religions

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Struggling in Crisis: The Evolution of Rainmaking in Transitional China, 1912–1949

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Abstract: This paper seeks to investigate China's response to the crisis of survival in the early twentieth century through the lens of rainmaking, a ritual practice that connected with the transcendental nature of religious ideas, yet refused to be categorized primarily as Buddhism or Daoism. The time-honored ritual, straddling China's transition from a monarchy to a republic, was enmeshed in a web of local and national crises with multiple dimensions. Its struggle for a place in the age of reason and rationality speaks volumes about the agonizing process by which the Chinese reconstructed their cultural identity in order to conform to a preconceived global narrative. Adapting rainmaking to the discourse of modernity set the stage for conflict and negotiation between the forces of social transformation and social conservation. The boundary between these forces is difficult to define, but their dynamic equilibrium shaped and reshaped the historical contour of rainmaking, illuminating the strength of China's social inertia that could withstand the revolutionary force of a regime change.

Keywords: religion; rainmaking; crisis management; anti-superstition; revolution

Citation: Au, Jik-hung. 2023. Struggling in Crisis: The Evolution of Rainmaking in Transitional China, 1912–1949. *Religions* 14: 888. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070888

Academic Editor: Thoralf Klein

Received: 15 January 2023
Revised: 10 April 2023
Accepted: 5 July 2023
Published: 10 July 2023

1. Introduction

A time of change implies not only a time of opportunity but also a time of crisis. This was the case for China in the first half of the twentieth century when the self-proclaimed Middle Kingdom, jolted awake by Western gunpowder, struggled to adapt to an international order alien to its traditional worldview. The adaptation allowed the country to experiment with various political, social and cultural reforms, but also revealed its inability to effectively respond to a multidimensional, and at times contradictory, crisis that was afflicting different strata of the nation.

It is enlightening to unravel this crisis by investigating the transformation of rainmaking, a ritual practice that resonated with the transcendental nature of religious beliefs but refused to be categorized as either Buddhism or Daoism. The age-old ceremony, which spanned China's transition from monarchy to republic, encapsulated the complexity and paradox of the nation's crisis. While rainmaking was a response to an immediate natural crisis (i.e., droughts), the religious practice faced its own crisis when examined through the lens of reason. As with many other religious practices, it fell victim to the May Fourth Enlightenment, which sought to eradicate China's antiquated social norms in the name of modernity. What began as a practice of belief culminated in a crisis of credibility.

This rainmaking crisis was a response to a greater crisis, the survival of the Chinese nation in the harsh reality of a colonial world. The ritual, along with other perceived 'superstitions,' became the easy target of a witch-hunt in search of the cause of the country's relative weakness compared to Western powers. Redefining rainmaking became part of China's response to the historical asymmetry between itself and the West. In light of this, the suspicion and criticism directed at rainmaking served the goal of national salvation.

The multifaceted and interconnected crises reflected in rainmaking gave the ritual a unique perspective on the study of China's transformation following the fall of the Qing dynasty. I argue that the evolution of the ritual within the discourse of modernity was a dialogue between proponents of social transformation and those of social conservation.

The transformation of China at the turn of the century was characterized by the blurring of the line between these two camps, with undecided minds crossing back and forth between the two sides. Rainmakers, composed primarily of peasants and workers attempting to prevent their lifeworld from being altered and subsumed by the narrative of modernity, stood firmly in the camp of social conservation. In contrast to the natural world governed by scientific laws, a lifeworld is the "only real world" according to Edmund Husserl. It is extrascientific, subjective and based on the perceptions of individuals (Husserl 1970, p. 49). In the other camp were intellectuals and officials dedicated to transforming China by eliminating its social ills, one of which was 'superstition', a newly imported term with a "fluid" definition that was often attributed to popular religious practices (Poon 2011, pp. 27–35).

I argue that the conflict and negotiation between these two camps continually shaped and reshaped the historical contour of rainmaking, illuminating the strength of China's social inertia, which could even withstand the force of a regime-changing revolution. The ritual, deeply rooted in inertia, sparked heated debate in China's fledgling Republic as it grappled with a new phase of history. The debate, however, had no clear victor, with rainmaking neither relegated to the trash heap of history nor unaffected by the controversy. Nevertheless, it was this debate that created breathing room for the religious practice, making the negotiation between different camps an integral part of China's nation-building in a time of crisis.

2. Making Rain in the Land of Drought

The lifeworld of rainmakers was beset by natural disasters and limited by rudimentary meteorological knowledge. Their interpretations of weather phenomena never progressed beyond "the stage of prognostication by proverbs" prior to the arrival of western sciences, lamented Zhu Kezhen 竺可楨 (1890–1974), a founding father of China's modern meteorology (Zhu 1918, p. 136). The Chinese proverbs, deeply grounded in empirical observations, might have provided a general guideline for farming, but they never enlightened the Chinese on how to tackle natural disasters scientifically. In times of drought, peasants instinctively resorted to rainmaking in an attempt to appease Heaven, as they believed a lack of precipitation was the result of its displeasure.

Drought, among all natural catastrophes, constituted the greatest existential threat to the agricultural nation. It was "the most difficult to endure" as both its cause and solution, if any, were well beyond the cognitive capacity of the population at the time (Esherick 1987, p. 281). In the country notoriously known as the Land of Famine, aridity had become synonymous with starvation or even death (Mallory 1926). This association was strengthened at the turn of the twentieth century by the unprecedented frequency and severity of drought and famine. The number of resulting fatalities was alarming due to the large population and deteriorating environment (L.M. Li 2007, pp. 250–307). An estimated 21 million people perished as a result of natural disasters between 1912 and 1949 (Xia 2000, pp. 79–80).

Apart from food scarcity, drought could precipitate an economic crisis among the peasants, many of whom were already saddled with crippling debts. A study conducted across 22 provinces in 1933 revealed that, on average, 56 percent of peasants relied on cash credit and 48 percent on grain credit. In Chahar, the most heavily indebted province in North China, nearly four out of five peasants were in debt ("Ge sheng nongmin" 1934, p. 30). Amidst a debilitating drought and skyrocketing inflation, these destitute peasants lacked the sustenance and resources to repay their debts. Their desperation would force them to sell everything of marketable value in their possession, including their property and children. In this case, it was common for boys, girls, and young women to be offered for sale at low prices. They would be abandoned if they were not sold, as the able-bodied fled the drought and begged in unaffected provinces (L.M. Li 2007, pp. 303–4).

The popularity of rainmaking was sustained by the multifaceted crisis frequently associated with droughts. The religious practice was more prevalent in provinces under frequent dry spells, such as Shanxi and Henan, but was not limited to these regions. Even

in regions with a sporadic dearth of precipitation, the Chinese invoked Heaven whenever they desired precipitation. By means of the ritual, they attempted to negotiate a solution with Heaven to end the droughts. After millennia of practice, they developed a series of diverse and engaging rituals, which they believed would induce rainfall.

The sophistication and complexity of these ceremonies, particularly those sanctioned by officials, reached their zenith in the Qing dynasty. One of the most elaborate ceremonies, as recorded in a book by Qing scholar and official Ji Dakui 紀大奎 (1756–1825), was a ritual that combined various Daoist and Buddhist religious elements. In stark contrast to ancient sacrifice, his ritual involved Daoist priests and Buddhist monks praying at an altar with eight tables arranged in a circle representing the Eight Trigrams. The priests exchanged trigram-imprinted pennants and sprinkled water with willow branches while the monks chanted the sutra for rainmaking (Snyder-Reinke 2009, pp. 125–35). Although Ji did not invent the ritual on his own, he deserves the credit for synthesizing a variety of practices that had existed among the people for centuries.

His work not only demonstrated the variety of rainmaking techniques in late imperial China but also reflected the rainmakers' dynamic culture. Their lifeworld, as illustrated by the book, was vibrant and colorful. After centuries of construction by a shared worldview and tradition, the lifeworld became a well-established order supported by both the authorities and the populace, whose concerted efforts rendered rainmaking an incontestable response to drought. Instead of questioning the validity of the ritual, inhabitants of the lifeworld would question the efficacy of certain techniques. Their primary concern was how to perform the ritual more effectively, without considering the possibility that it might not function as intended. They lived in a subjective universe that was resistant to objectification.

3. Bringing Rain to the New Republic

The belief in praying for rain survived the upheaval of the 1911 Revolution, which ended China's dynastic cycle but not many traditions that the Chinese regarded as an inalienable part of their life. They had lost the emperor, but their traditional beliefs in the Supreme Deity and the possibility of negotiating with it were unaffected by the apparent demise of the Son of Heaven. The absence of open official support—which was once a pillar of the lifeworld of rainmaking—sent shock waves through the community of rainmakers, but the political shift did not pose a significant threat to their culture's survival.

Rainmakers continued to believe that they were subordinate to Heaven as well as to the deities residing therein, despite the novel notion that it was the people, not Heaven, who gave the mandate to the new Republic (G. Wang 1993, p. 75). In the new era, the rainmakers not only inherited many occult techniques from the past but also created some eye-catching ones. These techniques, which occasionally contradicted one another, were too diverse to be cataloged, but they could be divided into two groups (i.e., coercive and conciliatory approaches). Coercive approaches refer to practices in which rainmakers vented their anger at deities and demanded rain in a hardline stance; conciliatory approaches comprised the majority of traditional rituals with religious elements.

These techniques resembled negotiation strategies that require varying attitudes at different times. While non-coercive methods predominated in the world of precipitation production, coercive ones had a crucial, irreplaceable presence that symbolized the last hope of rainmakers. Historically, all rainmakers assumed a submissive stance when approaching Heaven for negotiation. Their propensity for conciliation characterized the development of official rainmaking, which conformed to the hierarchical structure of the Chinese universe where Heaven represented the supreme power. But the very nature of rainmaking—a business believed to be connected to the life and death of peasants—made it an outlier among the spectrum of Chinese folk rituals. Most rainmakers, when driven to desperation by drought, might lose their composure and become aggressive, without fear of coercing Heaven into granting their request.

3.1. When Iconoclasm Met Tradition

A striking example of the coercive approaches was the Republic's attempt to end a drought by firing cannons into the sky, a new strategy that began to attract widespread interest. The ritual performed by the warlord Zhang Zongchang 張宗昌 (1881–1932), also known as the Dog-Meat General, was the one most frequently referenced in the media (Zheng 1926). In 1926, Zhang allegedly punched the statue of the Dragon King in a temple to end a drought in Shandong province, where he served as a military governor. He demanded an immediate stop to the drought, condemning the god for "inflicting tremendous suffering on the people of Shandong." Not receiving a response from the god, he ordered cannons to be fired into the sky from the peak of a mountain, which according to some accounts resulted in rain but others claimed the opposite (F. He 1934; Anan 1934).

This case exemplified China's social transformation at a time when the specter of traditional thought was creeping into iconoclastic practices in vogue. Not only did Zhang's abuse of the statue fit his image as a rogue warlord, but it also fit the Republican narrative of severing the 'superstitious' past. His use of cannons as opposed to folk rituals was another obvious departure from tradition. Underneath the veneer of his iconoclasm, however, was a long-held belief in the relationship between precipitation and supernatural power, be it the Dragon King or Heaven. While he had altered the presentation of rainmaking, he preserved the timeless principles underlying the practice. His open defiance of the deity and Heaven, albeit in an extreme manner, was consistent with the pattern of imperial officials seeking to demonstrate their compassion for the populace. His iconoclastic conduct was yet another instance of Chinese rulers asserting their control over the religious sphere of society (Hamashima 2011, pp. 130–37).

Zhang might have been the first in the Republic to use cannons to create rain, but he was not alone. In 1946, the provincial government of Sichuan adopted the same measure in response to a severe drought. It transported cannons by horse to a mountain in the city of Chengdu, which had been under a dry spell for a month. Three days after firing the cannons, the city reportedly rained, much to the delight of the locals (X. Jia 1946, p. 3). Making rain with firepower seems absurd today, but it was a popular notion in the early twentieth century. Clement Lindley Wragge, an English-born meteorologist, used cannons to produce rain for the first time on record in Australia in 1902. He deployed ten Stiger Vortex guns in various areas of Brisbane in response to a drought, but firing the guns did not produce significant precipitation ("*Collage of Images*" 1901).

The theory behind Wragge's experiment, however eccentric it might appear, had a pseudoscientific foundation that the Dog-Meat General and others like him might have found incomprehensible. Cloud-shooting with cannons, Wragge hypothesized, could disturb "the layers of air" and contributed to "the formation of aqueous particles and drops." He asserted that the hypothesis was supported by the long-term observation that rain often followed powder explosions on battlefields (Wragge 1901, pp. 3–11).

It is difficult to ascertain whether the Chinese had taken a leaf out of Wragge's book, but some Chinese media were eager to report the latest technology on artificial rain, including the Soviet Union's early cloud-seeding experiment and Japan's artillery-based rainmaking (E linyu 1934). The media coverage suggested that Chinese intellectuals had developed a keen interest in monitoring the scientific progress of other nations. Contrary to the widespread belief that China remained scientifically uneducated, it constantly pondered how the nation could advance its technology. It was no less determined than its Western counterparts to keep up with the advancements in science and technology, but in practice, it encountered various obstacles that will be discussed in the latter part of this article.

The majority of rainmakers, in contrast to Zhang, did not have the luxury of firing cannons and instead relied on other coercive methods. The coercion can be interpreted in multiple ways, with officials seeking to assert authority over low-ranking deities, and commoners exacting vengeance for the indolence of the gods. It was believed that rainmakers and the gods of rainfall had reciprocal obligations, with each expecting the other to carry out their responsibilities (A.P. Cohen 1978, pp. 256–57). While rainmakers held

the gods in the highest regard, they were occasionally tempted to expose the latter to the sweltering heat of a drought in an effort to elicit pity. They would place idols (e.g., statues of Guanyin or Guan Yu) in the sun while beating drums and gongs during a procession (Ge 1922, pp. 24–25; Yan 1934, p. 18). Much more radical were those who intentionally injured themselves to "demonstrate a willingness to endure physical pain for the benefit of others" (Snyder-Reinke 2009, p. 99). In July 1934, a reporter was shocked to witness self-mutilation during a rainmaking procession in Suzhou city. Some rainmakers "pierced their bodies with many small hooks and hung a large stone lock, a big vase, or an incense burner over their shoulders." This method of sacrificing flesh and blood is "truly sufficient to move Heaven," recounted the reporter with a sarcastic tone (Ajin 1934, p. 13). Infrequent as a rainmaking ritual in the Republic, self-mutilation pivoted on the belief that Heaven was sentient and could be swayed by the self-sacrifice of humankind. Before the fall of the Qing, there were still reports of women committing suicide by drowning as a prayer for rain ("Sheming qiuyu" 1886).

Most rainmakers, however, refrained from going to extremes as conciliatory techniques were the default. These techniques primarily consisted of religious rituals and customary practices, with Buddhist monks and Daoist priests traditionally leading the former and laypeople the latter. It is erroneous, however, to assume a rigid dichotomy between religious and non-religious rainmakers, a misconception reminiscent of the state's unyielding adoption and application of religion as a social category. Rather, the realm of rainmaking was a continuum of varying degrees of organized religious expression, in which Buddhism and Daoism represented the higher echelon.

Buddhist and Daoist rainmakers inherited rituals with sutra chanting and incantations from the past. Despite the Guomindang's (GMD) hostile rhetoric against them, they flourished in the Republic, commanding a large following who believed that religious rituals were among the most effective means of bringing rain. Christians joined forces and made religious rituals more fascinating. Christianity, which gained a foothold in China in the late sixteenth century, never won the hearts of the Chinese people. Sometimes labeled as heterodox, it was rejected either passively or actively by the majority of the educated, let alone the illiterate (P.A. Cohen 1963, pp. 3–60). Worse yet, its spread in China frequently coincided with what the Chinese viewed as unequal treaties imposed by imperial powers. It was considered a product of imperialism, sparking numerous anti-Christian movements (Bays 2012, pp. 74–77). While Christianity played a minor role in traditional Chinese rainmaking, its presence grew substantially in the Republic, where religious freedom, enshrined as one of the "modern ideals," was painstakingly distinguished from 'superstition' (Duara 1991, pp. 79–80).

Christian rainmakers were confident enough to claim that their prayers were the most effective at bringing about precipitation. They promoted the efficacy of their method over other practices by citing many allegedly successful cases in Christian publications. During a drought in Jiangsu province in 1917, for instance, locals had exhausted all available options, including burning incense, worshipping idols and parading clay dragons. None of these worked until Christians gathered in a church in the provincial capital of Nanjing to pray together. At the conclusion of their two-hour meeting, everyone was ecstatic as rain began to fall, according to a magazine article. "The prayer of our religion is not ineffective, but it requires sincerity and devotion," the article said (Zhou 1917, p. 23). The efficacy of Christian rainmaking was further validated by the warlord Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥 (1882–1948), the so-called Christian General, who was known for his zeal in evangelizing his troops (Mariani 2014). He reportedly brought precipitation to Henan province in 1922 by performing a rainmaking ritual with 10,000 troops and 800 Christians. They had a military parade and sang the national anthem before singing hymns and confessing their sins. Apparently, their prayer was answered merely two hours after the ritual ("Feng Yuxiang xinshi" 1922).

As the most eccentric warlord in the Republic, Feng was notorious for frequently switching his allegiance between competing power groups, despite his unwavering Chris-

tian faith. Unlike Zhang Zongchang, who had a stable power base, Feng maneuvered among various military cliques, gaining their support before turning against them. His political capriciousness contrasted with his steadfast promotion of Christianity, which earned him recognition from Western media. His alleged belief in constructing a well-organized army using Jesus' teachings was consistent with the era's dominant theme (i.e., to modernize China by bringing in advanced Western ideologies and technologies). In this respect, it was not too difficult for people to accept his Christian style of rainmaking, which was bolstered by a propaganda of efficacy.

Not all Christian rainmaking, however, was as elaborate as Feng's. Most of the prayers were of an ordinary nature. Whenever rainmaking was required, a priest would notify his congregation before convening them for prayer in the belief that God would help alleviate the drought (Liuyong 1918; "Zao tiangan" 1928). There was no regulation regarding the length of the prayer, with some lasting a single day and others continuing until the arrival of rain.

This new role of Christianity forced open a door for the growth of the religion in a nation where hostility towards Christians simmered constantly. It can be argued that the first two decades of the twentieth century were a "golden age" for the spread of Christianity in the wake of the anti-Christian Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901). Agitated by the murders of missionaries in the rebellion, more people entered the ministry, with a noticeable increase in Chinese Protestants and mission schools (Bays 2012, pp. 92–97). Along with Feng, notable politicians such as Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek were also Christians. Nonetheless, the overall growth of Christianity was modest, with more influence exerted on the elite than the general population. It failed to completely assuage public skepticism regarding its ties to imperialism, leaving it vulnerable to nationalist criticism. Despite the criticism, it reached out to the lower classes of society and maintained the faith of the common man by emphasizing the efficacy of its rituals, in this case, rainmaking (Standaert 2001, pp. 9–11). In consequence, some villagers practiced Christianity as if it were merely a Chinese folk religion, as the faith had "completely melded with" their way of life (Madsen 2001, p. 248).

3.2. Traditional and New Icons

Compared to the simplicity and uniformity of Christian rainmaking, Chinese folk rituals were diverse and vibrant. It is improbable to find a single model that was universally adopted across the vast territory of China, as each region had its own strategies for negotiating with Heaven and deities. In addition to the regional differences, rainmaking, as a non-elite subculture in Republican China was marked by significant differences in dialect, education and occupation. Despite the differences, these rituals shared certain characteristics that contributed to the cultural cohesion of China. One of the most salient features was the practice of icon worship.

The dragon, a legendary creature closely associated with water, was the most popular icon in rainmaking. The manifestations of dragon worship came in various forms, with dragon boat riding being a common practice. During the worst drought in Hunan province in 1934, starving peasants braved the heat and sailed dragon boats in the sun, exposing their upper bodies and refraining from wearing hats. "They know no heat, for the heat has been conquered by their imagination," a witness said in an account, casting doubt over the 'superstitious' act (Wei 1934, p. 753).

Another popular form of worship was the dragon procession. Rainmakers constructed dragons from a variety of materials, including paper and clay. People in mountainous areas, however, preferred to use plants. Those in Guangyuan city in Sichuan specialized in crafting a nine-section dragon out of reeds and branches from various plants. Each section of the dragon, which consisted of a head, a body, and a tail, was supported by a long stick. It was paraded through the neighborhood by villagers wearing wreaths on their heads. They visited each home amidst a cacophony of drums and gongs as residents burned incense and splashed water over the dragon. This ceremony was referred to as Water Dragon Play (wanshuilong 玩水龍) ("Guangyuan qiuyu" 1936, p. 36).

A makeshift dragon, however, was not a must for rainmaking parades. The Dragon King statue in a local temple was typically the most coveted. During times of drought, people usually prayed before the statue. As their patience wore thin, however, some resorted to forceful measures, such as exposing the statue to the sun or even whipping it (A.P. Cohen 1978, pp. 249–54). Out of reverence for the deity, most people relied on regular parades. Although they were called regular, they were not devoid of spectacular elements in the Republic. In 1930, a county in Hebei province had a dragon parade that featured only one rainmaker, who was born in the Year of the Dragon. The man, whose upper body was exposed and whose pants were bright green and red, pushed the Dragon King on a wheelbarrow, while a large group of devotees followed, each holding a willow branch. Whenever an onlooker poured water over him, he appeared to enjoy the sensation, bouncing up and down as if he were relishing the rain (Yizhi 1930, p. 9). While this performance was impressive, it paled in comparison to the grandiose spectacles that were held in large cities. For instance, merchants in Beijing sponsored a parade in which the Dragon King, seated on a sedan chair, was accompanied by twelve boys, twelve girls, twenty-four widows and two individuals dressed as turtles. Although this procession raised some eyebrows, it undoubtedly attracted the attention of many pedestrians (Shanshu 1927).

More eye-catching than regular parades was the one featuring a substitute dragon. Traditionally, the Chinese used small reptiles like lizards or snakes to represent the dragon in rituals (Snyder-Reinke 2009, p. 41). To parade these tiny animals, however, was not grand enough to capture the public's attention. A larger animal, such as a dog, could serve as a more effective substitute. In 1940, in awe of the Dragon King, some rainmakers in Sichuan decided to parade a black dog instead of the deity. They adorned the dog with a robe and a crown before securing it to a chair and parading it, while tens of thousands of spectators sang the incantation "green dragon head, white dragon tail, every home with a water spell." Unfortunately, the clothed dog perished in the heat after days of parading, without seeing the prayer answered (Jia 1940, p. 33).

The dragon, however, was not always the main figure in these rituals. In Shanghai, it was replaced by depictions of ancient generals and even the God of Fortune, while in Guangdong province, the Lord of Thunder and the Mother of Lightning took center stage (Lin 1929; Zhang 1935). The personification of thunder and lightning was an example of Chinese moral meteorology. Despite the absence of a scientific explanation for these natural phenomena, they were empirically linked to precipitation. Since ancient times, it was believed that the two deities not only caused rain but also punished wrongdoers.

In addition to these traditional icons, a new, imposing one emerged in the Republic (i.e., the image of its founding father Sun Yat-sen). His portrait adorned with silk flowers was carried by rainmakers in a dragon parade in Shanghai in 1934. It was accompanied by two flags of the Republic and a couplet, likely adapted from the last testament of Sun, which read, "rainmaking has not yet been successful; comrades, more effort is required." The portrait became the most prominent feature of the grand parade, which also included a "yellow dragon" and a long procession of peasants beating drums and gongs. The scene was "bizarre", a witness said (Xianhe 1934, p. 7).

The inclusion of Sun's portrait in the procession was an unusual sight, yet it was not without significance. One possible explanation for this was to assuage the Nanjing government's antagonism toward the perceived 'superstitious' nature of the ritual. Given that Sun was a GMD-created symbol of modern China, the inclusion of his portrait could be seen as a means to align the ritual with the party's ideology. After his death, the party actively encouraged the use of his portrait, elevating it to a level of prominence that could be deemed fashionable. Promoting Sun's cult of personality served the party's objective of using nationalism to fill the void left by anti-'superstition' campaigns. However, the belief that nationalism can "replace the irrational psyche with self-conscious subjectivity" can be viewed as another form of 'superstition' (Nedostup 2009, p. 283). On the other hand, some rainmakers might have genuinely believed in the efficacy of parading Sun's image, which had already permeated numerous folk religions due to the GMD's relentless pro-

motion. To justify the belief in Sun's efficacy, people began to play up his brief medical career (Chen and Qiu 1947, pp. 137–38). They believed that his ability to treat illness could be expanded to address other difficulties facing people, including drought.

4. The Voice of Reason

The Republic, after removing the "political tumor of China's despotism," strived to create a secular nation based on various concepts of modernity, including but not limited to science and democracy (Sun 1989, pp. 23–24). These concepts were predicated on the belief that reason should supersede empirical knowledge, thus subjecting traditional rituals to rigorous examination. Rainmaking was one of those rituals that were deemed to be out of step with the times. It had to be restrained or even eradicated to create the rational society that some intellectuals and officials imagined. Nevertheless, their desire to destroy the lifeworld of rainmakers was misguided, as the elusive concept of rationality was ineffective against the latter's obstinacy. Despite the efforts to reconfigure China's religious life, Chinese society did not fully modernize or become completely secular as envisioned by the modernizers (Katz and Goossaert 2021, p. 10).

A remedy for 'superstitious' beliefs, as proposed by the modernizers, was the promotion of education, particularly science. With modern schools popping up under the influence of the May Fourth Movement, the number of students reached an all-time high. In 1916, an estimated 3.8 million students were enrolled in elementary schools; within six years, this number nearly doubled to 6.6 million (Chang 2001, p. 137). Those with secondary and advanced degrees also increased in numbers. In 1909, there were slightly more than 92,000, but by 1923, there were more than 200,000 (Chang 1990, pp. 190–91). All of them were exposed to the sciences, which were offered at all educational levels, albeit to varying degrees (Dai 1934, p. 7). Together with an increasing number of academics and teachers, these students became the driving force behind China's political and social reforms.

Foreign-educated Chinese were also instrumental in introducing science and technology to the country. The trend of studying abroad can be traced back to the 1870s when the Qing court "acknowledged the superiority of Western guns and ships" and sent 120 boys to the United States to study (Rhoads 2011, p. 2). The trend continued in the Republic, with hundreds or more students annually pursuing academic degrees abroad. Most of them were educated in Japan, followed by Europe and the U.S. ("Zuijin liu niandu" 1935). Their knowledge and international experience allowed them to be pioneers in many fields of China's project of modernization.

At the heart of this project was achieving meteorological independence, a goal driven by intense nationalism that sought to rid China of imperialist influences. Intellectuals viewed it as a disgraceful loss of sovereignty that their country could not even monitor and forecast the weather on its own territory because all meteorological stations were controlled by Western powers. They considered meteorological independence as a means to both advance science and restore the nation's honor.

The key founders of China's modern meteorology were Gao Lu 高魯 (1877–1947), Jiang Bingran 蔣丙然 (1883–1966) and Zhu Kezhen 竺可楨 (1890–1974). Both Gao and Jiang earned their doctorates in Belgium, in mechanical engineering and agricultural meteorology, respectively. Zhu received his Ph.D. in meteorology from Harvard University. All three were credited with paving the way for China's meteorological development by establishing the country's first independent observatories and popularizing the study of meteorology.

Gao, Jiang and Zhu hoped that promoting meteorology would discredit the tradition of praying for rain. Meteorology, Zhu suggested, could increase the accuracy of weather forecasts, thereby benefiting agriculture, aviation safety, disaster prevention and even the eradication of 'superstition.' "Various superstitions in our country have yet to be abolished, such as the prohibition of slaughter and rainmaking," he noted. "To dispel heterodox views and superstitions, meteorological stations can help" (K. Zhu 1928, pp. 998–99). His

assessment proved to be overly optimistic. Meteorology could measure a great variety of atmospheric conditions, but not the persistence of a traditional belief.

The confrontation between intellectuals and rainmakers was limited in scope and effectiveness. Those who believed in Heaven found scientific theories, regardless of how well-grounded, less appealing than the imagined causal relationship between prayer and precipitation. It is true that Heaven did not always answer their prayers, casting doubt on the causality. Neither could intellectuals tangibly demonstrate how water vapor could be transformed into rain. They failed to convince the rainmakers, especially those "stupid peasants with simple minds" they mocked (Gongsun 1945).

Notwithstanding the difficult dialogue, intellectuals continued their efforts to disseminate meteorological knowledge to the masses, capitalizing on the Republic's thriving printing industry. Numerous journals of meteorology of varying levels of expertise were available for purchase (Liu 2014, pp. 103–4). Books on combating 'superstition' were also readily available. One of them, published in 1938 by a meteorological station in Southwest China, was titled *Meteorology and Superstition* (*Qixiang yu mixin* 氣象與迷信). It examined Chinese historical accounts of natural phenomena such as rain, wind and fog, challenging unsubstantiated claims before giving scientific explanations. "We must attempt to dispel all forms of superstition by promoting common meteorological knowledge among the people," the author stated (Lü 1938, p. 22). Publications of this type were intended for general readers but remained inaccessible to the majority of the illiterate population. According to surveys conducted at the time, China had an estimated illiteracy rate of more than 90 percent. A report from 1934, based on 27 nationwide surveys, provided a more optimistic estimate of 66.7 percent. Along the Yangtze River, more than six out of ten people were illiterate (Huang 1934, pp. 2–18).

As part of their contribution to China's modernization, some intellectuals established village schools in response to the widespread illiteracy in rural areas. One of them was Tao Xingzhi 陶行知 (1891–1946), a distinguished educator and Columbia University graduate. He believed that the purpose of popular education was to "turn knowledge into air" so that everyone could equally inhale it (Tao 1934, p. 630). He set up a school in the village of Xiaozhuang near Nanjing in 1927. Even though the school placed a greater emphasis on "the knowledge of day-to-day living" than on science, it played a crucial role in China's literacy movement, encouraging the self-transformation of the rural population by designing a curriculum that closely reflected their daily concerns (Merkel-Hess 2016, pp. 65–77). The Nanjing government also prioritized rural education or rural reconstruction. But in an impoverished country where nearly four out of five people were peasants, no modernization project could materialize overnight (Z. Li 1935, p. 28). The top-down effort to reshape the peasant way of life was doomed to be arduous, if not an outright failure.

5. The Panchen Lama and the Miracle of Rain

The belief that meteorological progress could dispel 'superstition' virtually collapsed in 1934 when the popularity of rainmaking was at its peak. Atmospheric science was simply disregarded when a severe drought struck coastal China, a wealthy region with a high concentration of merchants and higher education institutions. Science gave way to massive rituals of rainmaking throughout the affected provinces, revealing the chasm between the elite and common people, and transforming the ninth Panchen Lama (1883–1937) into a rainmaker.

The drought occurring between June and August had begun to exhibit ominous signs in May, which the weather-beaten Chinese could tell even without meteorological observation. In Shanghai, residents "felt unusually hot all of a sudden" on May 7 with "asphalt roads melting as if it were summer." Their feeling was confirmed by meteorological data that the temperature was 32 degrees Celsius ("Zuori tianqi" 1934). Later in the month, however, the city was cooled by sporadic rain that was closely monitored by a local observatory. The institution was adept at quantifying precipitation and temperature variations, but it proved insufficient in mitigating the effects of a severe heat wave that engulfed the

city in June. The city's temperature reached a record high of 39 degrees in late June and surpassed 40 degrees in July, a phenomenon unprecedented in the observatory's 63-year history ("Liuyue zhong" 1934; "Zuori qiuyang" 1934). The seemingly escalating temperature even became a marketing ploy for retailers. A fan factory organized a game of guessing the highest temperature between July 10 and July 31. It selected the winners from a pool of over 10,000 contestants after verifying the numbers they had guessed with the observatory, handing out ceiling and table fans as awards ("Huasheng dianqichang" 1934; "Shutian redu" 1934).

Most working people, however, did not find this game enjoyable, as the sweltering heat raged across Shanghai and its neighboring provinces, including Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Hunan, Hubei and Jiangxi. In villages, peasants felt they had reached the end of the line, with rice paddies cracking and fishponds drying up; in cities, coolies and rickshaw pullers languished in the scorching sun, slogging on roads that had melted ("Benshi zuori kure" 1934). The lower class bore the brunt of the heat and grew increasingly anxious and despondent during the prolonged drought, which, unlike flooding, threatened to starve them to death by leaving no "ecological endowments" (Courtney 2018, pp. 72–75). Mid-July forecasts from the observatory indicated that a typhoon was on its way to coastal China, which was expected to end the dry spell ("Hanzai yi cheng" 1934). The institution provided regular updates on the weather in the lower Yangtze region, monitoring precipitation and tropical storms from the western Pacific Ocean. However, the forecast arrived too late for some people, who had lost patience and chosen to resolve the situation in the conventional fashion.

Late in June, dragon parades began to appear in Nanjing and other affected regions ("Jing jiao xiangmin" 1934). Peasants simultaneously paraded "more than one hundred cloth dragons" in a Shanghai suburb, while young women sprayed water on the road and yelled "here comes the rain" ("Huxi" 1934). This type of rainmaking was prevalent in Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui—the three most affected provinces—where 58 percent of farmland was parched and 528 million Chinese dollars were lost economically ("Minguo ershisan nian" 1934). Peasants, the worst victims of the drought, organized the majority of rainmaking rituals. They also received assistance from the gentry, religious practitioners and even some officials. In Changshu county, Jiangsu, for instance, County Executive Zhou Heng 周衡 joined peasants, gentry and merchants in worshipping a bronze Dragon King in a temple. He reportedly prayed with incense at 5 a.m. on a daily basis, detaining those who violated the prohibition on slaughtering livestock—a traditional and popular way of praying for rain ("Tianshi kanghan" 1934).

Aside from government officials, Buddhists, Daoists and Christians all participated in the widespread rainmaking. Buddhist and Daoist leaders organized a national prayer in Sh^{an}ghai, where the 63rd Celestial Master of Daoism performed a renowned three-day ritual on an altar beginning on July 20 ("Zuowan you" 1934). This was overshadowed by the appearance of an unusual rainmaker, the Panchen Lama.

Prior to the onset of the drought, the Tibetan spiritual leader was in self-imposed exile in China due to factional conflict with the thirteenth Dalai Lama (Jagou 2011, pp. 42–57). The Panchen Lama was visiting a dentist in Shanghai in mid-June 1934 when the drought broke out. After recovering from his dental condition, he returned to Nanjing on June 30 and prayed for rain over the next two days. He chanted sutras in his residence and delegated four disciples, each in charge of seven monks, to make rain at Tangshan county, Yuhuatai district, Xuanwu Temple and Jiulong Bridge. In these locations, all groups found a pool where they could conduct the same ritual. The ritual began with the worship of water. The monks sat around the pools while scooping water into bowls. They then burned incense sticks in front of the bowls before chanting. The second step was to offer *tormas* or Tibetan Buddhist ritual cakes. The monks used flour to make these *tormas* while chanting. Afterward, they sprinkled water from the bowls and placed the *tormas* into the pools. The duration of the ritual was two and a half hours ("Banchan jixu qiuyu" 1934; Tujin 1934).

Their first prayers in July, however, were not answered. The Panchen Lama continued to send his disciples for rainmaking until they were allegedly successful in inducing rainfall for Nanjing. He traveled to Beijing later in the month, where he told reporters that he could pray for rain for the city if necessary. "In Nanjing, I dispatched ten monks to make rain on Qixia Mountain, whereupon it rained for two hours; then I performed another ritual on Baohua Mountain, where it rained for two days," he said. (Sanduo 1934) However, his claim of success was not uncontested. A political cartoon published on July 20 stated that there was no rain despite his efforts. "Perhaps the will of Heaven cannot be altered," it said ("Shishi xiao jing" 1934).

What the Panchen Lama had asserted about his rainmaking, nonetheless, was of no concern to Chinese intellectuals, who had no faith in the efficacy of his rituals. They launched ferocious attacks against those who relied on the irrational practice to resolve a natural disaster, accusing the rainmakers, particularly the Panchen Lama, of using the ritual to build their reputation and flaunt their compassion. "They are likely aware that praying for rain is deceptive; but if they did not do it, they could not demonstrate their love for the people," stated an article published a couple of weeks after the Panchen Lama's rituals (Youwen 1934, p. 414). If Buddhism were so powerful, another article joked, China could modernize by investing solely in the development of the religion. "I also contend that we can deport all foreign consultants to their home countries, as we have access to the infinite wisdom of the Buddha and the omnipotence of the Panchen Lama," the document said. "Why do we still require imported talent?" (S. He 1934, p. 447).

The critics seized upon an additional ironic element when the news broke that four members of the Panchen Lama's entourage had died of heatstroke en route to Beijing ("Banchan suicong" 1934). They were not the first victims of the fatal heat that had already claimed many other lives ("Jing shi" 1934). As the followers of the supposedly great rainmaker, however, they were not expected to be brought to their knees by the drought. Therefore, their deaths became a source of ridicule among the intellectuals. The four "little buddhas," a commentary said, were as fragile as a Guanyin statue made of clay, incapable of being protected by the Panchen Lama's power. It also charged that the spiritual leader had fled to Beijing to escape the heat, even though, officially, he was preparing to return to Tibet ("Banchan zai ping" 1934; Xinyu 1934, p. 9).

Not for the first time, the intellectuals questioned his agenda. Long before the drought occurred, he had conducted grand Kalachakra Initiation ceremonies in Chinese cities, in the name of bringing peace to China and the rest of the world. These ceremonies, sanctioned by the authorities, were wildly popular among the masses, but the intellectuals dismissed them as pure 'superstition' that must be eradicated (Mengruo 1934). Some went so far as to call the Panchen Lama "a disgrace to the Republic" and a "demon" who commanded great religious respect (Jiehu 1925, p. 3). Given his iconic status in religion, or 'superstition' in the eyes of the intellectuals, it was inevitable that the Panchen Lama would become a lightning rod.

While the criticisms of the 'superstitious' icon were harsh, they were limited to written texts. Intellectuals' peaceful promotion of a scientific mindset contrasted starkly with the faith-based practices of rainmakers. To preserve the sanctity of their rites, rainmakers were prepared to punish participants who violated traditional practices and, more alarmingly, to fight any outsiders who attempted to disrupt the ceremonies. A case in point was the violent confrontation between peasants and officials in Chongde county, Zhejiang, on 19 July 1934. Around 300 peasants petitioned the local government for official rainmaking to alleviate the drought, but the county executive denied their request. Then, a fight broke out between the petitioners and government security guards, who ultimately opened fire, resulting in four deaths and dozens of injuries ("Chongde nongmin" 1934). This was not a singular occurrence.

Significantly more bloodthirsty than this was the murder of Xu Yiqing 徐一清 (1871–1934), a school principal, by "more than one thousand" rainmaking peasants. The educator, who was also a GMD member and a Sun Yat-sen supporter, ruffled the feathers of the rain-

makers by discouraging them from praying for rain on 12 August 1934. Before the incident, rumors had circulated that Xu was interfering with official relief efforts by claiming falsely that the village was not affected by drought. The anger of the villagers boiled over when Xu intervened in their rainmaking procession and asked them not to "practice superstition in the name of praying for rain." They beat him to death and dumped his body in a river, but this did not quell the rage. They reportedly fished him out before breaking his neck and decapitating him with an unidentified instrument. "It was too horrifying to look at," lamented a news report ("Dangwei zuzhi" 1934; "Xiaoxue xiaozhang" 1934).

The brutal murder exposed the intellectuals' struggle against rainmaking. Their fervent preaching of science, whether in writing or in person, did not appear to have the slightest effect on the long-held belief of praying for rain. Their capacity to reach out to the peasants was constrained by a lack of resources and political influence. The authorities were different, however. They possessed the necessary resources and power to enforce their political will, but their dedication to the anti-'superstition' campaign was malleable.

6. To Pray or Not to Pray

Government officials in the Republic upheld the principle of rationality but also exhibited ambivalence towards rainmaking. Unlike most rainmakers and intellectuals, who were largely unwavering in their positions, some officials straddled the line between the adherents of social transformation and those of social conservation. On occasion, they gave in to the reality of the lifeworld of rainmaking, turning a blind eye or even endorsing the practice. The ambivalence was most pronounced under the Beiyang government (1912–1928) and then grew more subtle after the GMD came to power. This phenomenon demonstrates that both regimes lacked "strong organizational foundations" at the local level, preventing them from exercising authority effectively in the cultural sphere (Duara 1988, p. 792).

Whether cooperative or antagonistic, the attitude of government officials revealed the importance of rainmaking in contemporary statecraft. They might have handled the ritual differently on different occasions, but they all used it to advance their own agendas. On the one hand, they disapproved of rainmaking as a form of 'superstition,' in accordance with the call for building a rational society; on the other hand, they frequently toned down the rational rhetoric and made concessions, as part of a strategy to manage people's emotions.

Officials in the early days of the Republic, when the nation was plagued by fractious politics and structural weakness, were more cooperative in rainmaking than their successors in the Nanjing Decade. These officials, some of whom inherited the political and cultural legacy of the Qing, were not necessarily ardent rationalists. They were less committed to ideology and more tolerant of traditional practices. They sided with the camp of social transformation and jumped on the bandwagon of rationality, largely as a passive response to the political exigencies of the time. While they paid lip service to the cause of fighting 'superstition,' they continued to permit or even engage in 'superstitious' customs (e.g., rainmaking).

Under their rule, however, the religious landscape of China began to shift, upsetting what Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer call the "equilibrium of Chinese religion" (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, p. 4). The once-undefined landscape was redrawn and remapped to conform to the Western conception of religion, constituting a "radical, unprecedented break" with the past (Goossaert 2005, p. 15). Nonetheless, the landscape remained a rich tapestry of diverse traditions and customs, with 'superstitious' practices "as entrenched as ever" (G. Zhu 1915, p. 17). Even in prosperous Hangzhou, a coastal city with a high literacy rate, 'superstition' persisted in 1921. Nearly a decade after the founding of the Republic, the city was still dotted with "superstitious posters" and various altars, where monks and nuns performed religious rites that drew a large audience, including young people (Wan 1921).

In such an environment still infused with traditional beliefs, the Beiyang government allowed rainmaking to continue. In this period, instances of officials acting as rainmakers were prevalent. As mentioned previously, warlords such as Zhang Zongchang and

Feng Yuxiang added new ingredients to the traditional ritual. In the meantime, some local officials were more inclined to adopt traditional ceremonies from the Qing, but these ceremonies were no longer regulated by the state ("Duantu qiuyu" 1924; "Xiang sheng qiuyu" 1925). While the state apparatus of the Qing was actively involved in rainmaking, the Beiyang government appeared to allow greater autonomy to officials-turned-rainmakers.

The brazen attempts by officials to make rain ran counter to a major theme of the era—science—and elicited severe criticism from intellectuals. The latter accused the officials of deceiving the public by employing rainmaking to "win the hearts of the people" ("Qiyu shuo" 1928). This accusation resonated with the traditional belief that the ruling class had the moral obligation to provide for the governed. Under this moral obligation, even if an official did not genuinely sympathize with his people, he was obliged to put on a facade of sympathy to legitimize his rule. In the case of rainmaking, this facade had the unintended effect of endorsing the 'superstitious' ritual, which critics argued should be abolished in the Republic.

Another motivation for official rainmaking was to defuse tension with public rainmakers. Officials were acquainted with the scale of violence that could be triggered in an open crackdown. In extreme cases, even those who conceded to rainmaking demands could still enrage the practitioners by lacking sincerity. This occurred to the head of Anji county in Zhejiang in 1922. He acted swiftly to prohibit the slaughtering of animals, when a drought struck the deeply 'superstitious,' mountainous and poorly connected county. Dissatisfied villagers nevertheless requested that he burn incense and pray to a Bodhisattva statue in a temple. He followed every instruction but was still accused of profaning the deity by lacking sincerity. After being attacked by a mob, he was compelled to flee the county while under police protection (C. Li 1922, p. 26).

Aware of such tensions, even Nanjing government officials were forced to make concessions in response to public rainmaking. In contrast to its predecessor in Beijing, the GMD government composed of revolutionaries was more dedicated to the anti-'superstition' cause, making it a pillar of the nation-building project. As the self-proclaimed bearer of modernity, the GMD disdained many policies of the Beiyang government, which was often stereotyped as corrupt and conservative. The party's sweeping crackdown on 'superstition' was motivated in part by its desire for modernity and in part by its desire to gain legitimacy by correcting the mistakes of the previous administration. Its attack on rainmaking was ferocious because the ritual was one of the wrongdoings sanctioned by the warlords, the GMD's arch-rivals.

The party yielded to pressure nonetheless. Its utopian vision of a society without 'superstition' clashed with the reality of fierce social resistance, which was exacerbated by its failure to establish a legal distinction between religion and 'superstition' (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, pp. 61–63). Following the footsteps of the warlords, some party officials actively responded to people's requests for rain prayers. Even as late as 1946, officials in Lufeng county of Guangdong performed a rain ritual on a mountain "in response to the feelings of the people." The region was devastated by a severe famine that claimed over 100,000 lives three years ago (Luo 1946). Despite the efforts of the government to provide relief, the county descended into disorder, marked by skyrocketing prices and a decline in public security (Mai 1944, p. 6). Now, the county was once again in a state of "endless panic" due to a lack of precipitation and was possibly on the verge of another catastrophe. In an urgent telegram to the provincial government, the officials explained that it was in this context that they resorted to rainmaking to alleviate the anxiety of the people (Luo 1946).

Official rainmaking was no longer sanctioned by the government, but it was still permissible on rare occasions, as evidenced by their desperation to elicit sympathy from the above. This ambivalence characterized the official stance on rainmaking during the Nanjing Decade. The government was generally opposed to the ritual, but it was never determined to outlaw it entirely. Due to its increasing association with 'superstition,' few officials openly supported rainmaking during a drought. However, those who did were able to make a strong case by citing their sympathy for the victims, as was the case in

Lufeng. Although some officials sought practical solutions to alleviate droughts (e.g., deploying pumps to obtain water from less affected regions), many rainmakers still clung to their time-honored rituals rather than adopting modern devices (Zhao 1934, p. 241; Zhizhi 1934, pp. 253–54). In other words, officials sought to minimize the significance of rainmaking rather than immediately eradicate it, balancing their mission to combat 'superstition' with their desire for a stable social transformation. The wish for such a delicate balance caused officials to flip-flop on occasion regarding their treatment of rainmakers.

Policy reversals were common during protracted and severe droughts, as officials' anti-'superstition' stance was gradually eroded by people's growing demand for rain. A good case in point was the reaction of the public security bureau in Anhui when the province was afflicted by the 1934 drought. The bureau swiftly warned the public against rainmaking, sending police to disperse a dragon parade organized by "a few children." As the drought intensified, however, the government gradually allowed religious organizations and charities to offer prayers for rain. In addition to permitting public processions, it also prohibited the slaughter of animals. More remarkably, Bureau Chief Zhang Benshun 張本舜 made an unexpected decision to lead a group of officials and merchants to pray for rain in a dragon temple ("Wan sheng" 1934).

The ambivalent attitude was not limited to local governments; it was also prevalent in Nanjing. The central government was largely responsible for the expansion of policy vacillation between prohibition and endorsement. In 1934, the Nanjing government responded to the proliferation of rainmaking with a bifurcated approach: while turning a blind eye to rainmakers in rural and other less developed areas, it actively suppressed those practices in Shanghai. The majority of Shanghai's residents had a basic understanding of science, unlike other drought-affected regions, according to Premier Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883–1944). In a telegram to Shanghai, he declared that it was "not only superstitious but also fraudulent" to set up altars and pray for rain in the city, ordering an immediate ban on the practice. Despite this, he was lenient toward village rainmakers, recognizing their lack of education. He feared that "excessive interference may cause disturbances" and urged officials to prioritize pre-disaster education over harsh crackdowns during drought periods (J. Wang 1934, p. 23).

Wang's edict demonstrated that the Nanjing government had no intention of imposing a blanket ban on rainmaking. Although it had declared an all-out war on 'superstition' by promulgating a plethora of rules and regulations, the government was willing to make concessions where necessary for the sake of maintaining social stability. Such a compromise occurred more frequently than expected, as the government cautiously organized its comprehensive anti-'superstition' scheme so as not to provoke too much public resentment or opposition. This compromise, however, also made officials less certain about their rainmaking policies. They were left alone to ponder the question of whether or not to pray.

7. Conclusions

In defiance of conventional periodization, the ritual of rainmaking displayed remarkable resilience during the Chinese Republican era, even when the religious practice was entangled in a web of crises. It faced a crisis of credibility amidst a campaign to promote reason and rationality in response to another crisis (i.e., the survival of the Chinese nation). The relationship between the two crises was dialectical, pitching traditional practice against modern ambition. The outcome was not a decisive victory for either side, but rather a compromise between the two. Somewhere behind the fault line of the compromise was the resilience of rainmakers.

Resilience was deeply ingrained in their lifeworld, which was based on perception rather than scientific observation and governed the Chinese peoples' ways of thinking and acting. Living in and being shaped by the same lifeworld, they tended to perceive and interpret the surrounding phenomena in a similar manner. They gradually developed a standard for what was normal and what was abnormal, which Alfred Schutz refers to as "a natural attitude" (Schutz 1970, p. 116). This attitude had informed the Chinese for centuries

that rainmaking was the accepted response to drought. They had practiced the ritual for so long that it had become embedded in their practical consciousness, to the point where they did not pause to consider what to do in the event of a drought. They knew implicitly when, what, and how to act.

As a considerable force of social conservation, they vigorously defended their lifeworld against the force of transformation, which was primarily mobilized by intellectuals and officials. I am not, however, suggesting that the division of these two forces was directly proportional to an individual's level of education or profession. As evidenced by the preceding examples, the actuality was complex, with a permeable boundary between the forces. The force of transformation, as a distinct social minority, faced an uphill battle when attempting to discredit rainmaking. Despite having greater institutional power, it struggled to effectively communicate with the intended audience within the opposing camp, which explained the limited scope of the credibility crisis of rainmaking.

Nonetheless, it was undeniable that the interaction of these two forces constantly shaped the lifeworld of rainmaking in a slow but steady manner. The force of social conservation mounted a strong defense, utilizing the sheer number of sympathizers and their habituated culture. These rainmakers, however, lacked the knowledge-based persuasive power of intellectuals and the political dominance of officials to achieve their desired outcomes. Their response to the call for transformation was tactical, which is "an art of the weak" in Michel de Certeau's terms. They were required to operate within the modernists' sphere of influence, but they never capitulated. Rather, they exploited the "cracks" that occasionally surfaced in the power's surveillance network, which governed the extent and velocity of social change (de Certeau 1984, pp. 34–39). The interaction between the two forces, involving both repression and resistance, was not a battle with a clear victor, but rather a prolonged process of negotiation and integration that ultimately left both sides unsatisfied. This dynamic equilibrium determined China's response to the crisis of survival brought on by global modernity.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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