Qian Xuesen played an important role in Communist China's science and politics.

Qian Xuesen, a top Chinese scientist who made important contributions to the missile and space programs of both the United States and the People's Republic of China, died in Beijing on October 31. He was 98.

Qian relocated to the US in 1935 as a student and eventually became a leading scientist in America’s missile program. He also contributed to the Manhattan Project, which developed the first atomic bomb. During the 1950s he was accused of being a Communist and was eventually deported to China where he went on to advance China's aerospace programs. It was his successes with missile and satellite technologies that made him a highly respected figure in the eyes of the government and the people of China. He was named to the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

Yet his career was not without setbacks. During the "Great Leap Forward" industrial movement of 1958, Qian published articles in the People's Daily newspaper that claimed China's crop harvest could potentially produce over 20,000 kilograms of rice per mu (0.16 acre) by planting more seeds in the field than the usual density. His assessments were used by then Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader Mao Zedong which led to that year’s disastrous agricultural policy. Tens of millions died during the famine in the three years that followed.

Many Chinese people have questioned the reasons behind Professor Qian's article on agriculture issues. Since Qian is not a horticulturalist, why would he write an article like that? Many asked if he was he forced to sign that article as his own.

Similarly it was during the 1989 protests at Tiananmen Square that Jiang Zemin, then president of the CCP, convinced him to speak out against the students' actions. It was believed that since he was such a respected member of the Chinese citizenry, that his comments would quell the protests.

In his later years Qian showed support for the study of qigong, a Chinese style of meditation practice. From 1983 to 1987 Qian made over 100 speeches related to qigong and the extraordinary functions of the human body at the Institute of Space Medico-Engineering in Beijing.

In 1992 Falun Gong, an ancient form of qigong, was taught publicly by Li Hongzhi in Changchun China. Millions of people joined this practice including many CCP members. Fearing Falun Gong's soaring popularity, Jiang Zemin started a campaign to abolish Falun Gong in China. Jiang called the dean of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and ordered him to organize some academicians to speak out against Falun Gong. He did so, but Jiang was not satisfied with the
Controversial Scientist Qian Xuesen

Insubstantial scientists he enlisted. As a result Qian was asked to repudiate Falun Gong much in the same way he spoke out against the protests in 1989. Qian did not do so. Jian Zemin went to see Qian several times hoping he would openly support the oppression of Falun Gong. Qian never wavered in his position and he refused to renounce Falun Gong even though he was under a great deal of pressure to do so.

Qian's speeches about the positive effects of qigong were blocked by the CCP after Jiang criminalized the practice of Falun Gong in 1999. After Qian's death the state run news media neglected to mention Qian's studies relating to qigong. Nevertheless it is believed that Qian had a very positive influence on the citizens of China by validating the positive effects of qigong.