

Chinese Troupe
A Cash Engine
For Its Leader

Followers Provide Free
Labor and Savings

By MICHAEL ROTHFELD and NICOLE HONG

Over the past decade, the dance group Shen Yun Performing Arts has made money at a staggering rate.

The group had \$60 million in 2015.

It had \$144 million by 2019.

And by the end of last year, tax records show, it had more than a quarter of a billion dollars, stockpiling wealth at a pace that would be extraordinary for any company, let alone a nonprofit dance group from Orange County, N.Y.

Operated by Falun Gong, the persecuted Chinese religious movement, Shen Yun’s success flows in part from its ability to pack venues worldwide — while exploiting young, low-paid performers with little regard for their health or well-being.

But it also is a token of the power that Falun Gong’s founder, Li Hongzhi, has wielded over his followers. In the name of fighting communism, and obeying Mr. Li’s mystical teachings, they have created a global network to glorify him and enrich his movement.

Under Mr. Li’s direct leadership, Shen Yun has become a repository of vast wealth for Falun Gong, often accumulating money at the expense of its loyal adherents, a New York Times investigation has found.

It has raked in funds through ticket sales — nearly \$39 million in 2023 alone — but also by using religious fealty to command the free labor of its followers. It has received tens of millions of dollars more in ways that may have crossed legal or ethical lines, The Times found.

In one case, Shen Yun and a school that trains its dancers received \$16 million from The Epoch Times, a newspaper run by Falun Gong followers, during a period when federal prosecutors said the publication’s accounts were inflated in a money-laundering conspiracy.

Shen Yun and a network of satellite organizations added more wealth by skirting rules to tap tens of millions of dollars in pandemic-era relief money.

And three former Shen Yun performers said they were paid to perform in exchange for their services.

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Jimmy Carter in 2007. He was a self-professed outsider intent on reforming Washington.

A Peacemaker Who Never Stopped Striving

By PETER BAKER and ROY REED

Jimmy Carter, who rose from Georgia farmland to become the 39th president of the United States on a promise of national healing after the wounds of Watergate and Vietnam, then lost the White House in a cauldron of economic turmoil at home and crisis in Iran, died on Sunday at his home in Plains, Ga. He was 100.

The Carter Center in Atlanta announced his death.

Mr. Carter, who was the longest-living president in American history, died nearly three months after he turned 100 and became the first

former commander in chief to reach the century mark. In August, his grandson, Jason Carter, told the Democratic National Convention that the former president was “holding on” and “though his body may be weak tonight, his spirit is as strong as ever” and he “can’t wait to vote for Kamala Harris.”

The former president cast his absentee ballot for her in mid-October after making his final public appearance on his birthday when he was rolled out to his yard in a wheelchair to watch a flyover of military jets in his honor. Other than interludes in the White House and the Georgia

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Venturesome Tourists Disregard Risks as Afghanistan Beckons

By DAVID ZUCCHINO

BAMIYAN, Afghanistan — Yi-Pin Lin, an associate professor at Tufts University, proudly says he has vacationed in 120 nations over the past decade.

But there was one country he had always dreamed of visiting, only to be frightened off by decades of war, kidnappings and terrorism: Afghanistan.

With the end of the Afghan war in 2021, the country’s new Taliban rulers began encouraging tourists to visit. So last month, Mr. Lin packed his bags, paid \$130 for a visa and boarded a flight to Kabul, the Afghan capital.

“When I told my friends where I was going, they all thought I was crazy,” he said. “They said it was too dangerous.”

Mr. Lin, 43, is part of a small but growing vanguard of venturesome tourists making their way to Afghanistan, disregarding dire warnings issued by their governments. The State Department advises Americans not to travel to Afghanistan “due to terrorism, risk of wrongful detention, civil unrest, kidnapping and crime.”

Over the past three years, Taliban officials say, 14,500 foreign tourists have visited the isolated, poverty-stricken nation. They have arrived with hard currency



Yi-Pin Lin, left, a tourist from the United States, and his Afghan guide visiting a lake in Afghanistan.

that Afghanistan desperately needs.

Many tourists have experienced the country’s traditional hospitality while visiting its famous mosques, its towering mountain ranges, its scenic high deserts and the remains of the renowned Buddha statues in Bamiyan.

In the minds of many around the world, Afghanistan has conjured another image since the Taliban takeover: something akin to a prison. The country has become notorious for its suffocating restrictions on women, which have essentially erased them from public life.

The Taliban’s rise to power, however, has also brought a relative calm to the country with the end of the 20-year war.

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Hope Is Fading
In Cuba as U.S.
Hardens Policy

Obama-Era Progress Is
Cut by White House

This article is by Frances Robles, Ed Augustin and Hannah Berkeley Cohen.

It wasn’t long ago that the Plaza of the Revolution in Havana was packed with American tourists knocking into each other with selfie sticks while taking photos of the iconic image of the revolutionary Che Guevara and trying to catch a ride in a candy-apple red 1952 Chevrolet Bel-Air.

Today, those polished 1950s-era American convertibles that came to symbolize quintessential Cuba sit empty, the tourists they once carried largely gone.

The drivers spend their lives like most Cubans do: coping with prolonged power outages, standing in line at poorly stocked supermarkets and watching their friends, family and neighbors — sick of all the hardships — pack up and leave.

Ten years ago, President Barack Obama stunned the world by restoring diplomatic relations with Cuba, ending more than 50 years of Cold War estrangement between the United States and a country with which it had once been on the brink of nuclear war.

For two and a half years, Cuba brimmed with enthusiasm amid a remarkable wave of investment and tourism, fueled by deals signed by major American companies such as Google, AT&T and Major League Baseball.

But a financial implosion caused by a cascade of factors — the tightening of U.S. policy by the Trump administration, Cuba’s mismanagement of its economy, the crushing effect of the Covid-19 pandemic — has kept visitors away and launched an immigration exodus of epic proportions.

Tourism, once a lifeblood of Cuba’s economy, has collapsed, down nearly 50 percent since 2017, with new U.S. visa regulations making it harder for even Europeans to travel there.

“The comparison between then and now is literally night and day,” said Luis Manuel Pérez, who works as a chauffeur.

A former engineering professor, Mr. Pérez, 57, once had a stream of customers who paid \$40 an hour

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ANGER AND AGONY
OVER FIERY CRASH
OF KOREAN PLANE

179 DEAD; 2 SURVIVORS

Pilots Were Warned of a
Possible Bird Strike
on the Approach

This article is by Choe Sang-Hun, John Yoon and Jin Yu Young.

SEOUL — A passenger plane with 181 people on board skidded on the runway at a high speed and slammed into a wall before exploding into flames.

Two crew members were rescued alive from the tail of the burning plane, but over the ensuing hours on Sunday, grim news trickled out to anxious relatives at Muan International Airport, in southwestern South Korea.

By late Sunday, all of the remaining 179 people onboard had been confirmed dead, making the plane crash — flown by the popular low-cost carrier Jeju Air — the worst aviation disaster involving



A Jeju Air flight crashed on Sunday in Muan, South Korea.

a South Korean airline in nearly three decades and the worst ever on South Korean soil.

Sunday’s crash was the deadliest worldwide since that of Lion Air Flight 610 in 2018, when all 189 people on board died as the plane plunged into the Java Sea, according to reports from the International Civil Aviation Organization, a United Nations agency.

Officials were investigating what caused the Jeju Air flight to crash-land, including why its landing gear appeared to have malfunctioned and whether the

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Founder of HBO Who Turned
Cable TV Into a Cultural Force

By RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

Charles F. Dolan, who founded HBO, merged a group of small Long Island cable TV systems into a network he called Cablevision and amassed a fortune building an innovative communications, entertainment and sports empire that included Madison Square Garden and its professional teams, died on Saturday. He was 98.

A representative for Mr. Dolan’s family confirmed the death on Sunday in a statement, which did not say where he died.

Cablevision Systems Corporation had 1,500 customers when Mr. Dolan founded it in 1973. It was serving three million cable TV households in the New York metropolitan area and providing internet and digital telephone service when he reached a deal in September 2015 to sell it to Altice, a European media company, for \$17.7 billion. Altice USA now runs it under the Optimum brand.

Mr. Dolan “helped establish cable television as an economic, social and cultural force in the United States during the final



Charles F. Dolan in 2001. He founded Cablevision in 1973.

quarter of the 20th century,” Douglas Gomery, a mass communications scholar, wrote in the 2004 edition of “Encyclopedia of Television,” a publication of the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago.

The deal with Altice, completed in June 2016, included the Long Island-based Newsday and Mr. Dolan’s News 12 cable stations providing news from the New York metropolitan area. But the

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INTERNATIONAL A4-10

A Day at the Radioactive Spa

Khoja Obi Garm offers treatments with radon-infused water and echoes of Tajikistan’s Soviet past.

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Voice of a Long-Ago Japan

Midori Kato, 85, is the last original cast member of the cartoon series “Sazae-san.” The Global Profile.

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Blessing for an Abortion Clinic

Through a ritual at a year-old Maryland facility, leaders want to show that religion can be a source of support for reproductive rights.

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Raising Pheasants to Be Shot

Some New York lawmakers hope to end a program that provides birds to foster interest in field sports.

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A Pioneering Sportscaster

Greg Gumbel was the first Black announcer to call a major U.S. final, the 2001 Super Bowl. He was 78.

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Rethinking the Winter Classic

Instead of stadiums, the N.H.L. should choose outdoor venues with stunning backdrops. Commentary.

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Sharing Their Trauma

Two women accused a tennis coach of sexual assault 26 years apart. Then they found each other.

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BUSINESS B1-4

A.I. Could Reshape the Map

As artificial intelligence is widely adopted, some once-struggling midsize cities in the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic and South are poised to benefit, transforming economics and politics.

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Can Musk Deliver on Tesla?

Sales of the company’s cars are flagging, but investors are focusing on the potential of autonomous driving and Elon Musk’s ties to President-elect Donald J. Trump.

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Artists We Lost in 2024

Remembering, in their own words, the creators and performers who died this year, like the pianist and conductor Maurizio Pollini, above.

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