

**BEYOND IDEOLOGY:
RELIGIOUS THOUGHTS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES
IN LETTERS BETWEEN FENG ZIKAI AND MASTER GUANGQIA
IN SOCIALIST CHINA 1950s–1970s**

Qilin Zeng

Capital University of Economics and Business, Beijing

Abstract. The letters between Feng Zikai and Master Guangqia after 1949 in socialist China complicated interaction among religion, the self, and the world, and during this period waves of literary and artistic practices emerged that sought to identify individual options in the face of the atrocities. Feng’s religious-cultural practices, overseas interactions, and his letters in the 1950s–1970s in my paper would be regarded as a set of values or a structure of feeling that registered a social episteme. The years 1949–1975 were a period when the cold war took place and Feng kept close relationships with intellectuals from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan. This paper examines him in the transnational framework, and studies communist cultural and diplomatic policies as well. Therefore, this paper will focus on the letters between Feng and intellectuals from abroad, to explore the issue of how the religions, overseas publications and cultural practices helped Feng Zikai expand his ways of culture expression. Besides, this paper intends to investigate how Feng succeeded in retaining the continuation of Master Hongyi’s religious thoughts in socialist China during the 1950s–1970s.

Keywords: intellectual history, modern Chinese culture, religion, socialist period, structure of feeling

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2022.4.06>

Received 11 August 2022, accepted 2 November 2022, printed and available online 20 December 2022

1. Introduction

Feng Zikai and Master Guangqia in Singapore not only fulfilled the behest of their teacher Master Hong Yi to complete and publish the masterpiece *Protection of Life*, but also actively promoted the development of religion during the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) era. There are a total of 665 published letters between Feng Zikai and others after 1949. The letters between Feng and his youngest son Feng Xinmei made up 180 of these letters, only 4 more than the letters between Feng and Master Guangqia.(Feng 2016).¹ Therefore, this essay focuses on the letters between Feng, Master Guangqia and other intellectuals in the P.R.C. 1950s–1970s, as well as on his overseas religious practices during the socialist era in order to investigate how Feng's overseas cultural practices helped him broaden his means of cultural expression and encourage the development of religions in socialist China. To begin with, I would like to explain and analyse the main theories and keywords involved.

A typical representative example of Feng's private creations in the P.R.C. is the letter. The letters that Feng wrote to intellectuals between the years 1950 and 1970 are unique because they were written in the middle of the 20th century but were not released to the public until after his passing. These set them apart from the mainstream creations in Maoist China. Such private writings offer opportunities for examining his attitudes and emotions, as well as extending the multiple connotations of literature.

The letters, publications and related cultural practices centred on religions in the P.R.C. in this essay should be regarded not only as productions of literature, art, and religion but also reflections of a set of values or a structure of feelings that registered a social episteme. The publications and cultural practices complicate the interactions between religion, the self, and the world. During the P.R.C. period, waves of literary and artistic practices that sought to identify individual options in the face of atrocities emerged. Through exploring the specific example of Feng's religious thoughts and his related cultural practices during this period, this essay sheds light on a new dimension of understanding the relationship between the Chinese contemporary literary-historical environment and intellectuals.

In this essay, I discuss Feng's letters, overseas publications, and cultural practices to stress the need to consider the crucial roles of personalized private writings and communications amidst the turbulent cultural circumstances in the Maoist era. Such an approach takes account of the recent scholarly emphasis on the sentiments and poetics of selfhood that inform the historical moments in a different light. Scholars conducting research on intellectuals in the turbulent cultural environment have paid substantial attention to intellectuals' reactions, options, and text strategies (Wakeman 1985, Fu 1993, Huang 2005). Nicole Huang's research emphasizes Zhang Ailing's adoption of a highly personalized text strategy to intervene in politics (Huang 2005). I would like to apply this research perspective to explore Feng's letters to further

¹ According to Published letters (Feng Zikai 丰子恺, 2016, Feng Zikai Quanji 丰子恺全集 (The Complete Works of Feng Zikai). 19 vols. Beijing: Dolphin Press.) and the letters mentioned by Feng's family members.

discuss whether this could be regarded as a textual strategy and rhetorical method and to understand how he achieved inner reflection and maintained his pursuit of self through creations.

In the field of space studies, research has not been limited to only geographical space. Scholars have also extended their attention to cultural space. Walter Benjamin raised the idea that some rebellious behaviours of intellectuals in the capitalist era might have caused them to be regarded as secret agents by the regime. In other words, under the control of coercion, intellectuals developed ways to stretch their cultural space (Benjamin 2008). Lefebvre brought social relations into the discussion on the concept of space in his research and established a connection between space, social relationships, production relations, and related networks (Lefebvre 1991). The years of 1949–1975 was a period during which the Cold War took place and Feng retained close contacts with intellectuals from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan. As the Cold War extended its reach to the cultural field, it became gradually regarded as ‘a clash of ideas and cultures similar to military and strategic conflicts’ (Westad 2007: 5). Using these approaches, this essay will examine Feng’s letters and cultural practices in a transnational framework, and study communist cultural and diplomatic policies as well.

Using materials collected from letters, magazines, newspapers, government documents, archival materials, Feng’s artworks, and bibliography, this essay demonstrates that the study of the letters, creations, cultural practices, and interactions of intellectuals can help map out some of the cultural interactions between cultural productions, intellectuals, and politics. An examination of Feng Zikai helps to address the necessity of rethinking the living status of intellectuals and their networks critically in the context of mid-twentieth-century socialist China. The following questions will be asked: What were Feng’s cultural practices from abroad at the time? How did he broaden Master Hongyi’s religious ideas and promote religious development in socialist China? How did Feng’s use of overseas cultural practices during the socialist era help him develop his feelings and poetics of selfhood and keep his links abroad? What provocations, expressions, and experiments does he make in response to the Maoist era’s historical tempos?

2. The continuation of Master Hongyi’s religious thoughts: Feng Zikai’s overseas cultural practices in socialist China

After being introduced to the text by Master Hongyi, Master Guangqia read Feng Zikai’s *Yuanyuan Tang Essay Collections* in 1931. Feng Zikai and Master Guangqia began to write letters to each other in 1937 (Feng 2016: 153). Both of them were deeply influenced by their teacher Master Hongyi. Religion is an important aspect of the cultural practices and interactions between them.

In the early days of New China, Feng and Master Guangqia actively worked on the proposal for the construction of the Master Hongyi Memorial Hall. Feng mentioned the construction of Master Hongyi’s memorial stone tower in his letter

dated 6 June 1955 to Master Guangqia. He showed his appreciation for the official support for rebuilding temples in the nation and praised Master Hongyi's Hupao Stone Tower for being well reconstructed. He also expressed his wish for Master Guangqia to return to the country and experience the scenes of flourishing religious development soon (Feng 2016: 167). He continuously updated Master Guangqia on the construction progress of the memorial hall from 1955 to 1959, ending with 'the memorial hall still has no hope' (Feng 2016: 182).

The letters related to the construction progress of the memorial hall in these four years shed light on several points that are worth discussing further. The first of these is the attitude of the authorities towards the Master Hongyi Memorial Hall. In Feng's letter in June 1955, he mentioned that the government built Master Hongyi's stone tower, rebuilt Hupao Temple and Jing'an Temple, and turned Hupao Temple into a part of the West Lake Scenic District. However, the masses were too busy to build the memorial hall. Furthermore, the government would not subsidize the construction. Feng had to raise money from Master Hongyi's students in Shanghai and Hangzhou for the construction. He hoped that Master Guangqia could raise funds from overseas as well (Feng 2016: 168-169). Although Master Guangqia managed to raise funds in Singapore and Hong Kong (Feng 2016: 171), and Feng tried his best to apply for permission to build the memorial hall, the authority expressed no clear opinion or strong support for it. "... Yesterday, Wu Mengfei said that he had contacted the government in Hangzhou. According to the reply, the construction has not been implemented and must be postponed. Though we got approval from the Political Consultative Conference, the government in Hangzhou failed to support the construction immediately" (Feng 2016: 177-178). In 1959, Feng and Master Guangqia clearly stated that the proposal for construction was a failure and that they would refund the donors. "If the construction of the memorial is still hopeless in the next year, I will refund the donors as we have planned previously" (Feng 2016: 181). The second point is that although Master Guangqia and Feng had actively raised funds, the plan for the memorial still failed. This may have something to do with the modest and unsupportive attitude of the government towards the construction at that time. Moreover, the nationwide cultural environment and the attitude towards religion then should also be taken into consideration. Feng's letter mentioned that monks were busily participating in various political studies and conferences, and that the Buddhist interface in China was completely different from that in the past. During the period, the studies of political thought and cultural policies were promoted throughout the country, even in the religious field, and monks were regarded as an important part in the ideological reform revolution.

In the early 1950s, when the newly established nation of the P.R.C. was facing domestic complications and the tremendous task of construction, Zhou Enlai said that 'the turbulent domestic political environment and the international Cold War require our party to consolidate and develop the masses' unity to the maximum. To strive for the completion of the democratic revolution, we should unite all the forces that we can, and overcome all the difficulties that we are facing. People should fight together against imperialism and construct socialism' (Zhou 1992: 173-189). In this

context, religious clergy was also considered as one of the important forces to be unified, especially in 1953, when the Communist Party of China proclaimed that religion has the ‘five natures’ of ‘mass, national, international, complexity, and long-term’ (Literature Research Office of the CPC 2013). Therefore, religious groups and individual clergy were regarded as important part to be unified. In the 1950s to 1960s, religious policies and the clergy were included in the ideological reform movements. The environment for religious development, the failure to construct the Master Hongyi Memorial Hall, and the strict censorship on the publishing of *Protection of Life* overseas reflect the difficulties that Feng faced and the cultural ideals that he could hardly accomplish in the Maoist era. It is necessary to discuss how Feng and Master Guangqia achieved their religious beliefs and expanded their cultural space through religious-cultural practices during the period when religion was marginalized in Maoist China.

From 1929 to 1942, Master Hongyi spent most of the time spreading religion in the southern Fujian Province of China. He was continuously accompanied by Master Guangqia during this period. They wrote to each other when they could not meet. Master Hongyi expressed his thoughts and encouragement to Master Guangqia, “I won’t give you money, but send Mituo as a gift (临行赠汝无多自，一句弥陀作大舟)” (The Editorial committee of the Guangqia Memorial Hall 2007: 31) Master Hongyi gave Master Guangqia the religious name of Pu Run (普润) in the hope that he could “purify everything and love everyone (普雨法雨润一切，难行苦行为众生)” (Hsu 2013: 47). He also taught Master Guangqia religion. As such, Master Guangqia was one of his most important students, and after Master Hongyi became a monk, even one of his closest friends in Master Hongyi’s later years. In 1957, the 15th anniversary of Master Hongyi’s death, Master Guangqia actively collected Master Hongyi’s articles, speeches, and dairies from books, newspapers, and magazines for a collection titled *The Booklet for the 15th Anniversary of Master Hongyi’s Passing* (Shi 1957). Feng Zikai was asked to write the preface for the collection. In the testimonial and afterword, Master Guangqia wrote that he was ashamed to know that “Master Xingyuan, who is from Philippines, wishes to collect and publish Master Hongyi’s works” (Shi 1957: 99). He regarded it as his duty to compile this collection. “Many monks in Singapore and Malaysia are greatly affected by Master Hongyi. Most of them are his students and are from Southern Fujian Province” (Shi 1957: 99).

In 1934, Master Hongyi established an orthodox Buddhist school in Nanputuo Temple. Master Guangqia was the educational inspector for the school. At that time, many Buddhists received systematic Buddhist ideological training from Master Hongyi. Later, they went to the Nanyang area because of the war. Therefore, Master Hongyi had a close relationship with the development of Nanyang Buddhism. Master Guangqia also felt that “It is regrettable that Mr. Li Shutong is well known overseas, while Master Hongyi is less known. As his student, I feel that it is my fault that people do not have a clear idea that Mr. Li Shutong is Master Hongyi. Hence, I decided to collect all his works and publish them in Nanyang” (Shi 1957: 99). Although Master Hongyi is closely related to the development of religion in the Southeast

Asia area, Master Guangqia felt regret over the fact that many people overseas did not know that Master Hongyi was Li Shutong. He thought that it was necessary and important for him to take responsibility for spreading Master Hongyi's religious thoughts overseas. Feng and Master Guangqia subsequently collected and published the materials and works of their teacher actively. They succeed in publishing *Master Hongyi's Ink Sequel*, *Master Hongyi's Speeches*, and other books outside mainland China (Table 1).

Table 1. List of Master Hongyi's works published with the help of Master Guangqia

Book Name	Year	Location
<i>The Booklet for the 15th Anniversary of Master Hongyi's Passing</i> (<Hongyi Fa Shi Shi Shi Shi Wu Zhou Nian Ji Nian Ce> 弘一法师逝世十五周年纪念册)	1957	Singapore
<i>Master Hongyi's Ink Sequel</i> (<Hongyi Dashi Moji> 弘一大师墨迹)	1962	Hong Kong
<i>Master Hongyi's Speeches</i> (<Hongyi Dashi Jiang Yan Xu Lu> 弘一法师讲演续录)	1962	Hong Kong
<i>The 2nd Volume of Master Hongyi's Ink Sequel</i> (<Hongyi Da Shi Yi Mo Xu Ji> 弘一法师遗墨续集)	1964	Hong Kong
<i>Vinaya Studies</i> (<Lv Xue>律学)	1964	Hong Kong
<i>A Brief Explanation of the Four Newly Deleted Parts of Buddhist Precepts</i> (<Xin Shan Ding Si Fen Seng Jie Ben Quan Shi> 新删定四分僧戒本诠释)	1964	Hong Kong
<i>Anthology of Nanshan Lvyuan</i> (<Nan Shan Lv Yuan Wen Ji>南山律原文集)	1964	Hong Kong
<i>Four Laws to Explain the Banknotes</i> (<Si Fen Lv Xing Shi Chao Zi Chi Ji Fu Sang Ji Shi> 四分律行事钞资持记扶桑集释)	1965	Hong Kong
<i>Explanation of Random Karma</i> (<Sui Ji Jie Mo Quan Shi> 随机羯磨诠释)	1965	Hong Kong
<i>Memorial Collection of Master Hongyi's Works</i> (<Hong Yi Fa Shi Ji Nian Ce> 弘一法师纪念册)	1985	Beijing
<i>Collections of Master Hongyi's Works</i> (<Hong Yi Da Shi Quan Ji> 弘一大师全集)	1992	Fujian

Feng Zikai and Master Guangqia discussed some details of the preparation for publishing *Master Hongyi's Ink Sequel* in their letters. This book was first named *Li Xiweng's Facsimiles of Ancient Handwritings*. It is a collection of Li Shutong's works before he became a monk and was published by Shanghai Kaiming Book Store in 1930. Feng accidentally found the last copy in an old bookstore. He hoped that Master Guangqia could help reprint it overseas (Feng 2016: 203). When *Master Hongyi's Ink Sequel* was published, Feng stated that, "We shall give these as gifts to those who are lovers of calligraphy and Buddhism. Art and Buddhism are well combined in this book. Hence, readers can benefit from both the art and Buddhism. I do appreciate and thank Master Hongyi's great contributions" (Feng 2016: 244). In Feng's view, calligraphy and Buddhism are mutual carriers of communications. They can be regarded as means to perpetuate the religious thoughts of his teacher Master Hongyi locally and abroad. Besides, the well-combined aesthetic and religious elements could benefit readers in various aspects.

Apart from publishing and distributing Master Hongyi's religious books in Hong Kong and Singapore, Master Guangqia and Feng Zikai achieved the spread and continued development of their teacher's religious thoughts overseas by establishing schools. The establishment of schools became a way to overcome the restrictions of religion, nationality, and geography, and to expand their cultural space during the Maoist era. Although Master Guangqia was a monk, he actively participated in the local cultural practices in Singapore. In 1953, he proposed to establish Mituo School at a place near Longshan Temple for the benefit of monks and the children of overseas Chinese (Feng 1985: 12). Feng regarded establishing schools as a good way to continue the spreading of Master Hongyi's educational spirit overseas. He said, "Master Hongyi is the first person to introduce Western literature and art into China. They are gradually developed by many people, but little attention has been paid to Master Hongyi's educational spirit. Master Hongyi cooperated with colleagues to establish schools. Their enthusiasm for educating the youth is the legacy of Master Hongyi, and it is also the liveliest, meaningful, and permanent memorial option" (Shi 1957: 1). When Master Guangqia invited Feng to write a song for Mituo School in 1957, Feng agreed without hesitation and got his son-in-law Yang Minwang, who was working in the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, to be the composer (Feng 2016: 170). Furthermore, when Mituo School planned to celebrate its sixth anniversary and construct its library, Feng volunteered to design the cover of the special booklet for the anniversary (Feng 2016: 187). He paid special attention to the construction of the library in Mituo School. Feng continuously donated large quantities of religious books to the school and willingly helped Master Guangqia purchase books from mainland China (Feng 2016: 197). He sent a whole collection of *Fa Yuan Zhu Lin* (法苑珠林) as a gift to Mituo School (Feng 2016: 199). Only half a month later, Feng sent another five packs of Buddhist scriptures to Master Guangqia (Feng 2016: 199).

Feng described the status of Buddhist books in bookstores and the publishing industry during the early days of P.R.C. as being small in quantity, incomplete, and hard to find. Faced with the challenges in protecting and preserving Buddhist books,

Feng regarded sending the books overseas and donating them to Mituo School as the best option. He expressed his concern in his letter to Master Guangqia in August 1961: “When I was arranging my bookshelf, I found my drawing and calligraphy of one thousand Buddha statues to commemorate Master Hongyi’s death. I named it *Praise to the Ancient Buddha*. The articles and drawings in it have profound meaning. Preserving them in my place is meaningless, and it is a pity if they are damaged or lost in the future...I would like to donate them to Mituo School as a gift for preservation” (Feng 2016: 210). Feng regarded the donation of books to Mituo School as a good solution for protecting and preserving precious Buddhist books from unpredictable loss or damage. However, it was not easy to send books overseas during the Maoist era. “You mentioned that a volume of the aesthetic book was confiscated during the delivery. What about the others? Besides, I am wondering, other than the confiscation, have you encountered any trouble? If not, I assume that the confiscated book is not *Ancient Stories*, but rather, the *Selected Works of National Art Exhibition*, which was published recently and closely related to politics. It is better to take extra caution on this kind of books in the future” (Feng 2016: 198). The confiscation of books related to politics indicates that both their letters and their deliveries were under surveillance and being censored. Feng therefore reminded Master Guangqia to pay extra attention to their communications and deliveries in the future. Feng’s active participation in the establishment of the library at Mituo School in the early 1960s should not be simply regarded as an act of donation but rather, a strategy taken by Feng, who was highly sensitive to the cultural environment and subtle cultural policy changes, to protect culture. In consideration of the religious and publishing environment and the newly promulgated cultural policies in the P.R.C., Feng actively donated a large number of religious books overseas, which successfully protected these precious religious books from the cultural disaster in the mid-1960s and avoided regrets from ‘unpredictable cultural damage in the future’ (Feng 2016: 210).

Through his discussions on the construction of the Master Hongyi Memorial Hall and his donation of precious religious books to the library of Mituo School during the Maoist era, Feng actively protected and promoted the development of religion in the early days of the P.R.C. His cultural practices and connections overseas during that period contributed greatly to the protection of religious culture and Buddhist books. His strong belief in Buddhism and sentiment towards Master Hongyi drove him to pay attention to the marginalization of religion in socialist China.

3. Private and collective: the construction of time and space in letters

In *Technics and Civilization*, Lewis Mumford identified the clock as the most important hallmark of the modern industrial era, because it constructed a brand-new set of time. The use of the clock made time mechanical, modern, and technical (Mumford 1934: 14). Based on the perspective of time, scholars have explored how

a nation constructs time, its cultural psychology (Levin 1998), and world hegemony (Struve 2005). The new modern time order shapes the modernity of time and a new historical narrative. Ying Lei studied daily life under the rule of by the clock in the *Dream of Red Mansions*. He attributed the construction of time consciousness and anxiety to the western modern clock in Da Guanyuan (Ying 2014: 1: 13-24). Using the concepts of time discussed by various scholars, I find that two parallel time narrative systems exist in the letters between Feng and Master Guangqia.

During the period of turbulence, Feng described his personal life as following a highly accurate, mechanized, and modernized concept of time. "I want to retire early but could not because of the movement. I must go to the office daily ... I go to work at 6:30, go home for lunch at 12:00, return to the office at 13:30, and come back at 17:00. It is about 17- or 18-minute' walk. Exercise daily makes me healthier. Do not worry about me" (Feng 2013: 245).

As the cultural revolution progressed, Feng's free personal life became greatly affected. He had to accept the disciplined, organized, and systematized public schedule constructed by the socialist literary and cultural systems. During that period, a grand collective schedule took the place of personal daily life. Feng carried out the routines of his daily life on a highly modern time scale. He became a person who, chased by accurate modern time, suffered from great anxiety. Performing revolutionary acts all the time made him feel that "We are now wasting time" (Feng 2013: 245). He started to secretly create *Protection of Life* and *Yuan Yuantang Essays*.

Apart from the accurate modern time scale in the letters, Feng also wrote: "The Lunar New Year is around the corner, Shanghai is extremely cold now" (Feng 2013: 104). "Today is Bailu, Shanghai has entered autumn" (Feng 2013: 159). "One month later, it will be the beginning of Spring, the weather will get warmer" (Feng 2013: 229). He also wrote "After Zhongyuan," (Feng 2013: 192), "Mid-Autumn Festival" (Feng 2013: 196), and "Spring Festival" (Feng 2013: 174). Using the lunar calendar, Feng expressed his personal experiences in terms of the temperature, seasons, and changes in life. These helped him to get rid of the sense of control and anxiety from modern accurate time. This time narrative system dissolves the grand collective time system. It highlights the individual feelings of personal life and time and presents the perception of personal lyricism against that of grand history.

Of these two-time narrative systems, one is mechanical, modern, and precise, while the other is natural, periodic, and traditional. The former is always accurate, makes people anxious, and is pushed by quantities of life missions. The latter is vague, personal, and emotional. These two systems show the scissure between traditions and the grand collective of modernity. The use of the two-time narrative systems could be regarded as a strategy by Feng to erase reality and express his personal emotions. The contradictions between the time systems connect Feng's personal life and the grand collective history. The contrast shows his hard struggles when confronted with the great tensions between the collective and the individual, tradition and modernity.

Apart from the time narrative systems, I would like to emphasise his period of creation during the turbulent era. As Feng was required to participate in the

revolution during the daytime, he got up before dawn and stayed up till midnight to create *Protection of Life* and *Yuan Yuantang Essays*. The two temporal dimensions of daytime and night constitute a spatial heterogeneity.

The night is considered as an important symbol of time throughout history. “On the one hand, the night is the initial state of existence, the origin of all living beings; on the other hand, night represents the sensitive and the holy. It is the moment of enlightenment, insight, and self-consciousness” (Gu 2005: 4: 48-53). “In other words, if the ‘night’ is stripped from its natural dimension and placed in the dimension of cultural history, it is always closely linked to historical transformation, expressing farewell and warm welcome during social exchanges” (Gu 2005: 4: 48-53). Night is often regarded as the working time for the bottom layer of society. “When steam engines, electricity, and man keep the factory working, the clock shows the difference between daytime and night. Everyone should follow the daily routine constructed by the clock” (Boorstin 1985: 27). Feng worked at 4 a.m. between 1965–1973, which reflects the living conditions of intellectuals at that time. In the paper *Contemporary Literature in the Organization Department – A Short Cotemporary Reading* (《“组织部”里的当代文学——一个当代短篇的阅读》) (Hong 2011: 301-312), Hong Zicheng opined that ‘daytime’ represents revolution movement or persecution, while the ‘night’ represents private daily life. An antagonism exists between daytime and night, revolutionary movement and private daily life in the early P.R.C. The Organization Department did not want to divide the day into ‘night-time’ and ‘daytime’ as it attempted to extend the daytime revolution movement to private life at night. In the 1950s to 1960s, there was a growing demand for extending the public sphere and shrinking private space. The grey zone, where people could express individual feelings and personal imaginations, was loved by the ‘unreformed’ writers and the figures shaped by those writers (Hong 2011: 301-312). Daytime and night-time, as two dimensions of time, present the distinctions between the public domain and the private sphere, the collective and the individual. ‘Night’ offers people the ability to think, believe, feel, understand the whole world, and lyrically express personal emotions.

All the paintings, poems, and books which were sent to Master Guangqia by Feng should be taken into consideration when discussing Feng’s night consciousness. As mentioned previously, Feng consciously constructed distinctions between the public sphere and private space. This be seen in *Ri Yue Lou Zhong Ri Yue Chang* (The Editorial Committee of Guangqia Memorial Hall 2007: 71) which he sent to Master Guangqia in 1958 (Figure 1).

He wrote along with the picture, “I am now living in Shanghai, and often work with my daughter and son. We read and translate together. I am now drawing the scene to you. Hope you like it” (The Editorial Committee of Guangqia Memorial Hall 2007: 71). In the picture, Feng’s daughter is writing with a smile, while his son is sitting beside him reading quietly. Feng is wearing a robe with his hand under the table. There is a censer with burning incense on the table. Feng portrayed the scene using softer and elegant colours to highlight the quiet atmosphere and the relaxing and natural life he has when he is with his family members. The peaceful, comfortable,



Figure 1. *Ri Yue Lou Zhong Ri Yue Chang*. A painting by Feng Zikai.

and private family life, which was well protected by Feng, is distinguished from the chaos and complicated social life at that time.

In 1961, he sent *Ren Neng Ke Bao* (仁能克暴) (The Editorial Committee of Guangqia Memorial Hall 2007: 82) to Master Guangqia. The back of a giant tiger occupies two-thirds of the picture. The tiger is curled up on the ground and held by a smiling peasant. The fierce and violent image of the tiger is instantly dissolved. Feng did not show his fear of the violent beast but expressed his expectation of changing ferociousness with benevolence.

Master Guangqia postponed his visit to China until 1965. Feng and Master Guangqia visited the grave of Master Hongyi together. Feng wrote a poem, “I said goodbye to Master Guangqia besides a river. Moon and clouds all stop their steps. The shadow of the mountain will not change. The lonely cloud and crane are coming back” (The Editorial Committee of Guangqia Memorial Hall 2007: 68). Their farewell happened at night. The clouds and moon all feel sorry for their separation. The constant shadow represents their deep relationship. The lonely cloud and crane express his loneliness and sadness. Besides the poem, Feng gave Master Guangqia the picture *Courageous and Intensive* (The Editorial Committee of Guangqia Memorial Hall 2007: 69) as a farewell gift.



Figure 2. *Ren Neng Ke Bao*. A painting by Feng Zikai.

Feng wrote, “In the late autumn of 1968, I met Master Guangqia in Shanghai. I would like to give him this picture as our mutual encouragement” (The Editorial Committee of Guangqia Memorial Hall 2007: 71). Based on his words, the meeting should be cold and bleak. In contrast, the picture is full of vitality with the two men rushing forwards, willows swaying in the air, and green grass growing. Master Guangqia should be regarded as Feng’s spiritual support. Feng drew a vivid picture to encourage himself and express his aspirations.

During the construction of the Chinese socialist literary system, individuals and subjectivity were ignored by the mainstream consciousness, and private space was gradually taken by the grand public sphere as well. Feng secretly created *Protection of Life* and *Yuan Yuantang Essays* in his personal time, which could potentially be regarded as a means to recall Master Hongyi’s and his own life experiences. He would like to express his thinking, belief, and emotions through this potential writing work. *Protection of Life* and *Yuan Yuantang Essays* achieved the expansion of personal time and space under the repression of the grand collective time system and the public sphere.

4. New government and individuals' win-win policy in socialist China: material assistance and emotional sustenance from overseas

The letters between Master Guangqia and Feng reveal the material assistance from the former to the latter in the early days of the P.R.C. Master Guangqia continuously sent food, medicine, money, daily supplies, and other items that were specifically requested by Feng.

From 1959–1961, China was confronted with material scarcity and food shortages. Master Guangqia offered help to Feng's family, as well as to other intellectuals. "I received two letters from you. Last night I received all the items that were sent by you: 2 litres of oil, 1 litre of sesame oil, 10 pounds of sugar, 1 pound of coloured sugar, 2 pieces of cloth, 2 pounds of glucose, 40 bundles of noodles, and one toothbrush. I have checked that they are correct. As per your request, I have already given 1 litre of sesame oil and 5 bundles of noodles to Lay Buddhist Ma, 1 pound of glucose and 5 bundles of noodles to Lay Buddhist Su Huichun. I could hardly express my gratitude to you through this mail. Many thanks for offering us so many needed daily supplies" (Feng 2013: 142). All the items that were offered by Master Guangqia were ordinary daily supplies, but to Feng and other intellectuals in China during that time, these were 'extreme necessities'. Master Guangqia once said to his friend, "Intellectuals and artists are not businessmen. They are not good at business. We must take care of them and offer them a peaceful environment for creation" (The Editorial Committee of Guangqia Memorial Hall 2007: 7). Master Guangqia took care of intellectuals like Feng and reduced their financial burden during the turbulent and tough period.

Apart from Master Guangqia, Feng also maintained connections with other overseas intellectuals in the Maoist era. Therefore, I would like to explore how he achieved his spiritual needs and expanded his cultural possibilities within the Chinese socialist literary system. Feng studied in Japan when he was young and remained in close contact with the founder of Neishan Bookstore, Uchiyama Kanzo.² Although China and Japan did not establish diplomatic relations after the war, Feng kept in touch with his Japanese friends. Kanzo sent Feng the books he ordered from Tokyo (Feng 2016: 37). It was not easy to maintain communications with friends in Japan during that time. Feng was able to obtain that privilege as a 'famous cultural person'. The diplomatic relationship between China and Japan after World War II should be taken into consideration: The Japanese government was under the control of the United States, which supported a foreign policy of hostility to China. Official relations between China and Japan did not make progress after

² Uchiyama Kanzo visited Feng's exhibition on the first day after reading the news. In his opinion, Feng Zikai's paintings are distinctive; Feng Zikai gave Uchiyama Kanzo 100,000 yuan to return to Japan, which was mentioned both in 鲁迅の思い出 and *Hua Jia Lu* (《花甲录》). In 1956, Uchiyama Kanzo was invited as one of the representatives of Japan Friendship Association China for an unofficial visit to China. Feng Zikai, Ba Jin, and other intellectuals went to Shanghai Longhua Airport to welcome the tourist group. Feng Zikai accompanied Kanzo to visit the grave of Luxun and deliberately wrote *Welcome Mr. Uchiyama Kanzo* which was published in the "News Daily" to express his excitement of meeting old friends.

World War II in the worldwide context of the Cold War. Considering the complicated diplomatic environment, the government of the P.R.C. put forward the principles of ‘nongovernment first (民间先行)’ and ‘using the public to promote the official (以民促官)’ to create possibilities for the normalization of relations between Japan and China. Feng was one of the intellectuals who maintained relationships with overseas cultural parties and held numerous cultural positions in the Chinese government in the early days of the P.R.C.³ When he encountered shortages of books and food, the above principles enabled him to obtain material assistance and extend his personal cultural space. In other words, the new government and individuals achieved a win-win situation in which the intellectuals were able to maintain contact with their overseas friends.

5. Conclusion

The vivid example of Feng promoting the development of religions is how he and Master Guangqia actively raised funds and pushed the authorities to construct the Hongyi Memorial Hall. The letters related to this shed light on the nationwide cultural environment and the attitude towards religion. During the period, the study of political thought and cultural policies were promoted throughout the country, even in the religious field, and monks were regarded as an important part in the ideological reform revolution.

In the early 1950s, when the newly established nation of the P.R.C. was facing domestic complications and the tremendous task of construction, the government stressed the importance of consolidating and developing the unity of the masses to the maximum. The Communist Party China considered religion has the ‘five natures’, and religious clergy was regarded as one of the utmost forces to be unified and included in the ideological reform movement. Feng made an attempt to request approval to construct the memorial hall, but it was unsuccessful.

Even though religion was marginalized in Maoist China, Feng and Master Guangqia continued to put in significant effort to propagate religious ideas and broaden their cultural space. They regarded it as essential and crucial for them to propagate the religious ideas of their Master Hongyi abroad. There have been publications of Master Hongyi’s writings outside of mainland China, including Master Hongyi’s *Ink Sequel*, *Master Hongyi’s Speeches*, and other books. In addition to publishing and disseminating Master Hongyi’s religious writings in Hong Kong and Singapore, Master Guangqia and Feng Zikai established schools to promote the growth of their teacher’s religious ideas abroad. During the Maoist era, establishing schools

³ After 1949, Feng Zikai held many cultural and social positions. He served as a member of the Shanghai People’s Congress and CPPCC, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, and a member of the China Artists Association. He was Director and Chairman of the Shanghai Artists Association, Vice Chairman of the Shanghai Writers Association, Vice Chairman of the Shanghai Federation of Literary Artists, Member of the Shanghai Literature and History Museum, Director of the Shanghai Overseas Literature Association, and Dean of the Shanghai Chinese Painting Institute.

became a means of overcoming geographical, national, and religious limitations and extending one's cultural space. The establishment of schools was recognized as Master Hongyi's most vibrant, significant, and long-lasting memorial legacy because it succeeded in disseminating his educational philosophy. Feng decided to send religious books abroad and donate them to Mituo School in Singapore to protect and preserve them from unforeseen cultural damage after considering the situation of Buddhist publications in the early P.R.C. Feng Zikai was keen to pay attention to the marginalization of religion and to protect the religious culture in socialist China by his profound Buddhist beliefs and respect to his teacher Master Hongyi.

Two parallel time narrative systems in the letters between Feng and Master Guangqia were also discussed. During the period of turbulence, Feng described his personal life as following a highly accurate, mechanized, and modernized concept of time. Apart from the accurate modern time scale in the letters, Feng also used lunar calendar to express his personal experiences and to get rid of the sense of control and anxiety from modern time. The use of the two-time narrative systems could be regarded as a strategy by Feng to erase reality and express his personal emotions. The contradictions between the time systems connect Feng's personal life and the big collective history.

In addition to the lunar calendar and modern time, attention is paid to Feng's creative time during the 1960s–1970s. Feng Zikai participated in the revolution during the day and worked secretly until dawn or the early hours of the morning. Daytime and night-time together form the two temporal aspects that constitute spatial heterogeneity. Day and night are two dimensions of time that represent the boundaries between the public and private spheres, the collective and the individual. The contrast demonstrates his difficult challenges as he deals with intense conflicts between tradition and modernity, as well as the collective and the individual in the Maoist China.

Furthermore, during the Maoist era, Feng Zikai maintained contact with Master Guangqia and other foreign intellectuals to obtain essential things for daily life, books, and other necessities. Even though it was not easy to stay in touch with friends in Japan at the time, Feng was able to do so thanks to his status as a 'renowned cultural person' and was able to ask Kanzo and other Japanese friends for assistance. In order to generate opportunities for the normalization of relations between Japan and China, the government of the P.R.C. put forward the ideas of 'nongovernment first (民间先行)' and 'using the public to promote the official (以民促官)', which creates a win-win situation for both individuals and the authorities.

Through this discussion, three main reasons for conducting an in-depth research piece on Feng Zikai's overseas religious cultural practices during the Maoist era and his networking in the Cold War period become clear. First, I shed light on the local consequences of international affairs (Jeffery 2017). Putting his letters, publications, creations, and cultural practices in a transnational framework reflects the ways that the global consequences of the Cold War interacted with local forces in the construction of politics, cultural policies, and the circumstances in China, together with the responses of individuals. Secondly, this essay achieves a rethinking

of structure of feeling and intellectual's living status in the Maoist era by discussing Feng Zikai's private letters. Feng's private letters to his friends did not directly describe big history. Instead, they continuously presented his daily life. He stressed his personal life experiences and trivial details to sidestep political constraints. Thirdly, I emphasized the two-time narrative systems in Feng's letters to explore his strategy for extending cultural space under the limited cultural circumstances. The letters between Feng and his overseas friends between 1949–1979 not only succeeded in obtaining material and spiritual support, but also represent the living status of intellectuals and their attitudes toward cultural policies.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by Capital University of Economics and Business [Grant Numbers: XRZ2022074]

Address:

Qilin Zeng

Department of Chinese Language and Literature
Faculty of Culture and Communication
Capital University of Economics and Business
121 Zhangjialukou, Huaxiang Fengtai District
100070 Beijing, China

E-mail: zengqilin@cueb.edu.cn and zengqilin@u.nus.edu

References

- Allen, Barbara (2016) *Animals in religion – devotion, symbol and ritual*. London: Reaction Book Ltd.
- Barne, Geremie (2002) *An artistic exile – a life of Feng Zikai (1989–1975)*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Barnhart Richard and Barnhart Catherine (2002) “Images of children in song painting and poetry” In Ann Barrott Wicks, ed. *Children in chinese Art*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Benjamin, Walter (2008) *The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility, and other writings on media*. Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Berger, John (2009) “Why look at animals?”. *About looking*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Boorstin, Daniel (1985) *The discoverers: the history of human discovery and exploration*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Cantweel, Cathy (2010) *Buddhism: the basics*. New York: Routledge.
- Chen, Sihe (2008) *Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi jiaocheng*. [The Chinese contemporary literature history.] Shanghai: Fudan University Press.
- Chen, Sihe (1999) “Shilun dangdai wenxueshi (1949–1976) de ‘qianzai xiezuo’”. [Potential Writing in the history of Contemporary Chinese Literature 1949–1976.] *Wenxue Pinglun* 6, 104–113.

- Daston, Lorraine and Gregg Mitman, eds. (2005) *Thinking with animals: new perspectives on anthropomorphism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Du, Daisy Yan (2019) *Animated encounters: transnational movements of Chinese animation, 1940s–1970s*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Fang, Litian (2002) *Zhongguo fojiao zhexue yaoyi (shang)*. [The essentials of Chinese Buddhist philosophy (I).] Beijing: Renmin University Press.
- Feng, Yiyin (1985) “Guangqia Fashi he wo fuqin de youyi”. [Master Guangqia and my father’s friendship.] *Nanyang Buddhism* 176, 10–13.
- Feng, Zikai (1957) “Qianyan”. [Preface.] In Shi Guangqia, ed. *Hongyi Dashi Shishi Shiwu Zhounian Jiniance*, 1–3. [The booklet for the 15th anniversary of Master Hongyi’s passing.] Singapore: the Editor.
- Feng, Zikai (2013) *Zi Kai shuxin (zhong)*. [Zikai’ letters (2).] Beijing: Dolphin Press.
- Feng, Zikai (2016) *Feng Zikai quanji*. Vol. 19. [The complete works of Feng Zikai.] Beijing: Dolphin Press.
- Fu, Poshek (1993) *Passive, resistance and collaboration: intellectual choices in occupied Shanghai, 1937–1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gu, Bin (2005) “Heiye yishi he nvxing ‘ziwo’ de huimie”. [The destruction of the night consciousness and the female self.] *Journal of Tsinghua University Social Science Edition* 4, 48–53.
- Hong, Zicheng (2011) “‘Zuzhibu’ li de dangdai wenxue – yige dangdai duanpian de yuedu”. [Contemporary literature in the organization department.] In Dewei Wang, Sihe Chen, and Zidong Xu, eds. *After 1945 – sixty years of contemporary literature*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Hsu Yuyin 徐郁萦. 2013. *Eeshi Shiji Kuaguo Hongfa yu Wenhua Jiaoliu: Guangqia Fashi (1901–1994) 二十世纪跨国弘法与文化交流: 广洽法师(1901-1994)之研究 (A Study of Master Guangqia (1901–1994): Transnational Teaching of the Dharma and Cultural Exchanges in the 20th Century)*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Master Thesis.
- Huang, Nicole (2005) *Women, war, domesticity: shanghai literature and popular culture of the 1940s*. Leiden: Brill.
- Jeffery, Engels, ed. (2017) *Local consequences of the global cold war*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center.
- Lee, Haiyan (2014) *The stranger and the Chinese moral imagination*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lee, Haiyan (2019) *Mouse vs cat in Chinese literature – tale and commentary*. Washington: University of Washington Press.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1991) *The production of space*. Donald Nicholson-Smith, transl. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Levin, Robert (1998) *Time map: different interpretations of time and ethnicity on time*. Fan Dongsheng Xu Junnong, transl. Hefei: Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Li, Shutong (2004) *Li Shutong Shuo fo*. [Li Shutong’s Buddhist thought.] Xi’an: Shaanxi Normal University Press.
- Li, Shutong (2010) *Li Shutong jingdian zuopin*. [Li Shutong’s classic works.] Jinan: Shandong Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Link, Perry (2000) *The use of literature – life in the Socialist Chinese literature system*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Literature Research Office of the CPC Cultural Committee, eds. (2013) *Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenjian Xuanji (5)*. [Selected documents of the CPC Central Committee (5).] Beijing: People's Publishing House.
- Mumford, Lewis (1934) *Technics, and civilization*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co.
- Shapiro, Judith (2001) *Mao's war against nature: politics and the environment in revolutionary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shi, Guangqia (1957) *Hongyi Dashi shishi shiwu zhounian jiniance*. [The booklet for the 15th anniversary of Master Hongyi's passing.] Singapore: the Editor.
- Struve, Lynn (2005) *Time, temporality, and imperial transition: East Asia from Ming to Qing*. Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai'i Press.
- Sutta, Metta (2000) "Discourse on loving kindness". In Samyutta Nikaya, ed., *The connected discourse of the Buddha Bhikkhu Bodhi*. Somerville, Ma: Wisdom Publications.
- The Editorial Committee of Guangqia Memorial Hall, eds. (2007) *Guangqia Memorial Hall*. Singapore: Guangqia Memorial Hall.
- Wakeman, Frederic (1985) *The great enterprise: the Manchu reconstruction of imperial order in seventeenth century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Westad, Odd Arne (2007) *The global Cold War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ying, Lei (2014) "'Jie' zaofeng xiandai jishi: Hongloulou de shijian yishi yu jiaolv neihe". [The robbery is met with a modern timer: the time consciousness and anxiety of The Dream of Red Mansions.] *Chinese Language and Literature Research* 1, 13–24.
- Zhou, Enlai (1992) "Fahui renmin minzhu tongyi zhanxian jiji zuoyong de jige went". [Several issues on the positive roles of People's United Democratic Front.] In Literature Research Office of the CPC Cultural Committee, ed. *Selection of important documents since the founding of the People's Republic of China (1)*. Beijing: Party Literature Publishing House of the CPC Central Committee.