example, the deer depicted in long-life paintings is often depicted with *lingzhi cao* in its mouth. *Lingzhi cao* is widely used in traditional Chinese and Tibetan medicines.

61. Here the singer inserts the year in which the song is being performed; in this case, 2010.

62. *Zhou* or “secret scriptures” are also chanted for deities, in order to employ deities’ *gan-yan* to harm others. Whereas *hao* are recited loudly, *zhou* are whispered inaudibly.

63. Interview, 7 March 2009.

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