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Falun gong, the great red dharma : permanent revolution of the law wheel

Stephen Mclver Flanigan

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Stephen McIver Flanigan entitled "Falun gong, the great red dharma : permanent revolution of the law wheel." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.

Miriam Levering, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:


Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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To the Graduate Council:

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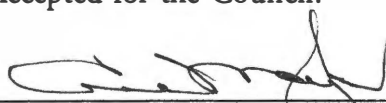
Miriam Levering, Major Professor

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and recommend its acceptance:





Accepted for the Council:



Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Thesis
2003
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Falun Gong, The Great Red Dharma:
Permanent Revolution of the Law Wheel

A Thesis

Prepared for the

Master of Arts Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Stephen McIver Flanigan

May, 2003

This work is dedicated to my teachers.
By this, may I begin and never cease to repay the debt I owe.

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In addition to these central figures in the University of Tennessee, virtually all of the prominent professors thorough my college career have imparted a visible influence in this thesis and my overall academic career. Dr. Doug Burgess of the History Department at East Tennessee State University helped form my interest in historical problems of revolution and political dialectics in that eternally instructive field of Classical Western history. Dr. John Hardwig, former head of Philosophy at East Tennessee, and now Philosophy head at U.T. Knoxville, likewise helped spark my interest in Marxian analysis, which is of particular salience in this thesis. My teacher and mentor Dr. Jeffery Gold of the Philosophy department at East Tennessee, has long helped my exploration of spiritual traditions, symbolic correspondence, and the disciplined transformation of consciousness. The insights gained by this lifelong project commenced under Dr. Gold's instruction continue to inform my analysis of subjective states and their cosmological landscapes. Finally, I owe considerable thanks to my teacher Fang Liang, who for years taught me as his sole student, passing on what I could absorb of the Taiji he learned in the Chen Village. From the practices I learned from him, I understand something about *qi* cultivation which no amount of reading can transmit.

Abstract

Falun Gong is one of the largest and fastest-growing religious movements in Chinese history, and its illegality and persecution in China are cause for concern in the areas of human rights and religious freedom. In this thesis, I argue that the particular characteristics of Falun Gong suggest that its massive popularity in China may be due to its ideological resemblance to the structures of Maoism and Chinese Communism, which for fifty years have penetrated every area of Chinese life. Furthermore, I argue that Falun Gong is a direct response to the traumatic experience of the Cultural Revolution in China and the avoidance of its real resolution, despite reform, under the Chinese Communist Party. The specifically postrevolutionary character of Falun Gong is evidenced by its mass-line messianism, its antitraditionalism, its totalism, its quasi-materialism, and even practical details of its *qigong* technique.

This thesis is primarily a study in rhetorical analysis, focusing on the texts and speeches of Falun Gong's leader, Master Li Hongzhi. But is also something of a web-ethnography, in that I have drawn extensively from on-line writings by Falun Gong practitioners.

A Note on Conventions Used in the Text

Though no system of Romanizing Chinese is entirely satisfactory, I have chosen to use the more phonetically useful *Pinyin* system, which is largely replacing the older, more familiar Wade-Giles method. Thus *Tao* 道 will herein be spelled *Dao*, *ch'i* 氣 will appear as *qi*, and Chuang Tzu 莊子 will transform into Zhuangzi. Where useful or relevant, I will include the Chinese character in its traditional form.

The citation of Master Li Hongzhi's texts entails some difficulty since the translations are forever in a state of revision, with regularly updated editions posted on-line and new editions now appearing in print. Though the changes are not substantive and are usually for the better, they render pagination a problem, and simple URL citations, even for specific pages, may be too general to be of great help. For these reasons I have chosen to notate citations from the principal Falun Gong texts by an address consisting of their chapter, section, and subdivision numerals, since most of the writings are ordered under sequentially divided parts. In the case of *Zhuan Falun*, I will include the title of the discussion section since the number is given in the URL, but not on the index itself. Thus a passage from *China Falun Gong* for instance, noted as 2.4.2, means the quote is found in the second chapter, fourth section, and the second item under the fourth section. The enumeration of divisions in these books can be confusing, but the versions I have available- an older printed copy of the HTML edition and the present PDF and HTML documents- all agree in their numerical divisions, even though the pagination has drifted somewhat. There are however several texts which despite their length have no internal divisions, namely the *Lecture at the First Conference in North America*, *Falun Dafa Lecture in New York City*, *Falun Dafa Lecture in San Francisco*, and *Exposition of Falun Dafa in the New York Seminar*. For these I will provide the page number of my printed version as it appears giving the present page of the sum total (e.g., 16 of 44). Therefore, if one wishes to locate a cited passage, even if viewing an altered print version or single-scroll HTML

document, an estimation of the relative position can be made.

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1 Spiritual (counter) Revolution

**“The Human body is the image of the country,
Whoever governs his body, governs the country.”**

-Daoist proverb.

When large-scale salvational religions arise in China, historical crises clothe themselves in religious symbols and are quickened by the psychic drama of embodied transformation. As these millenarian events have often accelerated the change of rulership in China, they serve as the omen, catalyst, and stage of cultural metamorphosis. Falun Gong 法輪功 is proportioned to its history; by sheer numbers and *per capita* it is perhaps the largest salvational movement in Chinese history, and it spread like a prairie-fire among the postrevolutionary cities in the 1990's, burning right up to the *Zhongnanhai*, the citadel of the Communist Party. The extreme popularity, efficient organization, and overt activism of this movement guaranteed its eventual proscription, and the whole phenomenon inevitably resembles Folk-Buddhist insurgences and their imperial suppression. While parallels with familiar historical motifs ring true for the broad outlines of the Falun Gong situation, within its quasi-Buddhistic facade and its late urban context, I believe Falun Gong exhibits as much the imprint of Chinese socialist revolution as any specific religious precursor. But this transmission of national eschatology is made possible by the shared heritage of revolution, utopianism, and self-transformation. Thanks to revolution and in spite of it, the Chinese religious imagination, with its impulse to religious sedition, proves that it can still mobilize a great multitude to confront historical exigencies.

Many of the forces challenging the Chinese present have converged in the path of Falun Gong's career. The late stages of revolution thoroughly disrupted education and have created in their excesses and undoing a certain ideological turbulence. The suppression of intellectual and student dissent may have sublimated energies away from more progressive and practical forms of public dissension, while a fatally-corrupt government of threadbare legitimacy now leans even more heavily on police control and

ensorship. A promising Chinese economy hovers near urban consumerism and rural crisis, while globalization under a neoimperialist state offers ambivalent rewards. And as social problems continue to rise, a revitalization of a sentimentalized Mao appears to be forming a new Chinese fundamentalism. These historically pressurized social factors demand a suitable response from the Chinese religious marketplace, and of indigenous forms, it can be no coincidence that Falun Gong, the most popular of new religious movements in China, also became the religious vehicle of protest.

But contemporary China maintains a host of broadly similar *qigong* 氣功¹ practices that do not (or no longer) lead to confrontations with the government and its ritual control system over the embodied world. Moreover, it can be argued that the wells of Chinese tradition still nourish social order through these *qi* practices by directly internalizing the grand text of Chinese culture- the practical synthesis of correspondences among the cosmos, the state, and the self. While affirming the spatial world and its order through applied internalization of the Chinese cosmogrammar, alchemists and physicians (if the distinction can be made) have extended life, restored health, and awakened the mind by harmonizing the elements of nature, not by escaping them.

Today, the parks of modern China host a flourishing *qi* cultivation subculture where a myriad of traditional and modern techniques are practiced in the same public space.² Martial regimens developed during the militarization of Ming and Qing society, no longer confined to clan and temple courtyards, are now performed along side health-oriented movements composed in the Deng era. Generally sharing the same axis of indigenous symbolism, systems of practice like *Taijiquan*, the numerous internal *Wushu* routines and most *qigong* techniques are all disciplines of liberation uniquely³ involved

¹ *qigong* literally means 'breath work' or 'energy work.' It is a modern, secularized term for various internal operations involving the gathering and refinement of *qi* for purposes of health, martial prowess, and spiritual enlightenment. A discussion of this term and its historicity follows in chapter two.

² For a glimpse into China's *qi* cultivation subculture, see "The Mystery of Chi", part one of Bill Moyers' video series "Healing and the Mind" (1993)

³ Ecstatic dance, a progenitor and occasional companion of these *qi* techniques must surely be remembered here, but in pure dance the activity of the body is wholly given over to rapturous aesthetic expression unencumbered by such practical application as fighting.

with the body's active, practical function. The experience of *qigong* practice over time can frequently produce a wide range of altered states of consciousness that typify religious experience in the Chinese mode- Daoist, Buddhist, mediumistic and shamanic phenomena all manifest daily on a large public scale in China, all under the broad aegis of *qigong*. Though perhaps all would agree that *some* sort of convincing subjective event is here transpiring, many *qigong* practitioners claim that at higher levels, the sheer vital power and awareness of advanced *qigong* can enable adepts to act upon external objects and acquire knowledge independently of the physical senses, and even harden their bodies against sharp weapons and missiles. Some lineages, which may derive at least in part from the infamous sects of yore, still demonstrate their sword-bending invulnerability to audiences.

While these claims seem extraordinary, they are natural extensions of the basic philosophical principles behind classical learning. With *qi* as universal substrate, the cosmification of the individual opens a greater domain to the organs of the mind 心 and intent 意. As the animating life-principle, the organic quality of this cosmic *qi* shows the spirituality of the Sage to be the supreme abstraction of Chinese humanism. If the mind is truly free and wise, its efficacy cannot help but acquire transmundane power. And in the more immediate realm of embodied experience, the mastery of materiality through *qigong* is known largely through certain martial traditions, usually termed internal (*nei jia* 內家)⁴. Combining classical Internal Alchemy with various fighting techniques and bioenergetic movement, these internal forms of practice can produce remarkable body awareness, together with startlingly subtle and explosive power.

Furthermore, *qigong* exists as an extended but essential aspect of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Virtually everyone who receives acupuncture treatment in China understands that the physician is altering the flow of *qi* in the meridians of their body.

While acupuncture and its attendant disciplines manipulate *qi* through external or

⁴ Of the so-called internal styles, *Taijiquan* in its many variants is the most popular. Others which can boast a higher percentage of martially oriented experts are *Xinyiquan*, *Baguazhang*, *Liuhhebafa*, and *Dachengchuan*.

sympathetic agencies, *qigong* does much the same but with the mind and breath leading the *qi* through the meridians, organs, and subtle organs of the interior landscape. For the Daoists, enlightenment is a state of super-health - a sheer overwhelming positive vitality that permanently dispels the imbalanced centrifugal forces of disease and disorder. Thus, the ability of *qi* cultivation to generate power within an individual exists along a continuum which begins with life itself and extends all the way to immortality and the paranormal, with a range of stages in between, all made possible by a democratized form of mystical empiricism inseparable from the narratives of China's great traditions.

If this internal power is rhetorically harmonized with the political order, then a resolution of life's contradictions and the dialectics of *qi* cultivation will culminate as the grand conjunction of opposites within the practitioner's subjective, microcosmic experience. But if political and economic facts preclude the possibility of socio-cosmic harmony, or if the rhetoric of the cultivation school conjoins internal transformation and the school's own revelation with millennial historicity, then the normal quiescence of meditation can become extroverted and project its power onto the political macrocosm. As with the case of earlier millennial uprisings in China, these conditions have likewise made Falun Gong a persuasive and energizing movement capable of challenging the coercive mechanisms of the state.

When Li Hongzhi 李洪志, the sole author of Falun Gong's method, teachings, and texts, introduced Falun Gong to the park scene in 1992, the previous decade had already witnessed a popular explosion of interest in *qi* cultivation practices, *Yijing* divination, ESP, UFO's, and occultism in general. During the eighties, numerous *qigong* masters started new schools of practice, promised miraculous healing, and became something of a popular spectacle. During this '*qigong* fever 氣熱', fortunes were made, and this special exercise of *qigong* proved efficacious to many from all walks of life. Meanwhile, the parks became a notable public sphere for informal networking and communication, a zone of interaction where exercise met with hope and transcendence.

Falun Gong sprang into this prepared arena, and spread quickly in Chinese cities.

By 1996, the spectacular popularity of Falun Gong began to generate conflicts. Perhaps in response to behind-the-scenes disputes over money, and perhaps as a sign of larger ambitions, Master Li withdrew Falun Gong, or Falundafa 法輪大法, as it is more commonly called, from the Qigong Scientific Research Association, one of the government bodies instituted during the 1980's to regulate the swiftly emerging business of *qi* cultivation. By breaking with official registry, Falun Gong abandoned its legal protection, but remained powerful due to both its broad popularity and to the rumored influence of high ranking party cadres who were themselves followers of Master Li's method.

Despite its breakaway status in the legal bureaucracy, Falun Gong continued to operate as other informal groups had done before, except Falundafa exhibited a superior level of unity and purpose. Borne by a concerted but decentralized organization, Falun Gong not only won over large segments of the *qigong* community, they also must have expanded *qigong* participation significantly. Master Li's unique system of exercise and all-embracing, apocalyptic worldview captured a following of astonishing proportions: in 1999 Master Li claimed one hundred million disciples.⁵ Though this figure is certainly exaggerated, and the Chinese government's figure of two million likewise suspect, an estimate of twenty million may be conservatively accurate.⁶ Already suspicious of charismatic *qigong* masters with large followings, elements within the government attempted to disrupt and intimidate some Falun Gong gatherings and in 1996 banned Li's principal book *Zhuan Falun* 轉法輪, while it was still a 'bestseller.'⁷ Soon thereafter, Li

⁵ This claim is stated in various locations, see for example *Lecture at the First Conference in North America*, 38 of 44.

⁶ Benoit Vermander, "The Law and the Wheel: The sudden emergence of *Falungong*: prophets of 'spiritual civilization,' *China Perspectives*, No.24, July-August, 1999, p. 15. Vermander gets this figure from an anonymous Chinese researcher, but offers his suspicion that this sum may be too low. Nevertheless, it is most important to recall that there are varying degrees of participation within this, and perhaps any religious movement, and thus diverse and periodic levels of involvement render this movement into a constellation of ritually and textually coordinated experiences difficult to quantify under optimal conditions.

⁷ Such ambivalence within the government toward Falun Gong reflects how deeply factional actual control of policy still is within the state apparatus.

left China and emigrated to the United States, where he still resides, cloaked in secrecy, his reticence periodically broken by surprise appearances at Falundafa conferences and grand pronouncements on the internet.⁸

Though in legal limbo, and growing to potentially menacing proportions, for years the Chinese government could form no negative consensus in opposition to Falun Gong. In fact, the state-sponsored media even promoted the benefits of Falun Gong. In February of 1999, *U.S. News and World Report*, a Chinese health official maintained that the “millions of dollars” saved each year in health-care costs justify the continued tolerance of the group.⁹ The majority of Falundafa practitioners tend(ed) toward retirement age, and so the exercise and social context probably seemed benign to most people.¹⁰ But not all were convinced of Falundafa’s beneficial effects. In April of 1999, physicist He Zuoxiu, a member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, published an article entitled “Why I am opposed to Qigong Practice by Teenagers” in the youth publication *Teenage Science-Technology Outlook*. In this article, He attacked Falun Gong’s claims to scientific authenticity and charged that “a post graduate in my institute had two relapses of mental disorder after he practiced Falun Gong.”¹¹ Falundafa practitioners petitioned the magazine’s editors for the right to print a defensive response, but when the editors refused, Master Li’s disciples converged upon the magazine’s offices and commenced a sit-in protest. Over the course of several days, their numbers swelled to a few thousand. Police were summoned on April 22, and the beatings and arrests that followed have become enshrined in the Falundafa narrative of events as ‘The Tianjin Incident.’ Feeling themselves maligned, the Falundafa leadership succumbed to a mixture of courage and self-righteousness, and swiftly organized via e-mail and cell-phone a larger protest in the capitol.

⁸ For an archive of Master Li’s post-crackdown communiques, visit <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/index.html>, or simply www.clearwisdom.net, where among other resources Li’s ‘recent articles’ are available.

⁹ Bay Fang, “An Opiate of the masses? Millions of Chinese embrace a mystical exercise movement.”, *U.S. News and World Report*, 22 February, 1999, 46.

¹⁰ John Wong and William T Liu, *The Mystery of China’s Falun Gong: Its Rise and Its Sociological Implications*. World Scientific Pub Co, 1999, p.22.

¹¹ Quoted in Danny Schecter, *Falun Gong’s Challenge to China*. New York: Akashic Books, 2000.

On April 25, 1999, ten thousand Falun Gong practitioners stunned Chinese intelligence and surrounded the *Zhongnanhai*, the political heart of Beijing, in a ring of quiet meditators two miles in circumference. A conciliatory meeting, reportedly between Zhu Rongzhi and Falun Gong representatives, satisfied the peaceful demonstrators, and denials were made in the press that any crackdown was planned against the group.¹² But in July, the Chinese government outlawed the practice of Falundafa and launched a massive propaganda offensive to marshal public opinion behind the heavy-handed proscription. Since the ban on Falundafa in July 1999, “tens of thousands” of Falun Gong practitioners have been detained and subjected to “reeducation,” while some organizers have been sentenced to eighteen years of hard labor.¹³ At the present time, the Falundafa public relations agency claims via www.faluninfo.net that 300 people have so far died at the hands of police. The near daily protests in Tiananmen Square and elsewhere in mainland China by Falun Gong practitioners have become the most pointed and sustained public challenge to the Communist regime in its half-century of existence.

Before the revelation and popularization of Falundafa, numerous other *qigong* masters had won nationwide fame and the glory of wealth by means of their miraculous healing abilities, which were often displayed in mass gatherings not unlike stadium revivals in the United States. The fact that Falun Gong outcompeted these previously more popular forms of *qigong*, and captured a truly vast following suggests that Li Hongzhi’s school of practice harnessed the unique political forces of the age in a way other systems and teachings did not. While most forms of *qigong* were content to loosely embrace an autocentric cosmology, Li’s profuse teachings reintroduce a grand historicity to these internal and social practices. Promising freedom from disease, acquisition of supernatural capabilities, and post-apocalyptic ascent into a racially pure paradise, Li unleashed a simplified form of New Age esotericism whose nationalism, messianism, and social fundamentalism aimed the mass movement squarely toward a confrontation with the state

¹² David Van Biema, “The Man with the Qi”, *Time Magazine*, vol. 153, no. 18, May 10, 1999.

¹³ “More on PRC Crackdown on Falungong Tiananmen Protest”, Hong Kong Agence France Presse in English, May 11, 2000.

from the very start. Though Falundafa practitioners claimed their action in the capitol was merely a legal application for ‘appeal’ stemming from the Tianjin incident, it was also an expression of the messianism emanating from Master Li and enveloping Falundafa as a whole. It is reported that during meetings between Falundafa representatives and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the Falun Gong spokespeople in essence offered their services to the CCP as the only entity capable of “saving China”.¹⁴

In summoning the power of the millenarian moment, Falun Gong invoked a familiar historical motif; but the distinguishing elements of Falun Gong reveal signs of the rupture in Chinese cultural continuity. Though disguised in the lexicon of Buddhism and the general morphology Daoist *qi* cultivation practices, Falundafa departs radically from many essentials that form the substance and context of traditional symbolism, practice, and its integrated cosmos of correspondences. Compared with previous forms of Folk Buddhism, the actual Buddhist content of Falundafa is historically sparse. The towering authority of the past in China has often forced religious and philosophical innovation to project itself backwards in time and visibly incorporate established, ancient terms. But Falun Gong dismisses the mandate of tradition not merely in peripheral or stylistic details, but in its fundamentals of doctrine and technique, while simultaneously claiming ancient, even primeval authenticity through its Buddhist-derived terminology and its vision of history. In his texts, Master Li wages a sharp attack on the established salvational methods of antiquity, on Buddhism, and on other contemporary *qigong* masters.¹⁵

As one of its primary characteristics, Falun Gong’s antitraditionalism is an ironic culmination of the past century’s spirit of iconoclastic modernization. For such a sentiment to become embedded in the doctrinal and technical foundation of an improvised variant of Folk Buddhism suggests that Falundafa absorbed this antitraditional discourse from the CCP. Furthermore, the strong emphasis on self-improvement, loosening of personal attachments, and self-sacrifice found in Falundafa are likewise doctrines advanced by earlier religious forces, but more recently by the CCP. The

¹⁴ Vermander, p.19.

¹⁵ *Zhuan Falun*, (Hereafter, *ZFL*) 2.5, “The Issue of Pursuit”. Also see *ZFL*, 3.6.

messianism and totalism of Falundafa, all projected onto the mass scale, are further extensions of the cult of personality in nearly every respect. The path of spiritual transformation, colored now by revolutionary consciousness, is again historicized and externalized. Study sessions of Master Li's texts bear resemblance to the political study groups of an earlier time, and the message heard in such study is of struggle, pitted against the "old forces" who oppose the glorious reformation of the substance of the cosmos itself. These parallel resemblances suggest that Falun Gong is in many ways the religious offspring of the Chinese Revolution, and of the Cultural Revolution in particular. Here, the contradictions between repetition and innovation converge, as it is arguable whether the Chinese Revolution and Mao Zedong Thought could have developed without the precedents of folk millenarian revolt, classical utopianism, and medieval synthesis.

Another distinguishing feature of Li's philosophy is what can be termed an extremely pessimistic anti-humanism. For Li, incarnating as a human being is analogous to "jump[ing] into a manure pit,"¹⁶ while the earth is the cosmic nadir of moral, and hence existential degeneracy. Here, Li most tellingly reverses the essential Chinese symbol of the center, *zhong* 中, the macrocosmic focus whose expression in the social realm is the culture and state of the Middle Kingdom. Though still the literal center of the universe, Li now regards the middle point as the universal focus of evil and perversity. In Li's scientific imagery, the Earth attracts the heaviest, most impure elements in existence which fall into its terrestrial snare and are trapped. Li explains the situation to his disciples:

"I am telling you that according to the concept of the universe, the earth, being in the center, is the worst place. Why? It is because the universe is round and various kinds of living beings in the universe will drop. To where do they drop?... They drop to the center, don't they?"¹⁷

This illuminating inversion of the formerly harmonizing center may well represent the symbolic kernel within Falundafa's pessimism, a product perhaps of the painful disappointment over the New China and its overoptimistic confidence in human nature.

¹⁶ *Lecture at the First Conference in North America*, 29 of 44.

¹⁷ www.falundafa.org/book/eng/north_america.htm 7 of 44. Compare this with many Gnostic concepts of terrestrial embodiment.

“Ordinary human beings,” seen in past decades as the spontaneous font of political and productive wisdom, are portrayed by Li as a supremely unfortunate and debased lot. But for Li’s disciples, the status of their salvation elevates them above this dreadful state, the very locus of cosmic evil, for they are no longer “ordinary human beings.”¹⁸

This bleak view of humanity hangs in a general environment of grandiose spiritual struggle and warfare. “Old forces” of ignorance and suffering, whom Li identifies as demons, have incarnated on earth in the form of Jiang Zemin and his cohorts precisely to oppose the revelation of Falundafa, whose revolutionary wave of mass-liberation threatens the regime of sentient beings who control the cosmos.¹⁹ Practitioners themselves are targeted by demonic forces for spirit possession, and as for Li’s competitors, “Especially those sham *qigong* masters, they are all possessed by evil spirits.”²⁰ Numerous animals and fox spirits are also straining to infiltrate human bodies, while extradimensional beings are born from human energy invested in temple statue worship, and these strange progeny seek to control their worshiper parents.²¹

Besieged by a host of hostile spiritual entities, and awaiting the purge of cosmic evil, Falundafa disciples find themselves in possession of an historic opportunity to transmute hardship and suffering into a victorious, healing transcendence. Forbearance - one of the three “principals of the universe,” along with ‘truth’ *zhen* 真 and ‘benevolence’ - *shan* 善 allows disciples to cosmify and historicize their personal experience in postrevolutionary China. Long before the crackdown, Falundafa embraced the positive value to be gained by enduring suffering, and this same idea has spawned the controversy over refusing medical treatment. By spiritually rationalizing the decay of cosmic order so evident in the past century, Falundafa ideology identifies the practitioners’ own personal

¹⁸ See for example *Falun Dafa Lecture in New York City*, (March 23, 1997), closing paragraphs.

¹⁹ Likewise, this vision of antibureaucratic warfare with controlling demons bears certain similarities with gnostic ideas of the archons, though their cosmogenic agencies seem not to be present in Li’s host of demons.

²⁰ Zhuan Falun 3.6 , www.falundafa.org/book/eng/zfl_36.htm . This section features a fascinating exposition of the issue of ‘Spirit Possession’ 附體 in Li’s worldview.

²¹ See *Zhuan Falun*, 5.7, “Light Opening”

suffering and transformation with the macrocosmic decay and regeneration of the universe. But the previous campaign to eliminate the “old forces” shares with Falundafa’s program a similar theme of anti-institutionalism, now indentifiably anti-statist. Given the overall context of millenarian liminality, this dual redemption of the individual and the cosmos stands in unmistakable reference to the history it seeks to rectify.

As one of its primary characteristics, Falun Gong’s antitraditionalism is an ironic culmination of the past century’s spirit of iconoclastic modernization. For such a sentiment to become embedded in the doctrinal and technical foundation of an improvised variant of Folk Buddhism suggests that Falundafa absorbed this antitraditional discourse from the CCP. Furthermore, the strong emphasis on self-improvement, loosening of personal attachments, and self-sacrifice found in Falundafa are likewise doctrines advanced by earlier religious forces, but more recently by the CCP. The path of spiritual transformation, colored now by its earlier impressment into revolutionary consciousness, is again historicized and externalized in the whole vision of universal “Fa Rectification.” The messianism and totalism of Falundafa, carried by mass mobilization of practitioners, are further reenactments of the cult of personality in nearly every respect. In this regard, the internet has become a defining technology in energizing the Falundafa mass line.

It can be argued whether the Chinese Revolution and Mao Zedong Thought could have developed without the precedents of folk millenarian revolt, classical utopianism, and medieval synthesis. As the inheritor to these indigenous traditions, not to mention the Judaeo-Christian messianism underlying Marxism, the Chinese Communist Party helped to inculcate the millenarian zeal and self-transformational ethos which now takes form as the Falun Gong phenomenon. From its notable antitraditionalism to its mass-line democratization, Falun Gong echoes many of the themes and techniques of the Cultural Revolution. And against this positive resemblance, Falundafa also stands in negative response to the great trauma of late Maoism- relief from oppression is not to be found in economic upliftment, politics, or anywhere in the grasp of natural humanity, but

rather within the psychic, somatic, and moral experience of those who have rejected “ordinary humanity” for a superior, spiritual class. In considering the influence of the Chinese Communist experience on the development of this religious movement, the particular emphasis Mao placed on correct political belief and the greater role he gave to the superstructure must be seen as potential incentive to the development of an idealistic reaction, even if the facade of materialist discourse remains so noticeable in Master Li’s metaphysics.

If the worldview of Falundafa is perhaps understandably extreme, its moral response is a cry for that simple decency made scarce by a system which encourages corruption and nepotism. The emphasis placed on moral cultivation of the mind-nature - *xinxing* 心性, receives greater emphasis in Falundafa than in most other *qigongs*, whose worldviews have been somewhat secularized and mechanized. In fact, Li teaches that one’s level of spiritual development is determined and limited by the moral elevation of the *xinxing*. This becomes enmeshed in the technical details of the practice, and in the actual process of deliverance it is the agency of Master Li that transforms the practitioner and not their own effort. Thus, the outlet for moral frustration formed by Falundafa’s religiously inspired ethics is neatly fused with the Master’s exclusive salvation and authority.

Beyond the ethical dimension common to all that is religious, this resurgent demand for personal and public moral regulation is certainly an understandable reaction for a postrevolutionary China mired in a crisis of widespread corruption. As part of the overall context of healing, the moral charge within Falundafa can be seen as an attempt to integrate and validate past enthusiasm for the socialist program together with basic, if fundamentalistic values. Despite the aforementioned retreat from humanism, the desire for an orderly, good-natured society is clearly a major theme in Falundafa rhetoric and defense. Indeed, if the messianism was reidentified with the state and supreme leader, a regime could well use such a religion as this to enforce good, self-motivated order by elevating benevolent and truthful citizenship to the level of soteriological efficacy. But this

same devotion to moral integrity and the universal qualities of *zhen shan ren* places dedicated disciples on a career towards martyrdom, for violation of any of these principals, and disavowal of Falundafa under duress could, it seems, disqualify one from Master Li's saving grace.²² Thus, the urgency of the macrocosmic "Fa Rectification" threatens to invoke a more dramatic confrontation.

In the emerging scholarship on Falundafa, Jian Xu (1999) has situated Falun Gong within its postrevolutionary context by extending Nancy Chen's (1995) analysis of *qigong* as a strategy for extracting the body out of the urban control-field of the state²³. While this line of analysis usefully reveals the more general features of *qigong* and "post-Mao subjects," it stops short of demonstrating why Falun Gong in particular should become so popular and so dangerous to the government, and does not propose any resonance between Falundafa and Maoism. Ed Irons (2000) has made a useful investigation into possible connections between Falundafa, *Yiguandao*, and the larger current of folk sectarianism. He identifies the "socialist influence" upon Falun Gong, particularly in terms of its organizational "cells." Furthermore, Irons notes that "[w]e can logically expect any contemporary Chinese group holding millenarian doctrines to utilize elements from the modern secular state."²⁴ Thus far, Irons is one of the only scholars to draw this specific conclusion linking Falundafa with Chinese socialism. The first scholar, however, to point to the relationship between Falun Gong and the Cultural Revolution was Patsy Rahn.²⁵ Supporting the connection between Li's authoritarianism and Mao's cult of personality, she cites Sima Nan, a Chinese lecturer who claims "The devotion to Rotating the Law Wheel (Zhuan Falun) is exactly 'how Mao's Little Red Book was used in the Cultural

²² See Li's article, "Beyond Forbearance".

²³ Jian Xu, "Body, Discourse, and the Cultural Politics of Contemporary Chinese Qigong," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58, No.4 (November 1999): 961-991. Chen, Nancy. "Urban spaces and experience of qigong," in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China*, eds. Deborah S. Davis, Richard Kraus, Barry Naughton, and Elizabeth J. Perry. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995, pp. 347-361.

²⁴ Ed Irons, "The Sectarian Roots of Falun Gong: The Religious Aspects of Popular Movements in Secular China." Paper presented at the 2000 Conference of the American Academy of Religion.

²⁵ Patsy Rahn, 'The Falun Gong: Beyond the Headlines,' a paper presented at the American Family Foundation's Annual Conference, April 28, 2000. available at Barend Ter Haar's website: www.let.leidenuniv.nl/bth/faluntext4.html#Bibliography.

Revolution.”²⁶ Elsewhere, Rahn has proposed that Falun Gong is “revenge for the Cultural Revolution.”²⁷ Though this thesis originated and evolved without the benefit of Rahn’s early comments, parallel attention to this postrevolutionary axis lends further support to this line of analysis.

David Owenby identifies Falun Gong as a nationalistic revitalization movement, and certainly the tide of contemporary nationalism is a significant theme expressed by Master Li’s ideology.²⁸ In support of this nationalism, Owenby focuses on what he claims is Falundafa’s revitalization of Chinese tradition. He cites Chinese and Chinese-American practitioners who perceive Falundafa to be an authoritative, orthodox embodiment of Chinese traditional practice and doctrine. Owenby uncritically accepts this perception, and thus neglects to detect the strong element of antitraditionalism embedded Falun Gong’s teachings. Given the extensive condemnations Master Li heaps upon various traditions and texts (Sutras, *Daozang*, et cetera), not to mention Li’s unorthodox technical system, such an oversight leaves important issues unaddressed. And though Owenby loosely connects the millenarianism of Falun Gong with that of sectarian Folk Buddhism, the more immediate vehicle of millennial doctrine, Communism, is not factored into his reading of Falun Gong’s place in history.

So, to make an adequate presentation of Falundafa itself, its context, and its place in Chinese history, the proper setting must be constructed so that Falundafa’s distinctive qualities stand out against the backdrop of more traditional cultivation practice. For this, we will need to review the history of Chinese internal cultivation and observe its modern

²⁶ *ibid*, note 25. There she also provides an interesting quote from the Southern Weekend newspaper in Guangzhou, China “We are familiar with the cult of personality created by Li Hong Zhi and Falun Gong and Li’s claim to be a savior . . . This is the legacy of the Cultural Revolution, as the ‘savior’ kind of idolatry fabricated by Lin Biao and Jiang Qing and their ilk are deep-rooted in the hearts of the Chinese people.” A quote from the Southern Weekend newspaper in Guangzhou, China. Rahn cites this passage as being quoted in an article by Seth Faison in the New York Times, August 17, 1999 “If it’s a Comic Book Why Is Nobody Laughing?”

²⁷ Originally posted on the H-Asia discussion forum, and extensively quoted on Ter Haar’s site. Schecter also quotes this phrase, but manages to shear it of its intended meaning.

²⁸ David Owenby, “Falungong as a Cultural Revitalization Movement: An Historian Looks at Recent Events in China.” Electronic document via World Wide Web: www.ruf.rice.edu/~tnchina . Also see “China’s War Against Itself,” New York Times, February 15, 2001.

flowering in the urban park spaces. Furthermore, it must be noted that Falun Gong's antitraditionalism and innovation are not solely retrospective; the rapidly emerging post-reform modernity, with all its uncertainties and consumer aspirations, has also influenced Falundafa. But perhaps the largest issue raised by the Falun Gong episode is the persistent legacy of the Cultural Revolution. The trial of the Gang of Four and the Open Door Reforms were, by themselves, not enough to resolve the bitterness and destruction unleashed by Permanent Revolution. Each government campaign and crackdown since the Democracy Wall has been, in effect, a grim reminder that the same regime behind the Cultural Revolution is still in power. Likewise, the government's own campaign of propaganda and reeducation has drawn criticism comparing their present tactics to the struggle sessions and reeducation programs of the Cultural Revolution. With both antagonists trapped in the same script of power and resistance, it appears that the unresolved experience of the late Maoism remains a grave issue for contemporary China.

2 The *Qigong* World

“He who receives this way rises at once to the dark secret and no longer becomes submerged in the dust of everyday life.”²⁹

The term *qigong* is in essence a neologism of twentieth century vintage, and is used to globally encompass a range of techniques which previously were known by their own traditional nomenclature. But since *qigong* does appear in a few old texts, there is some uncertainty regarding the historicity and specificity of the term itself. Li Yuanguo, a scholar of Daoism at the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences and the author of a comprehensive survey of *qigong*, finds that “During the Sui-Tang period the word ‘qigong’ was already employed by Daoists as technical term,”³⁰ in such works as the *Taiqing daoqi jing*,³¹ *Yanlujun xiuyang dalue*³², and *Zhongshan yugui fuqi jing*.³³ Though *qigong* appears in these texts, Liu argues that it was the development of Internal Alchemy in the Song era that formulized the techniques and symbols which comprise the essential structure of *qigong* as it is known today. Internal Alchemy, or *neidan*,³⁴ is the paramount technique of Daoist meditation, and has absorbed many other styles of meditation such as the various practices of *shou yi*, “guarding the one,” as well as methods involving visualization of deities, energies, and transformative psychodramas within the body, including the gestation and birth of the Immortal Fetus³⁵. Borrowing its iconography in part from the protoscience of external alchemy (*waidan*)³⁶, inner alchemy seeks to refine the base

²⁹ From the *Hui Ming Jing*, a late alchemical treatise., in Richard Wilhelm, *Secret of the Golden Flower*. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1962, p.76.

³⁰ Quoted in Benjamin Penny, “*Qigong*, Daoism, and Science: Some Contexts for the *Qigong* Boom,” in Maybel Lee and A.D. Syrokomla-Stefanowska, eds, *Modernization of the Chinese Past*, Canberra: University of Sydney, 1993.

³¹ DZ 569, HY 819

³² DZ 677-702 HY 1026, 59

³³ DZ 677-702 HY 1026, 60

³⁴ *Neidan*- literally ‘inner elixir.’

³⁵ On the varieties of *shou yi* meditation, see Kohn, “Guarding the One,” in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, 125-158.

³⁶ Among other discoveries, Daoist alchemists first developed gunpowder. See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*. Cambridge University Press, 1954. Vol. 5 Part 7.

substances of the human psycho-organism into a the elixir of immortality.³⁷ Though longevity is claimed to derive from the interior production of the *dan*, or elixir, the more significant result of this operation is the transformation and expansion of consciousness.

The general identification of *qigong* with internal alchemy prevails among most scholars and initiated practitioners alike.³⁸ Isabelle Robinet allows that:

“One may say that texts belonging to the current of inner alchemy are characterized by

1. a concern for training the mind as much as the body, with the mental aspect usually predominant.
2. a tendency to synthesize various Taoist currents, certain Buddhist speculations, and specific Confucian lines of thought.
3. references to the *Yijing*; and
4. references to chemical practices.

The two latter characteristics are combined: all *neidan* texts use chemical terminology- at least they speak of lead and mercury, the furnace and the cauldron- and place them in relation to the trigrams of the *Yijing*.³⁹

The wide syncretistic vocabulary given to the discourse of *neidan* seems to strain the literal meaning of definition, but this forest of traditions takes root in the cultural bedrock of the *Yijing*, the *Wuxing*, and the cycles of time. This foundational symbolism of the Book of Change, plus its attendant figures of the *He Tu*, and *Lo Shu*, have been the polar constellations in the cultural firmament for more than 2,500 years, and their interiorization in the human microcosm considerably predates the development of *neidan* proper. Robinet traces inner alchemy’s lineage back to the *fang shi* of the Warring States and Han eras, as well as “various *qi* practices” and pharmacology.⁴⁰ *Qi* practices here refer to

³⁷ Though the distinction between inner and outer alchemy is explicit in the Chinese sources, it is also necessary to inform Westerners, who seem never to have caught on that the European alchemists operated with ‘philosophical metals’ and were likewise developing transformative, introspective techniques.

³⁸ By ‘initiated’ I am referring to the possession of knowledge regarding the philosophical elements of doctrine as they apply in both cosmology and internal praxis, or in short.. I explicitly avoid equating such initiates with the ‘literati’ since this appellation implies certain social coordinates that may not encompass the spectrum of society participating in *qigongs* of various periods. Besides, the dissemination of these traditions may, like the popularity of Kabbalistic texts in seventeenth-century Europe, reflect the relatively wide expansion of literacy and printing in a less private, individualized society. As those occult and messianic speculations spread in Judaism, it produced the mass externalization of the mystical experience in Shabbateanism much the same way, at least on a rhetorical if not phenomenological level, as Folk Buddhism did in the Late Empire. Whether the Yellow Turbans and other Han era utopian Daoists reflect a democratization of literacy is more doubtful.

³⁹ Isabelle Robinet, “Original Contributions of *Neidan*,” in Livia Kohn, ed. *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, pp. 301.

⁴⁰ Robinet : 1989, 300.

numerous forms of discipline including older, hygiene-oriented breathing exercises and gymnastics of the *daoyin* tradition.⁴¹ These gymnastic pursuits are mentioned in the *Zhuangzi*, which dates from the fourth century B.C.E. In a famous passage, Zhuangzi describes these activities in some detail:

To pant, to puff, to hail, to sip, to spit out the old breath and draw in the new, practicing their bear-hangings and bird stretchings, longevity his only concern- such is the life of the scholar who practices gymnastics, the man who nourishes his body, who hopes to live to be as old as Pengzu, for more than eight hundred years.⁴²

If Zhuangzi seems to be poking fun at the gymnastic longevity seekers, as he also does to the shamans, perhaps it was to suggest the superiority of his own, more genuinely internal method. Kristopher Schipper argues that Zhuangzi's rather obtuse admonition to "follow the regulator and make it a rule for behavior,"⁴³ really means that one should "[t]ake the spinal column as your regulating principal."⁴⁴ Schipper hypothesizes that the term 'regulator', *du*, refers to the primary *qi* meridian of the body, the *du mai*, one of three located in the spinal column. Even if one finds this proposition convincing, it does not necessarily indicate that *neidan* was, in a recognizable form, being practiced in Zhuangzi's day. However, if one follows Harold Roth's interpretation of the *Nei Yeh*, a text that Roth argues predates both the *Zhuangzi* and the *Laozi*, it is possible that basic symbolism from the *Yijing* was being used in conjunction with a technique of meditation structurally similar to *neidan*.⁴⁵ Whether scholars find these interpretations overambitious or not, it is important to bear in mind that practitioners themselves quite naturally incorporate the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* into their applied teachings- and by this perception of continuity alone the term "Daoism" takes on much of its meaning as a cohesive tradition. Part of the genius of inner alchemy, like so much esotericism, lies in its ability to stimulate older texts into lively disclosure of meaning with the hermeneutics of psychotechnical introspection.

⁴¹ For a history of *daoyin* see Catherine Despeux, "Gymnastics: The Ancient Tradition," in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*.

⁴² *Zhuangzi*, Ch.15. Cited in Despeux, "Gymnastics," p.226. From Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1968, pp.167-168.

⁴³ *Zhuangzi*, Ch.3

⁴⁴ Schipper, *Taoist Body*, p.210.

⁴⁵ Harold Roth, *Original Tao*, New York:Columbia University Press, 1999.

Thus, Laozi's veiled reticence may reveal more comprehensible relevance when viewed through the lenses of alchemical mysticism.

As an analysis of materiality and embodiment, internal alchemy provides the map to an innate and immanent paradise. At its most basic level, inner alchemy operates by internalizing the most seasonal and cardinal of the *Yijing* symbols: Heaven, Earth, Fire, and Water- the points of the compass, the the solar stations of the year, and the procreative dyad of the cosmos all take up their harmonies within the human body to form the microcosmic dynamo. Foremost within this subtle anatomy are the three elixir fields, or the *dan tien*, where the primary substances of life and consciousness reside.

Since the cosmology of the *Yijing* already employs the procreative imagery of the family, the Daoist projection of this system onto the individual microcosm begins with the union of the parents. This sexual *conjunctio* between the male's semen and the female's blood produces the primordial spark of energy which will nourish life *in utero* and after birth. This vital essence is the water of life and resides in the kidneys, which themselves are sometimes likened to the mother and father within the body. This watery essence is the generative fluid, or *jing*⁴⁶, by which the more gross aspects of bodily vitality are preserved and which in turn can engender new life. Meanwhile, above the watery abyss of the lower regions one finds the abode of fire in the heart, which for the Chinese is the seat of the mind. According to the symbolism of the trigrams *Li*(fire) and *Kan* (water), the central yang line within *Kan* wishes to rise, while the central yin line within *Li* is drawn to descent. The alchemist uses his mind, or intent 意 to drive up the vapors of *jing* with the inhalation of external (postnatal) *qi* into the heart, and then let them settle down again in the lower abdomen upon exhalation. From this union of the yang within the water and the yin within the fire, *jing* is converted into *qi*, the life-breath, which is then stored (typically) in the reservoir of lower *dan tien*. Most *neidan* literature seems to indicate that this reaction between fire and water produces the elixir, which then accumulates in the abdominal elixir field. Thus, the *dan* is really a concentrated distillate of *qi*, the purified essence common

⁴⁶ *Jing* can refer to semen, or to the 'charge' or essence within it.

to the pairs of opposites. On one level, this process, and the entire operation of inner alchemy, can be seen as the refinement of essences from the cosmic forces within the body. The action whereby these essences are extracted and synthesized quite resembles the operation of a distillery of a refinery tower, with the spinal column acting as the tower itself. Likewise, the alchemical cycle of breath calls to mind the image of an electrical dynamo, where oscillating poles of magnetic charge produce a current that can be stored as potential or expended as mechanical energy.⁴⁷ The essences are originally hidden within their opposites: by extracting the true yang from water and the true yin from fire, an inversion of basic duality has occurred. This inversion or reversal makes possible further resolution of opposed duality, as the elixir is then circulated throughout the larger orbit of the breath, which corresponds to the microcosmic track of the solar year.⁴⁸ By this “Heavenly Circulation,” the symbols for heaven and earth, and indeed all the opposed relations of duality, are brought into balance around the center.⁴⁹

In terms of traditional medical physiology, this operation involves breathing the *qi*/elixir around the spine, head, and torso along the body's central axis. This axis is composed of the body's two main *qi* meridians, the ‘governing vessel’ (*du mai*) and the ‘conception vessel’ (*ren mai*).⁵⁰ All the profuse symbolism and metaphor of the alchemical enterprise boils down to this operation and the internal landscape encountered by the practitioner during the working of this technique. This cerebro-spinal circulation can be extended to involve the other *qi* meridians that Traditional Chinese Medicine identifies within the body. Thus, the high-energy elixir can bring added health to the body, and can also produce the internal power for which certain Chinese martial arts are famous. Furthermore, the inclusion of the hands and feet within the overall circuit adds to the

⁴⁷ Notice how ‘scientific’ analogies naturally suggest themselves when translating these concepts into modern discourse. A discussion of the more literal ‘scientization’ of *qigong* in the twentieth century follows below.

⁴⁸ This same waxing and waning of yin and yang likewise resembles the lunar month and the daily cycle of day and night, but the hexagrams are primarily associated with the calendar, and thus, the sun.

⁴⁹ The center is sometimes the upper (heart) *dantien* and sometimes the lower (abdominal) *dantien*. It is as though the orbit of the breath, like that of the sun, is elliptical, and these two centers are the two focii. Thus, the true center must be synthesized.

⁵⁰ This cerebro-spinal technique of subtle or internal breath-control is extremely similar to some Indian techniques and even some forms of Kabbalistic meditation.

'dynamo' effect by bringing more symbolic centers into the *qi* amplification system.

As the symbolic poles of heaven and earth exchange their charge in the oscillation of this larger dynamo, they 'mate' in the cycle of breath. From this coupling the *qi* substance becomes transformed into spirit, or *shen*. As the refinery becomes more energetic and builds from more concentrated distillates, its final products draw nearer to absolute inversion of duality and merger with *dao*. In the final stage, *shen*/spirit is refined into *shu*, 'emptiness,' whence the person can now fully and consciously identify with *dao* and become immortal.

While this brief overview greatly simplifies the process as described in *neidan* texts, this axis of symbolic, psychic, and physiological correspondence forms the core of the experience. For the Daoist, the internalization of classical symbolism creates a powerful bond between the mystic and the specific discourse of Chinese culture, as well as primordial nature untainted by the constrictions of civilization.

Unlike more pessimistic forms of *gnosis* or ecstatic escape from the world, the Daoist method of human perfection is engineered by the creative interplay of the cosmic structure itself. The overtones of immortality, even if metaphorical, affirm the value of embodied experience, for it is by means of the body and its natural environment that this immortality is gained. Though the conjunction of opposites necessarily implies a dimensional transcendence of 'the ten thousand things,' the general resistance to an ontologically superior ground of being in Daoist thought flows from the immanence of the *Dao* itself, and thus the sage need not retreat to the same philosophical level of world-renunciation found in some Indian and Hellenistic religions. Instead, the source to which the Daoist returns is the center around which the ordered differentiations of manifestation revolve. And since the world order and its symbols were established by the sage kings of old, the center is, on a cultural level, the polestar of the Middle Kingdom itself and the culture that defines it. The classical literature, well-known by virtually everyone who read Daoist texts, never lost its unifying influence, even if Daoist interiorization inverted its orientation. In fact, the projection of the *Yijing*, the Five Elements, gods, mountains, and

sounds into the human microcosm helped to deeply anchor the elements of culture within subjectivity itself, while still engineering a release from the contradictions between people and society. There is some irony in the way Daoism, suspicious as it is of words and the corrupting influence of society, binds itself to the literary foundation of the public world order. But Robinet reminds us that the Daoist employment of these symbolic figures represents a middle ground between speech and silence. She cites an alchemical text that proclaims “Silence is language. Where language is, there is fundamentally silence. Silent language: this is the secret formula of alchemy.”⁵¹

Given the antiquity of the discursive elements syncretized by Han era Daoists, the medical and religious systems born of that time have easily anacronized themselves into the Yellow Emperor’s new version of history, while already resembling and presaging the Inner Alchemy of a millennium later.⁵² From the cosmological synthesis *Huainanzi* up through the millenarian Celestial Masters, Ge Hong’s milieu and the Shanqing revelations, Daoist techniques and theories for refining embodiment evolved with considerable continuity into the Tang and Song era of philosophical revival, wherein Neoconfucianism and Inner Alchemy would together crystallize their elegant metaphysical systems around the symmetries of the Book of Change and the mutable substrate of *qi*.⁵³ And as Lay Buddhist societies developed into distinctive and influential movements, systems of Inner Alchemy were adopted as the preferred technique and practiced along side the devotional recitation of sutras.⁵⁴

In the late Empire, Inner Alchemy would again empower millenarian Folk Buddhists with a protorevolutionary armamentum. The rise of militias, banditry, and rebellion in the Ming and Qing Dynasties greatly stimulated the development of martial

⁵¹ Robinet, “Original Contributions of *Neidan*”, 307. The cited passage is from the *Zhonghe ji* (Collection of Central Harmony, HY 249, fasc. 118-119, 6.13a).

⁵² On the Yellow Emperor *Huang Di*, see Ilza Veith, *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972. pp.4-9.

⁵³ For the development of these Daoist currents see Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

⁵⁴ For a reading of Internal Alchemy in sectarian writings see Daniel Overmeyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Harvard University Press, 1999, pp.232-237.

arts in the provinces, and the religious connotations of some such forms of training were either revived or partially reinvented with strong borrowings from Inner Alchemy.⁵⁵ Many of the most influential schools of *qi* oriented martial arts were developed in the climate of disorder, rebellion, and foreign invasion that shattered the static harmonies of late Qing scholasticism. Douglas Wile has, in more accurately dating the ‘classics’ of *Taijiquan*, raised a strong case for the possibility that this most popular of martial arts arose, at least in part, as a supremely Chinese method of ‘self-strengthening’ to repulse the foreigner and brigand.⁵⁶

Wile has also documented the textual transmission of *qi* based martial techniques that came to be known as the ‘Internal School’ 內家, from the title of Huang Baijia’s early Ming treatise “Methods of the Internal School Fist”. Relying upon internal training, “stillness overcoming motion”, and “reversing the principals of Shaolin”, the Internal School claimed descent from the semi-legendary alchemist Zhang Sanfeng.⁵⁷ Of the descendant forms of the Internal School, the most prolific is *Taijiquan*, which was first developed in the Chen Village in Henan province. Other related, if independently developed styles include *Xinyiquan*, *Baguazhang*, and *Liuhe bafa*. All of these systems were made for fighting, and opportunities for their practical employment were no doubt plentiful. But despite their unapologetic militarism, these schools were, at their core, Daoist lineages of Internal Alchemy whose symbolic systems were more influenced by Neoconfucianism than the arcane lexicon of the alchemists.

Nevertheless, it is probably unlikely that *neidan*-influenced techniques were widely pervasive among non-sectarian provincials who were required to train in local militias, even

⁵⁵ The history of martial arts and their religious influences in China is beset with apocryphal and partisan contention greatly complicated by the anachronizing tendencies of ‘priorism.’ However, the use of meditative martial arts by the various White Lotus schools in their notable uprisings indicates that highly developed and diverse traditions of martially configured *neidan* practices were in some widespread existence by the end of the eighteenth century. See Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976, pp. 30-32.

⁵⁶ Douglas Wile, *Lost T'ai Chi Classics from the Late Ch'ing Dynasty*. Albany, SUNY Press, 1996. The participation of the degree-holding literati in these activities (of Daoist flavor and military application) indicates once again that social complexity overstepped idealized boundaries. Also useful is Wile’s *T'ai Chi's Ancestors: The Making of an Internal Martial Art*. New City, New York, Sweet Chi Press, 1999.

⁵⁷ Wile, *Lost T'ai Chi Classics*, pp.xvi-xvii.

if a few clans possessed more than a merely external method of bodily cultivation. For the majority of Chinese, the notion of magical adepts skilled in swordplay and similar forms of mastery was part of popular culture derived mostly from novels and theater. Though genuinely *qi*-based feats of internal mastery, such as invulnerability to weapons and the barehanded breaking of stones and the like, were probably part of the street theater repertoire of late Qing society, it was not the *neidan* dimension of Chinese religion but rather the ritual performance of spirit-possession which propelled the diverse anti-Christian and anti-foreign societies into the coordinated events of the Boxer Rebellion.⁵⁸

After the gunpowder dispelled the protective spirits of the Boxers, and the

⁵⁸ See Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987. As one of his basic theses, Esherick argues that “the origins of the Boxers are not fruitfully sought in sectarian or martial arts groups which happened to have the same names many years ago. Rather, what we need to understand are the sources of the distinctive Boxer ritual repertoire, and here the key is the popular culture of the area and not the nature of some particular sectarian group.” (p. xvii) Indeed, many of the *neidan* influenced *qi* practices we are here concerned with did exert some presence in the Boxer movement, and Esherick traces the invulnerability technique of the Big Sword Society back to the ‘Armor of the Golden Bell,’ one of the more externally applied *neidan* forms practiced by White Lotus meditation sects. But Esherick is careful to distinguish the Armor of the Golden Bell “from the invulnerability of the Boxers themselves, which came from possession by gods....The inspiration for such possession rituals was clearly the widespread practice of shamanism, especially in association with folk healing....in Shandong, this practice can be traced all the way back to the shamans of the Zhou Dynasty state of Qi.” (pp.55-56) Thus the old symbiotic rivalry between the *wu* 巫 and the masters of Dao has remained an abiding motif. In addition to the Armor of the Golden Bell technique, and perhaps with apologies to Esherick’s statement above, Eight Trigrams Palm, *Baguazhang* 八卦掌 quite possibly derives in some degree from the Eight Trigrams sectarians. Standard Bagua ancestry considers Dong Hai Chuan 董海川 to be the trunk of the modern tree of descent., he having learned the art from a particular Daoist at Jin Hua Shan in Anhui province by the name of Dong Meng Lin 董夢麟 (a relative?), who was, according to one version, a member of an order called the Blue Lantern Knighthood 碧燈俠. Dong Hai Chuan became the primary student, perhaps as the sole Daoist inheritor of the tradition, and then taught a large number of students. Another account passed down orally reports that Dong Hai Chuan never named or specified his teachers at all, and instead evaded all such questions, saying only that his teacher was a very old Daoist who lived in the mountains. (See B.K. Frantzis, *The Power of Internal Martial Arts*, Berkeley, North Atlantic Books, 1998, p.208.) Most of the Bagua practiced today was modified in a number of ways by Dong Hai Chuan’s students, and Sun Lu Tang 孫祿堂 in the second generation. Interestingly, a number of Dong Hai Chuans’ students including his best disciple Cheng Ting Hua, were killed in 1900, as a modern Chinese practitioner/historian puts it: “resisting foreign troops during the Opium War.[sic.]” (Liang Shou Yu, et al, *Baguazhang: Emei Baguazhang, Theory and Applications*. Boston, Yang’s Martial Arts Association (YMAA) Publication Center, 1994. This publication my source for the supposed names and places of Dong’s instruction.) According to another source, when the Emperess Dowager Zi Xi fled Beijing following the Boxer defeat, her bodyguard was none other than Yin Fu 尹福, one of Dong Hai Chuans senior students. (Frantzis, p.208-209.) Even if such claims are anecdotal, the involvement with the Boxers suggested by these remarks seems noteworthy, especially since none of the well-known and active Taiji masters in North China and Beijing are mentioned in connection with the Boxer movement. Thus, it is possible some surviving sectarian teachings persuaded Dong’s Bagua school to throw in their lot with the Boxers. Clear descent from the White Lotus school would have been a dangerous association for such a group in the Imperial and Communist periods, so there is a motivation for reinventing the origins and transmission of Baguazhang.

twentieth century dawned with omens of chaos, the same currents of reform and positivism that fueled creative response in China's intellectuals also shaped the rapid evolution of *qigong*. There arose in Republican times an imperative to heal and empower the 'sick man of Asia,' and the promise of science appealed to many as the secret to Western and Japanese ascendancy. With culturally shifting expectations for healing, many Republican Chinese came to prize Western medical (and-pseudomedical) products, perhaps as a folk method for ingesting the technological power of the unconquerable foreigners.⁵⁹

Optimism for self-strengthening through Western methods was half a century old when the Republican era began. But with the expiration of the Imperial system and the Confucian examinations, the ground disappeared beneath the feet of arch-conservative reactionaries, shifting the political and intellectual discourse in the direction of a modernization with ever greater Westocentric overtones irreconcilable with the cultural compass of the Middle Kingdom. With the gradual Sinification of modernization came the potentially destructive but inevitable antithesis- antitraditionalism. As Prasenjit Duara points out in his study of the Nationalist campaign against folk religion, the discourse of science is embedded in the concept of the modern state, and in a postcolonial or postimperial context, this entails an unavoidable measure of antitraditionalism, particularly against religious and philosophical matrices.⁶⁰ As science usurped the prestige of traditional epistemologies, the cultural politics of *qi* cultivation were forced to enter the secular age. While rural forms of religion and *qi* cultivation continued on where unmolested, urban areas and Beijing in particular became centers for innovation where *qi* adepts sought to harmonize their art with the times, some as ready modernizers and others

⁵⁹ For an interesting look at the marketing of Western miracle cure-alls, see Hugh Shapiro, "The Puzzle of Spermatorrhea in Republican China," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 6, no.3 (winter 1998) : 551-596.

⁶⁰ Prasenjit Duara, "Knowledge and Power in the Discourse of Modernity: The Campaigns Against Popular Religion in Early Twentieth-Century China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* (1991), Vol .50 No.1

as the defenders of classical learning.⁶¹ As many translators of Neoconfucian (and Daoist) texts demonstrate, *qi* can be rendered as 'material force,' both linguistically and ideologically. Thus *qi* could jettison elements of its symbolic and 'religious' context and live anew, animating a body of western physiology and subject to western technology.⁶²

Within the community of *qigong* practitioners, a move toward the westward-looking scientism of the day was launched by Jiang Weiqiao 蔣維喬 with the publication of his 1914 treatise 'Methods of quiet-sitting meditation by Master Yin' 因是子靜坐法⁶³

In the 1917 preface for later editions, Jiang recalls how his impulse to modernize Chinese *qi* cultivation was sparked by the initiative of Japanese, who, in typical fashion, borrowed Chinese methods of meditation and then pragmatically repackaged them without the obfuscations of the Daoist *fangshi* 方士. Jiang writes:

I have recently learned that Okada Torajiro and Fujita Reisai in Japan are advocating quiet-sitting meditation and have tens of thousands of followers. The students of Okada have written an *Okada Method of Meditation* while Fujita himself has authored one book on the method of resting and regulating the heart, and another on the key to strengthening the body-mind. These books have become quite popular and have been republished more than ten times. I was touched when I read them, saying to myself: 'These are our skills.' But their books introduce them in such a straightforward, honest, and reasonable way, that they are no longer subjected to mysteries but explained by studies in science and philosophy. And their approach is so different from that of our classical books. I could not stop thinking about it afterward! I ruminated upon the character of our people: any learning, skills, techniques, or arts, once becoming excellent or superior, will be regarded as secrets and be held in private, not to be shown to others for public study. It has been like this since ancient times. The Japanese are different. When they have learned something from us, they

⁶¹ In the twentieth century, the Red Spears inherited Boxer and sectarian traditions in the form of initiatory local militias, and were an institution that the Communists, in their rural strategy, had to deal with. See Tai Hsuan-chih, *The Red Spears, 1916-1949*. R.Suleski, Trans. Ann Arbor, Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1985. The Chinese government can be thankful that Falun Gong is a highly, almost purely urban phenomenon, and *not* an eruption of organization in the countryside. Such a development has the potential to be vastly more challenging and disruptive than the Falundafa suppression.

⁶² See for example Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963. His treatment of Chiang Tsai, pp.495-517.

⁶³ According to Kunio Miura, Jiang Weiqiao (b.1872) was chronically ill as a youth, suffering from tuberculosis and lung hemorrhages. Jiang claims to have cured himself through meditation, and he records his experience in the *Methods of Quiet Sitting*. Jiang was also a scholar, authoring books on Buddhism, including

study it in public. The result is that they surpass us... Now the book I have written here does not rely on strange, monstrous mystifications, but tries to give explanations on the basis of psychology and physiology. All that I discuss in the book are results of my experiments.⁶⁴

A great many themes relevant to Chinese cultural transformation are evident in Jiang's confession, from the affectations of nationalism to the growing distrust of 'superstition' - *mi xin* 迷信.⁶⁵ While Jiang's immediate concerns were for the accessibility of *qigong* study and practice, his context bears the imprint of a modern statehood's strategies for authority and legitimacy. As the systems of identity, epistemology, and coercion shift into modern, materialist modalities, "feudal superstition is quite actively posed as a negative category against which the state defines itself."⁶⁶ As Benjamin Penny puts it in his analysis of *qigong* history, "When the clear discourse implicated in the founding of the state is based on science it becomes clear that 'superstition' is not simply left over- it potentially becomes a radically powerful undermining agent, subject to the sanctions of the state."⁶⁷

Exponents of traditional medicine also sought to preserve their art in the new climate of modern nationality, and starting in 1919, a number of institutions were founded, often with close ties to the KMT, whose aim was to refine traditional medicine by means of scientific methods. While the Nationalist's association with scientism was in part designed "to give a modern look to an essentially conservative politics, these attempts to incorporate science into medicine could be seen as no more than a strategy of resistance on behalf of proponents of traditional medicine, adopting some of the rhetoric

⁶⁴ Quoted and translated by Xu (1999): 971.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, this term *mi xin* 迷信, 'confused belief,' was coined by the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci as a pejorative label for Daoism. See Christopher Schipper, *The Daoist Body*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, p.16. Also see Stephan Feuchtwang, "The Problem of 'Superstition' in the People's Republic of China," in G. Benavides and M, W, Daly, (eds) *Religion and Political Power*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 43-68.

⁶⁶ A.S. Aganost, "Politics and Magic in Contemporary China", *Modern China* (1987), Vol 12, No.1 , pp.43-44. Quoted in Benjamin Penny, "*Qigong*, Daoism, and Science: Some Contexts for the *Qigong* Boom," in Mabel Lee, A.D. Syrokomla-Stefanowska (eds), *Modernizing the Chinese Past*, (Sydney: Wild Peony Press, 1994) , p.173.

⁶⁷ Penny, *ibid*.

of iconoclastic modernizers as a defense.”⁶⁸

The modernization of the Chinese state has from its inception sought to broaden the public domain and thus extend centralized control. Sensing the larger epistemological context of this trend, Jiang raises the public nature of the Japanese meditation schools, citing this public openness as an instrumental factor in the rationalization and democratization of these *qi* practices. During the premodern period, these *qi* techniques were transmitted with varying degrees of esotericism, be they the preserve of the temple, initiatory society, or clan courtyard. But in the twentieth century, it is precisely this public context which has facilitated the massive popularity and proliferation of *qi* practices. By tuning in to the political spirit of the time, Jiang’s call for public, democratic, and scientific availability of *qigong* naturally foreshadowed China’s attempt at socialist transformation from a country of familial insularity to a nation of the masses ideally united as one family under Mao and the Party.

Despite Jiang’s attempts at modernizing *qigong* practice, his quiescent therapy drew critical attention from the young Mao Zedong, who saw in this sitting-practice the same feudal opiate that had helped preserve the ineffectuality of what Marx called the “Asiatic mode of production.” Perhaps indicating the influence of Jiang’s piece and its pervasive context, Mao wrote his response in the same year of 1917:

Human beings are active animals and they love to be active. Human beings are also rational animals and thus they need a reason for their activity. Why is this?

Because activity secures survival. Yes, but that is an easy explanation. Because activity secures the fortune of the homeland. Yes, and that is a weighty explanation. Neither reach the basis of the matter. Activity is what ultimately nourishes life and satisfies the mind. This and none other is the truth.

Zhu Xi proposed respect, Lu Jiyuan proposed tranquility. Tranquility is meditation, and respect is not activity either, it is but another form of being at rest. Laozi emphasized being without activity, the Buddha wished all beings to be serene.

Sitting in meditation was advised by the followers of Zhu Xi and Lu Jiyuan over the ages, the most recent example being Master Yin’s (Jiang’s) book. He praises method as wonderful and highly spiritual and says that activity destroys the body. This is one way of looking at things.

⁶⁸ Penny, p.176.

However, I do not share these ideas. In my opinion, there is nothing between heaven and earth that is not in activity.⁶⁹

Here, one can perhaps detect in Mao's early process philosophy that same overconfidence in the inexhaustible activity of human labor that would envision the feasibility of the Great Leap. For Mao activity means struggle, with its implicit violence and periodic turmoil. Later, when Mao asserted "the negation of the negation" into his dialectical formula, he set in motion the perpetual revolution that would both topple his perceived foes and unleash a new millennialism on China, one that meant to master history by ceaselessly annihilating it.⁷⁰

All the contemporary authors who have surveyed the development of the *qigong* phenomenon emphasize the contributions of modernizers like Jiang Weiqiao and Dong Hao since this ongoing theme of scientific popularization has endured under socialism as an essential strategy for *qigong*'s survival. But a whole movement of more traditionally styled pioneers has gone largely unnoticed by these contemporary authors who perhaps allow the somewhat artificial category of *qigong* to limit the scope of their inquiry. While the modernizers sought to retrofit traditional practice with a simplified and politically defensible material basis, more traditional lines of practice, operating primarily under the aegis of martial arts, were concerned with preserving the integrity of classical philosophy and reconciling their martial nature with Confucian refinement. This current began at least as early as the 1850's if not earlier, when a circle of literati *Taijichuan* pioneers composed the texts now referred to as the "*Taiji* Classics".⁷¹ These treatises firmly establish the evolving practice of *Taijiquan* in the philosophical context of traditional medicine, the Five Elements, *Yijing* symbols, and the attainment of *Dao*, in short, the program of Internal Alchemy but with more emphasis on bodily empowerment, perhaps due, as Wile argues, to the waxing chaos afoot in Chinese society.

⁶⁹ Mao Zedong, "A Study of Physical Culture" in *Collected Works*, V ol. 1. (New York: International Publishers, 1954.) Quoted in Xu, p.972 and Miura, p.334.

⁷⁰ On 'the negation of the negation', Mao's dialectics, and the Cultural Revolution, see Stuart Schram, "Mao's Thought, 1949-1976." in J.K. Fairbank and R. MacFarquhar, (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol 15, especially pp.42-54.

⁷¹ See Wile, *Lost T'ai-Chi Classics*.

In the early twentieth century, this neotraditional discourse in the martial arts produced a number of influential texts in support of the growing popularization of the art. Foremost of these noteworthy authors was Sun Lutang 孫祿堂, a legendary figure in the modern pantheon of Grandmasters, and most remembered for his development of a unique *Taiji* style that bears his name. Sun was an avid exponent of national strengthening through the martial arts, and in tones reminiscent of later Maoist sentiments, Sun wrote in 1915 that “physical training is the way to strengthen the country.”⁷² But the concerns of a traditional philosopher were ever present in Sun’s activities, and the “softness” of the internal, *qi*-based martial arts allowed Sun to harmonize his nationalistic self-strengthening agenda with his Confucian sensibilities. Continuing in the preface to *Xing Yi Quan Xue*, Sun recalls that

There was prejudice in the old days. Literates despised martial arts as martial artists were short of literary learning. Now the country will be improved through reforming affairs...I don’t want to be bold with powerful force, but hope to have the proper way to health. The real courage is not based on brute force, but on the proper relationship between hardness and softness....There is a common saying that the principal of martial arts training is the same as literate learning. Both have the same value and importance.⁷³

In all, Sun wrote six books on various aspects of *Taiji*, *Bagua*, and *Xingyi*, and he also taught a sizable number of students before he died in 1933, the year he predicted for his death based on *Yijing* divination.⁷⁴ That same year saw the publication of Chen Xin’s 陳鑫 *Chen shi Taijiquan tu shuo* 陳氏太極拳圖說 (Chen Family Supreme Polarity Boxing Diagrammatically Explained) though it was originally composed in 1919. Presumably alluding to Zhou Dunyi’s eleventh-century Neoconfucian treatise *Taiji tu shuo*- ‘Supreme Polarity Diagram Explained’⁷⁵ - Chen’s ambitious volume is nothing less than a

⁷² Sun Lu Tang, *Xing Yi Quan Xue, The Study of Form-Mind Boxing*. Pacific Grove, California. High View Publications, 1993, p.60. *Xing Yi* 形意 is arguably the closest to pure Internal Alchemy of any martial art.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.36.

⁷⁵ See W.T. de Bary, I. Bloom, (Eds.) *Sources of Chinese tradition*, Vol 1., pp.673-676.

philosophical *tour de force*, employing symbolic diagrams of every sort to present Chen style *taijiquan* in an elaborate system of classical correspondences. While Jiang Weiqiao would perhaps see in Chen's text that cloaking tendency of the arcane Daoist, Chen ensures that the rich texture of traditional cosmology would remain relevant to the embodied experience of practitioners.⁷⁶

Continuing this tradition into the middle twentieth century, Zheng Manqing 鄭曼青, easily the most influential figure in the American encounter with *Taiji*, was the epitome of the Confucian gentleman. Professor Zheng, as he liked to be called, was a practicing physician, skilled at painting, poetry, and calligraphy. He authored a number of texts on *Taiji* and Confucianism, and has left a vigorous lineage of Taiwanese and American students.⁷⁷

Thus, before we identify twentieth century *qi* phenomenon purely with its more modernized, simplified, and neo-syncretistic popularisms, we should bear in mind that the more philosophically intact martial arts practices have remained among the most popular forms of *qi* cultivation all along. Though also subject to merciless bastardization, these martial lineages, born during the late Qing, represent primarily a response from Neoconfucian thought. These more traditional lineages represent an alternative strategy to the out and out scientism that has dominated much of the recent *qigong* discourse. That is not to say that this more traditional paradigm is necessarily incompatible with a scientific frame, but rather that the full version of the traditional philosophical system has continued to thrive, proving that classical learning can adapt and flourish even in late modernity.

If the retiring simplicity of *wuwei* was politically unacceptable in the battlefield of modern China, an active, healthy, and productive body, guided by correct thought,

⁷⁶ Chen Xin, *Chen shi Taijiquan tu shuo*. Hong Kong: Chen Hsiang-chi shu-chu, 1983. Reprint.

⁷⁷ Since his impact on the American *Taijiquan* scene was so significant, Zheng's works are now fewer in number than books about him. The most comprehensive collection of Zheng's works is to be found in *Cheng Man-ching's Essays on Man and Culture*. Mark Hennessy, Trans. Frog Ltd, 1997. Of the many writings on Cheng by his students, among the most interesting is Wolfe Lowenthal's *Gateway to the Miraculous*. Berkeley, Frog Ltd., 1994.

would become the *sine qua non* of the revolutionary project. In that same early essay quoted above, Mao extolled the individual and national benefits of physical exercise.⁷⁸ In 1952, Mao advanced his national athletic agenda with a jingoistic sports slogan- “Develop physical culture and sports; strengthen the people’s physiques.” This aphorism, writes Xu, “dominated the central space in every sports field and stadium for almost forty years before it came to share that space with the more eye-catching Marlboro and Coca Cola ads. When Mao decided to launch the Cultural Revolution, he swam across the Yangtze to demonstrate the fitness of his own body for the enterprise....The ‘Sick Man of Asia’ is gone.”⁷⁹ While the socialist paradigm of materialist struggle suited the development of competitive sports, the need for medical technology and preventative health care drew *qigong* and other aspects of traditional medicine into the national cause.⁸⁰

The “Golden Age” of Chinese socialism in the mid-fifties witnessed the incorporation of “external *qi*” (*waiqi* 外氣) therapies and treatments into an evolving medical scene. Starting in 1954, Liu Guizhen 劉貴珍 opened a series of *qigong* clinics where he treated thousands of patients and claimed, convincingly it seems, such a high success rate with all manner of chronic illness that he received several awards from the Ministry of Health and was granted a formal audience with Mao in 1956.⁸¹ Most contemporary authors trace the modern use of the term *qigong* to Liu’s 1957 work *Qigong liaofa shijian* 氣功療法實踐 (Practice of Qigong Therapy).⁸² From this time on, *qigong* publications steadily increased and continued to do so until their abrupt cessation in 1966.⁸³

⁷⁸ Mao, “A Study of Physical Culture”.

⁷⁹ Xu, 974

⁸⁰ On sports culture under Mao, see Brownell, *Training the Body For China*.

⁸¹ Miura, p.335.

⁸² Penny, p.176, Xu, p.963, although Xu cites Lin Housheng, the doctor who invented *qigong* anaesthesia, who gives the year 1953 for *Qigong Liaofa*’s publication. Miura credits Dong Hao 董浩 with the “first reference for the modern term” in his 1934 *Fei laobing teshu liaofa: Qigong Liaofa*. 肺癆病特殊療法(Special Treatments for Lung Ailments: *Qigong* Treatments.) Miura, p.342.

⁸³ Penny, 176.

The early divergence of Communist urban and rural strategies was reflected in the grudging but pragmatic reappraisal of Traditional Chinese Medicine by the newly empowered CCP. In his work *Traditional Medicine in Modern China*, Crozier points out that “In the countryside, where trained physicians were in desperately short supply, the old-style doctors were used on a large scale, but they were almost entirely excluded from the large urban hospitals and government medical institutions.”⁸⁴ These cultural, political, and utilitarian demands engendered new hybrids of Western and traditional Chinese medicine, and the well known *Barefoot Doctors Manual*, published in Henan during the Cultural Revolution, indicates how neotraditional currents converged in the barefoot doctor phenomenon. Of the four sections offered under the division entitled “Therapeutic Techniques”, three are “Treatment with Chinese Herbs,” “Folk Treatment” (mostly acupuncture, massage, and skin related techniques), and “New Therapeutic Techniques.” This last section commences with a patriotic invocation celebrating what sounds like a kind of revelation:

The Great Masses of workers, peasants, soldiers and health workers have shown a daring and courageous spirit. They have, after much practice, discovered new therapeutic techniques, such as new acupuncture points, alkali techniques, “suture-buried-in-acupuncture point” technique, needle plucking, etc. The appearance of these new methods which are well received by the masses has greatly increased the effectiveness of treatments given. Not only are they important contributions to the people’s health, they also represent the merger of western medicine and traditional Chinese medicine, and thus open to new opportunities for the new medicine and pharmacology that China is inherently favorably disposed to.⁸⁵

It is illustrative that this manual, published at height of the Cultural Revolution, details a *qi*-based physiology and therapy, with *qi* meridians inhabiting the modern body of science, their contradictions resolved by the tandem use of theory and practice. Though traditional medicine is in many ways one of the great repositories of traditional culture in all its forms, its essence, formerly cloaked in patterned feudal garb could now assume the uniform of the liberated masses. New acupuncture points in the human body

⁸⁴ R.G. Crozier, *Traditional Medicine in Modern China*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968, p. 165.

⁸⁵ *Barefoot Doctors Manual*. Philadelphia: Running Press, 1977, p.90.

were not unlike new stars in the firmament; revolution had revealed new physiological hypostases that conveniently empowered the masses with a democratized medical technique. Since “acupuncture therapy is a treatment technique that embraces quantity, speed, quality, and economy,” the “precious heritage of traditional Chinese medicine” was somewhat able, at least in politically correct settings, to survive.⁸⁶ Thus, comrades sent down to the country were medically treated by semi-trained acupuncturists whose point of technique still hinged upon the needle “getting the *qi*” 得氣。

Under the duress of the Cultural Revolution, *qigong* and related practices retreated into the cover of privacy, while “mass calisthenics” sought to strengthen and harmonize the collective body of the nation.⁸⁷ While most traditional training methods, from martial arts to theatrical gymnastics, operated in a climate of unified group choreography, the new public ritual of exercise, guided by rhythmic, amplified instructions, helped to establish the culture and community of morning exercise in the public parks and squares. After Mao’s death, the sublimated religious dimension of Chinese culture emerged again, and the desire for healing and spiritual peace quickly lifted the exercise experience from a ritual for strengthening the materialist state to one seeking to transcend its control.

If Mao had to emphasize the “error” of idealism so frequently, perhaps it was in part because the mind recoils at the banalities of mere material existence.⁸⁸ Certainly, the vigor with which broadly religious phenomena rebounded in post-Mao China indicates that even the religiously-styled rituals of a modernist state can not indefinitely displace religious traditions. Of the human universals which ensure the timeless appeal of religious behavior, it was the hope for healing and the alleviation of suffering that primarily inspired

⁸⁶ *ibid.* Certainly, doctors were targeted during many phases of the revolution for various class and ideological pretexts. Since the barefoot doctor program was the medical equivalent of the Great Leap, the *Manual* may represent the work of astute, well-trained professionals with the intention of mitigating disaster. For example, the authors quite interestingly caution barefoot doctors not to perform acupuncture on the “surfaces corresponding to the five organs.” (lungs, liver, heart, spleen, kidneys. p.97)

⁸⁷ On ‘mass calisthenics’, see Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China*

⁸⁸ Mao himself appears to have harbored a number of strong beliefs one might characterize as superstitions, including his sensitivity to possible omens. See Daniel Kane, “Irrational Belief Among the Chinese Elite”, in Lee, Syrokomla-Stefanowska, pp.152-165. Kane reports many interesting stories about Mao, and others reflective of both elite and popular culture.

the sensational popularity of *qigong* and paranormal phenomena in the Deng era.

In 1977, researchers at the Shanghai Traditional Medicine Research Institute and the Shanghai Nuclear Research Center claimed that they could measure the external *qi* emitted by a *qigong* master, and the experiment was repeated in 1983. The report by Lin Hai of the Shanghai Traditional Medicine Research Institute concludes that “*qi* is very much like infrared rays, electromagnetic waves, static electricity, magnetism, or the flow of tiny subatomic particles.”⁸⁹ With the sanction of the national scientific and athletic agencies, teachers of *qigong* opened more schools, while a myriad new *Wushu* routines and sanitized forms of *Taijichuan* entered the institutionalized marketplace of physical culture. But the safe, mainstream neo-materialism of the secularized *qi* paradigm could not banish the strange extremes that linger on the threshold of consciousness.

In 1979, several children were discovered who claimed to have extrasensory powers of perception, and soon thereafter *qigong* masters emerged with similar claims and a willingness to demonstrate their powers in public.⁹⁰ While many expressed skepticism over these reports, the most visible, high-profile exponent of ESP was Qian Xuesen, the “father of the Chinese Atom Bomb.” Qian believed these paranormal phenomena could be analyzed scientifically, within the materialist paradigm of Marxism.⁹¹ The state run media printed these stories, and over the next decade, official coverage on *qigong* and paranormal activities was enthusiastic and routine.⁹² Clearly, various activities and sentiments superseding the constraints of strict materialism had persisted through the previous decades and were now fruiting forth like mushrooms after the storm. These new adepts of *waiqi* showmanship included Wang Liping,

who claimed to be able to summon wind and rain....Once he projected his vital energy for half a month, and animals- rats, foxes, hares and snakes, gathered around him....Yang Shiguan projected his vital energy to 150 people at one time; it is said that a golden light emanated from the whole group, and a golden aura appeared around the head of everyone present. In Yunnan, a certain *qigong* master claimed he could fly from Kunming to

⁸⁹ Miura, p.336. Also quoted by Kane, p.176.

⁹⁰ Kane, p.154-155.

⁹¹ Kane, p.163

⁹² Chen, *Urban Spaces*, p.356.

Beijing in two and a half hours, and could even take two blindfolded men with him....A woman, Zhang Xiangyu, was also in communication with the 'spirit of the universe'; through this power she could improve people's health, or increase their intelligence.⁹³

Such experiences are normal enough in the world of Chinese religion, and to be sure, *Yijing* divination, fortunetelling, and possession trance accompanied this revival.⁹⁴ But modernity's imprint is ubiquitous, and fascination with UFO's also fed this popular flight from the mundane. This was the dawning of China's New Age, part of the same global phenomenon, but unique in that China was one of the old age homelands whose exported ideologies had given rise to the new world marketplace of alternative realities. But unlike the liberal west, with its individualized consumerism, the social and political forces in China ensured that this revitalized, "new age" experimentation would be more mainstream, communitarian, disciplined, and somatic in nature. Just as the old Daoists believed mastery of the body was fundamental to complete liberation, so too the Chinese state and its subjects define relationships of control and autonomy upon the body itself.

Though the long history of these meditative techniques demonstrates that they appeal to people of virtually all social and historical situations, never are their practitioners separate from their history, even as they transcend it. In her analysis of the *qigong* fever of the 1980's, Nancy Chen argues that some particular characteristics of modernity are manifest in the *qigong* experience:

Whereas in imperial China, modes of [*qigong*] transmission were often familial and bases of organization frequently paralleled secret societies, the patterns of *qigong* association in the contemporary urban setting are distinct for the mental and emotional relief they provide from the physical landscape of the city. In place of urban anomie, there is a search for balance in one's life. Exercises in imagination and healing link one's body to the cosmos as an alternative to the alienation of life in the modern metropolis....The spaces created through *qigong* reflect intimate relations among practice, body, and landscape and imply alternative mentalities outside the proscribed order by the state.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ The main trance-phenomenon was a *qigong* technique called Crane Qigong that was based on the meridian system but which culminated in cathartic trances characterized by spontaneous, involuntary movements, often accompanied by uncharacteristically intense emotional release.

With the unprecedented penetration of the state into all areas of life, the existence of an alternative zone of mentality, particularly in public where networking can occur, is a considerable threat, especially if “superstitious” elements too openly challenge the dominance of proscribed ideology. Thus it was in the 1980’s the Chinese government began regulating *qigong* through the establishment and monitoring of *qigong* associations. Chen places *qigong* activities into four categories within this context: (1) official state-run organizations; (2) officially recognized, legal independent outfits; (3) informal, unrecognized groups operating in a “gray zone”; (4) underground associations under official condemnation and prohibition, either for reasons of outright fraud, or more frequently for going beyond the pale of tolerance, thus incurring the charge of superstition.⁹⁵

Of the more important and widespread components of the *qigong* fever that would test the limits of publicly acceptable behavior was a certain phenomenon called “spontaneous” *qigong* (自發氣功). Emerging around 1980, this style of practice is notable for its climactic culmination in a trance state more akin to spirit possession than *samadhi* 定. These trances typically induce involuntary movement and cathartic emotional release quite unusual for public self-expression in China. Thomas Ots has written an analysis of the spontaneous *qigong* controversy, and describes the experience as he observed it in China. After practicing a routine of stylized movements and breathing techniques, the process consummates when

The practitioner has attained the highest stage of harmony and calmness. At this stage, however, practitioners may give in to various bodily movements and also sounds. They may shake their hands or limbs, the head, or even the whole body; they may jump up and down, trample the ground, move in different directions, float around in dance-like fashion; they may massage or beat certain body parts or fall down to the ground; they may shout, scream, laugh or cry, touch or embrace others, etc. I was surprised by this ‘non-Chinese’ behavior. Many of the practitioners were in a state of limited control of their actions; others seemingly had entered

⁹⁵ Chen, 354.

varying states of trance, ecstasy, or emotional catharsis.⁹⁶

Though the spontaneous forms of *qigong* were few in number compared to the hundreds, if not thousands of more quiescent forms, spontaneous *qigong* attracted considerable popularity, with an estimated 4.5 million followers in 1983.⁹⁷ Like most drawn to the practice of *qigong*, people took up spontaneous cures for some physical disorder, but the extroverted emotional release featured in this practice also appealed to those who flocked to the practice ground. According to Ots, when discussing the health-effects of this *qigong*, the popular journals spoke only of specific organic disorders like ulcers and hypertension, but in private letters practitioners “verbalized their psychosocial misery, feelings of depression, unhappiness, hopelessness, anger...Some talked about their feelings of shame and guilt, or how they had been driven to despair, how their life circumstances had made them cry, and how they felt at odds with the world.... The Cultural Revolution, or marital and job-related problems were most often given as reasons for their misery.”⁹⁸

Ots makes an interesting observation of the practitioner’s experience of this spontaneous trance. Like all “orthodox” *qigong*, the Crane style involves the circulation of *qi* through the meridian system, guided by the mind, breath, and movements in a controlled and precise manner. But when the practice climaxed and the automatic movements came on, practitioners no longer described their bodily awareness in terms of controlled, orderly *qi* circulation. Instead, practitioners report that their whole bodies were overwhelmed by an unstructured surge of *qi*. The release of the spontaneous trance transcends not only normal body awareness and social constraints, but also its architectural context of internal physiology and phenomenology. One practitioner recounts that

⁹⁶ Thomas Ots, “The silenced body—the expressive *Leib* : on the dialectic of mind and life in Chinese cathartic healing”, in Thomas Csordas, Ed, *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.122.

⁹⁷ Ots, p.123. The most popular spontaneous form is called Crane Qigong, others include Great Universal Qigong and Erect Tree Pattern. Miura refers to instances of these uncontrolled movements in the *Honglou Meng* and a Yuan collection of folk tales *Liaozhai zhi yi*. In these literary contexts, this phenomenon is called the ‘spirit dance’, an expression of the shamanic strata of Chinese religion. See Miura, p.351.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.126.

After I had practiced for a certain time and up to a certain standard, I felt a flow of warm *qi* which expanded from the point *dantien* [below the navel] to the accupoint *huiyin* [at the base of the spine] and later it flowed to the accupoint *yongquan* [on the sole of the feet]. But when I get into the state of the spontaneous movements, then my whole body feels warm. At some parts, it feels like burning fire....A current of warm water rushes through my body...and it flows to and fro, to and fro. It is such a wonderful and happy feeling as one usually cannot imagine.⁹⁹

A woman describes her first encounter with spontaneous trance in a similar manner, but with a greater degree of emotional catharsis:

I felt a stream of *qi* leaving the earth, lift me upwards and then turn me around in different directions. I had trained for three days, thus I felt self-assured and did not go against it. Suddenly, a force pushed me back. I stumbled forward and fell down on my knees. Now I became frightened, and wanted to finish the session, but before I could get up, another explosion hit my front and pushed me backwards. I fell to the ground, and then this energy just whirled me around and around. Again and again I tried to stop it, but I just didn't succeed. Then, for the first time in all these years, I became aware of all my sadness and shock. I started crying. What a relief!¹⁰⁰

Ots places the experience and development of spontaneous *qigong* squarely in the context of social and political response. The *qigong* fever began in 1980, in the wake of the Democracy Wall movement, but over the years, as the government exercised periodic campaigns of control, the number of spontaneous *qigong* progressively diminished, and after the "Beijing Massacre" in 1989, Ots tells how when

I revisited the Earth Temple Park in Beijing which in the years before was a favorite location for hundreds of practitioners of spontaneous *qigong*, it was hard to find even a small group practicing Crane *qigong*. Now, however, when practitioners reached the point where they previously would have engaged in spontaneous movement, they remained still and absolutely silent. There was only one man who engaged in small, circling movements of the hips. He was totally in control and, as if afraid of being watched, he cautiously observed the surroundings. There was no trace of the emancipatory air of self-expression and joy of prior years.¹⁰¹

In addition to the larger political atmosphere, the decline of spontaneous *qigong* was also

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.127.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.,p.130.

due to an officially directed campaign in *qigong* journals to discredit the spontaneous experience. The substance of this criticism was that *qigong* should develop the qualities of quietude, control, and stillness, and this sentiment was made into a jingo: “big movement is not as good as small movement; small movement is not as good as no movement; no movement is not as good as quietness.”¹⁰² While this reflects an attitude not unknown to *Taiji* and *qigong* practitioners, its particular use to delegitimize the spontaneous *qigong* movement was an expression of both a specific political agenda and a broader cultural resistance to the experience itself. In assessing the cultural attitude toward movement and extreme bodily experience, Ots quotes Mary Douglas’ comment that “We tend to find trance-like states feared as dangerous where the social dimension is highly structured, but welcomed and even deliberately induced where this is not the case.”¹⁰³

The spontaneous *qigong* movement and its controversy represent the revitalization of experiential, embodied ‘religious’ activity as a site for resistance in post-Mao society. Though the criticism of the spontaneous movement was persuasive rather than coercive, after 1989 the government’s assertion of control expanded to include closer supervision of the enormous *qigong* subculture. By 1990, estimates placed the number of *qigong* practitioners at over two hundred million. The sheer scale of the *qigong* boom, and its ideological implications exceeded official indulgence. As Hong Kong news analyst Chi Ta bluntly put it, “Ordinary Chinese have already replaced communism with *qigong* in their minds, and the political old men in Beijing also depend on *qigong* to sustain their lives. Recently, however, the CCP has become aware of the threat posed by the *qigong* party and is purging the *qigong* circles.”¹⁰⁴ After the arrest of a *qigong* master by the name of Zhang Xiangyu, the CCP ordered that no interprovincial or intercity *qigong* organizations were to be allowed, mass public *qigong* lectures were to cease, and that professional *qigong* teachers

¹⁰² 大動不如小動，小動不如不動，不動 不如寂靜。 Ibid., p.124.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 130. Form Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, New York:Pantheon, 1970.

¹⁰⁴ Chi Ta, “The Chinese Authorities Take Action to Purge the ‘Qigong Party’”, *Tang Tai*, No. 39, Aug. 25, 1990, pp.14-15. In Lawrence Sullivan, Ed, *China Since Tiananmen: Political, Economic, and Social Conflicts*. New York, M.E.Sharpe, 1995, p.215.

would be required to hold a state-issued medical certificate.¹⁰⁵

These prohibitions were made under the popular perception that *qigong* masters were in the service of high Party officials, and according to Chi Ta's sources,

Each of the 'the eight old ones' (Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, Yang Shangkun, Deng Yingchao, Li Xiannian, and others) has by their side four to five *qigong* experts allocated by the state. They use *qi* on them, cure them, and predict the future for them. Moreover, since *qigong* masters practice divination according to the *Yijing*, they can carry on political struggles with their opponents. Some politicians in the [central leadership compound at] Zhongnanhai always take counsel with their *qigong* masters in 'making a move'...In fact, it is rare for medium level and senior officials in China to have no *qigong* masters by their side or friends in the *qigong* circle. In China, *qigong* has become a kind of politics. Those who know nothing about China's *qigong* and the *Yijing* have much difficulty in becoming senior officials or making a fortune. A senior official at the State Commission for Restructuring the Economic System said: "There is endless wonder in it. If you are conversant with *qigong* and the rules of [The Book of] Change, you will be as good in China as a fish swimming in the water, controlling things as you please."¹⁰⁶

Even if some of the details concerning politicians claimed above are exaggerated, the public perception alone is significant. Furthermore, involvement of high-level party cadres in *qigong* would become something of a factor in the Falun Gong situation, since it appears party members' support may have protected Falundafa from criticism and harassment. And while Chen's basic analysis of *qigong* as an alternative to the state dominated sphere remains useful and to some extent essential, the fact that *qigong* is perceived as a power shared by the official caste and broad masses alike complicates a simple dichotomy one might imagine existing between the state and its subjects. Within the *qigong* context, the concept of ultimate power is removed from the state and placed in nature, which humans can then relate to in varying degrees of harmonious integration. But in keeping with the hierarchical paradigm of the old patriarchal bureaucracy, the power is concentrated in the hands of great masters capable of issuing tremendous external *qi*. These high-profile *qigong* masters are the font of miraculous healing, and because of their

¹⁰⁵ Ibid,p.219.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

ability to draw large dependent followings, it is their power the Party primarily fears.

After the imposition of martial law in 1989, large gatherings of all kinds were banned. The mass healing seminars where *qigong* masters would emit external *qi* to thousands of enthusiastic devotees became a thing of the past. Accompanied by the familiar charges of “superstition,” in 1990 authorities arrested Zhang Xiangyu, female master of the spontaneous Great Universal Qigong.¹⁰⁷ A new psychiatric disorder called “*qigong* deviation” provided the pretext for hospitalization of some whose main problem may have been political in nature.¹⁰⁸ As the specter of control descended, the mood of many practitioners shifted towards millenarianism.

When Ots made his study of the spontaneous movement, he drew phenomenological parallels with Melanesian cargo cults and the Boxers, but he concluded that the *qigong* movement of the time “cannot be labeled as a millenarian movement yet: it still misses a cohesive ideology and charismatic leadership in the Weberian sense.”¹⁰⁹ But in the 1990’s, Chen observed that “Many practitioners in the PRC look forward to an apocalyptic ending of the present regime in the formation of a Great Universe (*da ziran*).”¹¹⁰

And so it was at this precise moment, in the politicized space of the *qigong* subculture, that a new school of practice, the Great Dharma of the Law Wheel, *Falun Dafa*, was revealed in China for the first time in 1992. With a charismatic master of cosmic self-importance, a comprehensive and millenarian ideology, and a calm practice promising supernormal capabilities, Falundafa supplied all of the missing ingredients needed to transform diffuse *qigong* resistance and escapism into a unified and effervescent movement.

¹⁰⁷ Chen, p.357. It is possible that this school possessed a millenarian ideology based on the title ‘great universe’ 大自然, but I do not have any specific data to prove this.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.347.

¹⁰⁹ Ots, p.132.

¹¹⁰ Chen, p.361.

3 Permanent Revolution of the Law Wheel

“You will have to completely discard everything you have learned in the past, keeping nothing. A new set of things will be cultivated at this new level. After passing this new level, another new set of things will be cultivated again.”-Master Li Hongzhi¹¹¹

As a form of *qigong*, Falundafa is somewhat unique in many ways, from the specifics of its technical operation to the comprehensive body of teachings expounded by Master Li Hongzhi. In fact, it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the person of Master Li from the exercises themselves, not to mention the immense rhetorical repository which Li has authored. But for the sake of discussion, it is useful to begin an analysis of Falun Gong with an examination of the exercises, much as any encounter with Falun Gong would commence, and from there follow the theoretical architecture of the technique into Li's doctrinal superstructure.

At its most external and basic level, Falun Gong is a set of five *qigong* exercises, four of which are performed standing and one is a sitting procedure with certain Tantric influences. As with much of Falun Gong's nomenclature, many names of the movements and their component postures invoke Buddhist authority. The first sequence, “Buddha Showing A Thousand Hands”, features such movements as “Maitreya Stretching his Back,” “Tathagata Filling Energy into the Top of the Head,” “Bodhisattva Placing Hands on Lotus” and “Vajra Toppling a Mountain.”

The second and third forms, “Falun Standing Exercise” and “Penetrating Cosmic Extremes,” are less evocatively described, but the fifth set is called “Strengthening Divine Powers”. This is the sitting meditation practiced by Falundafa. Most of the exercise uses hand gestures that resemble *taiji-qigong* movements as well as Tantric mudras, though Falundafa's are greatly simplified when compared with the mudra techniques of the Tibetans and the Esoteric School.¹¹² The routine is finished with quiet sitting meditation,

¹¹¹ *China Falun Gong* (henceforth *CFG*), 5.1

but as we shall see, the theory of mind and consciousness in Falundafa, like so many of its characteristics, differs significantly from other meditational practices which it seems at first to resemble.

Now the fourth set is called “Falun Heavenly Circulation” *Falun Zhou Tian* 法輪周天. Here, we are confronted with the image of internal alchemy, as the “greater” and “lesser heavenly circulation” are the basic methods of respiring the *qi* through the axial meridians and principal accupoints of the body. But the “Falun Heavenly Circulation” resembles the classical operation in name only. As a matter of fact, Li is quite explicit in his abandonment of the traditional scheme, charging that the Daoist technique involving “the two energy channels of Ren 任 and Du 督 ...is only a skin deep heavenly circuit....Here is how the ‘Borderline’ [Falun] Heavenly Circuit moves: it comes out from the *Huiyin* [base of the spine] or the *Baihui* [top of the head] accupoints, moving along the sides of the body, where Yin and Yang meet. The heavenly circuit in Falun Gong is much greater than the movements of the Rare Meridians and Eight Channels discussed in average cultivation methods. It is the movement of all the crisscrossing channels located throughout the body. All meridians of the entire body need to be thoroughly opened at once, and they all have to move together.”¹¹³

So, Li’s version of the Heavenly Circulation seeks to transcend the gradualism of the controlled meridian methods, and hearkens back to the descriptions of spontaneous *qigong*. But unlike the spontaneous schools, Li insists that “You must keep yourself under the control of your “main consciousness” 主意識¹¹⁴ during practice. Falun Gong cultivates the main consciousness. Do not deliberately seek swaying. Contain the swaying of the body when it does happen. You may open your eyes if you have to.”¹¹⁵ Thus, the rhetoric

¹¹³ CFG 2.4.2

¹¹⁴ The so-called ‘main consciousness’ is one of three psycho-spiritual components of Li’s analysis of selfhood. The main consciousness roughly corresponds to what might be termed the ordinary conscious mind. This main consciousness operates in confederation with the ‘paraconsciousness’ 副意識, which seems to refer to what might commonly be understood as the subconscious. These terms and the way they are used do not draw from any clear precedent, but may have been tangentially inspired by the *hun* and *po* ‘souls’ of antique thought.

¹¹⁵ CFG 4.5, “Some Basic Requirements and Words of Caution for Practicing Falun Gong”.

delegitimizing spontaneous *qigong* at the very least resonates with Li's technical framework, and may have imparted some causative influence.

The altered physiological arrangement is not the only significant modification of this "heavenly circulation" practice. Normally, it is the mind or intent (*yi* 意) that leads the *qi* through the meridians, and this mental focus is a major component of the overall training. But having renounced articulate traversal of the meridians, there is no need for the pointed internal focus of guided intent. As Li quite bluntly puts it, "Falun Gong cultivation involves no use of mind-intent,"¹¹⁶ and if one should engage the internal process with the mind "you will go deviant."¹¹⁷ Furthermore, there is no breathing pattern or attention invested in the breath at all. Here, the casual identification of *qigong* with "breathing exercises" has led many journalists and other observers to mischaracterize Falundafa technique, and thus ignore significant doctrinal idiosyncrasies that may reveal sociological patterns and phenomenological distinctions. Certainly, from the perspective of mental exercise, this complete dismissal of the active concentration is more likely to produce a different state of development compared with traditional forms of discipline than just changing the rhetorical framework behind the exercises and their invisible aspects.

One case in point is the state of concentration 定 sought by Falundafa practitioners during the peaceful-sitting portion of the Strengthening Divine Powers. Li's banishment of all trance extends beyond the possession-zone and into the stillness of sitting. This state must be "completely conscious and cultivate the Main Consciousness."¹¹⁸ Entering any kind of trance is equated with "loosing consciousness", and Li cautions that this state "frequently happens to people with a superior ability to attain *ding*. However, it is problematic if it goes on for a long time."¹¹⁹ Since some schools of meditation distinguish between advanced concentrative states and mere unconsciousness, it is possible that from a sort of Buddhist standpoint, the Falun Gong *ding* involves a constant arising of the ego,

¹¹⁶ *CFG*, 2.4.5

¹¹⁷ *CFG*, 2.4.2

¹¹⁸ *ZFL*, "Glossary: Ding".

¹¹⁹ *CFG*, 5.1

and thus does not effect a cessation of consciousness determined by form. Together with the powerful suggestive imagery of Li's fantastic spiritscapes¹²⁰, I believe this state of consciousness cultivated when sitting may contribute to the unusually visionary character of practitioner's experiences. No doubt the struggles of social existence, fiction and science fiction help color this alternative empowering state, wherein demons are destroyed with Falun-weapons and fabulous, free paradises beckon with the fruit of "consummation." Nevertheless, sensitizing the mind to a state of quiet but never confronting anything like a void may very well produce the image-generating type of experience more connected with "guided meditation" than with *samadhi*.¹²¹ As a matter of fact, Li informs his students that "the *Xinxing* or *de* we talk about is not contained in the emptiness from the Buddha School and the nothingness of the Tao School. On the contrary, the emptiness of Buddha School and the nothingness of the Tao School are included in our *Xinxing*."¹²² Thus the transformative void is neutralized, made into substantial material form, and so is never seen or contemplated.

While one cannot be surprised at the lack of a more refined Buddhist psychological analysis here, one must from a technical perspective wonder, why have the mental training elements of Daoist meditation also been rejected? According to Li, this is because the internal movements previously guided by the focused intent "are already embedded in our Falun Gong, so you don't need to deliberately do them or guide them with your thoughts. You will go awry if you do it that way. During the lecture series, I install energy mechanisms 氣機 outside your body that circulate automatically. The energy mechanisms are something unique to high-level cultivation, and they are part of what makes our exercises automatic."

Here we have hit upon one of the central features of Falun Gong- its automatic

¹²⁰ It must be said, Li's talk of Buddha paradises, other dimensions and multitudes of worlds, never attempts the poetic grandeur of the more descriptive Mahayana Sutras.

¹²¹ If this hypothesis is true, then a feature of this effect would be its receptivity to suggestion, since 'guided meditation' usually involves some instructed visualization whose spontaneity bypasses the linear, discursive mind.

¹²² CFG, 5.3

operation. Where traditional cultivation methods demand that practitioners “eat the bitter” through unswerving mental concentration and physical endurance, Falun Gong develops a person’s energy level quite automatically, whether the person is practicing the exercises or not. The key to this unceasing, automatic action is the Falun itself.

The *Dharmachakra* of Falundafa is a disk-shaped “intelligent being consisting of high-energy substances. It transforms Gong (cultivation energy) automatically and it does not exist in our dimension.”¹²³ As a symbolic figure, the Falun is believed to be an image of the universe, and carries the *wan* 卐 character of “The Buddha School” and the *Taiji* symbol of “The Dao School.” More specifically, the Falun-disk is implanted within the practitioner’s body in the lower *dan tien*, the elixir field of traditional somatology. This implantation is sometimes said to be achieved by means of a *qi* mechanism which Master Li’s *fashen* 法身 (*Dharmakaya*) installs outside the body for the dual purpose of “adjusting the body” and developing the Falun.¹²⁴ In other places, the installation of the Falun appears more direct, for as Li specifies “I send out the Falun and install it in your lower abdomen.”¹²⁵ On the nature of the Falun, Li proclaims that

Once developed, one’s Falun exists as an intelligent entity. It automatically spins ceaselessly in the practitioner’s lower abdominal area, constantly absorbing and transforming energy from the universe and ultimately converting the energy in the practitioner’s original-body into *gong* [cultivation energy]. Consequently, the effect of “the Fa [*Dharma*] refines the practitioner” is achieved. This means that the Falun constantly refines this person even though he or she doesn’t perform the exercises every minute. Internally, the Falun offers salvation to oneself... It can also protect the cultivator from interference by people with inferior *xinxing* [moral mind-nature]. Externally, the Falun can both heal sicknesses and eliminate evils for others, rectifying all abnormal conditions. The Falun rotates continuously in the lower abdominal area, turning clockwise nine times and then counterclockwise nine times. When rotating clockwise, it vigorously absorbs energy from the universe and that energy is very strong. Its rotational power becomes stronger as a person’s *gong* potency improves. This is a state that can’t be attained by deliberate attempts to pour *qi* into the top of the head. When rotating counterclockwise, it releases energy and provides salvation to all beings, rectifying abnormal states. People around

¹²³ *CFG*, 5.1

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

the practitioner benefit. Of all the qigong practices taught in our country, Falun Gong is the first and only cultivation method that has achieved “the Fa refines the practitioner.”¹²⁶

During the early years of Li’s instruction in China, the installation of the Falun was a featured benefit of attending Li’s large lecture gatherings, which would often extend over several days. Transcripts of these lectures form the predominant substance of the Falundafa texts, now referred to as “scriptures” by the faithful. During these lectures, Li claimed that his *fashen* transformed the energetic makeup of practitioners’ bodies so that they could leap forward into advanced stages of cultivation made possible by the automatic Falun technology. The literalism of the whole process prompted one participant to ask “Can people who came in late get a Falun?”, to which Li replies, “If you came in before the last three days, you can get your body adjusted and Falun installed, along with many other things. If you came during the last three days, that is hard to say.”¹²⁷ Thus, from the very start, the precious Falun with its automatic salvation is inseparably bound up with the person of Master Li.

After the development of the Falun in the lower elixir field, the process of cultivation generates more Faluns that surround the body and perform such tasks as combating demonic influences or offering protection and power. These Faluns frequently appear in practitioners’ accounts of “supernormal vision” or extradimensional perception. To perceive these astral phenomena, disciples must have their Celestial Eye 天目 opened by Master Li when their *xinxing* level is high enough. While the ‘third eye’ is one of the few indispensable items from traditional practice, when Li expounds his theories on the subject he promises “Here, we are not going to dwell on that theory of the past but explain it with modern science in the most simple and plain modern language.”¹²⁸

Now it is significant that the Falun is implanted in the (lower) elixir field- any other location may have rendered Falundafa incomprehensible to the expectations of

¹²⁶ CFG, 2.1

¹²⁷ CFG, 5.1

¹²⁸ ZFL 2.1 “Issue of the Celestial Eye”.

Chinese *qigong* students. This is because the elixir field serves as the primary alembic of the alchemical operation, at least in its foundational stages. Here, the reader will recall, is where the the philosophical cinnabar or *dan* accumulates and takes root, and from this energetic womb the refined elixir embarks upon its microcosmic circuit and ascent. But Falun Gong most emphatically rejects this essential process universal to all forms of inner alchemy, which Li considers to be vastly inferior to his own previously unrevealed technique. The fact that Li specifically denounces the familiar motifs of “ ‘establishing the foundation,’ ‘setting up a bodily crucible and furnace to make *dan*,’ ‘gathering medicinal herbs,’ and ‘adding measured fires’ ”¹²⁹ indicates that these old terms are still in circulation among *qigong* practitioners, and that inner alchemy still maintains something of its symbolic repertoire, even after a century of secularization and simplification. Whether this lexical familiarity with *neidan* is through previous, initiated experience into an established lineage, instruction in a newer method, or through popularization of texts it is difficult to say. So we must consider that due to the severe complications rendered to the practice and transmission of *qi* cultivation in the Cultural Revolution, particularly to the more traditionally complimented techniques, it is possible that without more intact oral traditions there arose a ceasura of symbolic interpretation into which new renderings could enter, possibly aiding the linkage between antitraditional rhetoric and the Falun Gong’s abandonment of Daoism and Buddhism.

Though the specific action and system of the Falun here are unprecedented, the late Qing/early modern alchemist Chao Pi Chen also speaks of a self-winding *falun*. Chao understands this natural rotation to be “Automatic immortal breathing” of the “true vitality”, ascending and descending through the prime meridians- fully the “heavenly circulation” in all its medical and alchemical detail.¹³⁰ The self-winding wheel of law is a standard alchemical motif for Chao, not an object.

Having dispensed with the internal technology of the feudal past, Falun Gong’s automatic method involves a relatively new collection of substances and procedures. Even

¹²⁹ CFG, 2.6.1

¹³⁰ Lu K’uan Yu, *Taoist Yoga, Alchemy and Immortality*. New York: Samuel Weiser, 1970.

Yin and *Yang* have no real metaphysical significance for Falundafa, since they are “of a lower level.”¹³¹ The dimension of self-effort present in the practice of Falundafa is primarily, if not exclusively, an exercise in moral restraint. Practitioners cultivate their *xinxing* -moral mind-nature- by enduring suffering, “passing tests” of temptation, and giving up the attachments of ordinary human beings. The level of *xinxing* refinement exhibited by the practitioner determines to what degree the actual soteriological agency of Master Li can advance the disciple toward “consummation”. On a technical level, this invisible sacrament is distilled by the action of the Falun. As the Falun rotates, it collects a high-energy substance called *gong* 功, usually translated by Falundafa interpreters as “cultivation energy.”

Now in a more general *qigong* or martial arts context, this term *gong* typically denotes skillful power or work-energy developed through discipline. But in the Falundafa usage, *gong* is a particular substance superior to and completely different from *qi*. The entire system of classical thought and practice is once again trumped by Falun Gong’s higher technology, and so *qi* itself falls by the wayside.¹³² The Falun-disk in the abdomen is said to transform one’s *de* 德 or virtue into this *gong* as it revolves. Usually *de* is seen as an immaterial mental quality, but in the neo-materialist paradigm of Falundafa, even human virtue is in fact a form of subtle matter, a white substance that forms a field around the body. “We obtain that *de*,” Li explains, “through suffering, enduring setbacks, and doing good deeds.”¹³³ The virtue automatically gained through enduring pain and hardship is transformed by the Falun directly into *gong*. Li sets forth the basic operation of Falun Gong by rhetorically pondering his own significance:

What does the master give you? He gives you the *gong* mechanism that develops your *gong*. Since *de* exists outside one’s body, one’s real *gong* is generated from *de*. Both the height of one’s level and the strength of one’s *gong* potency are generated from *de*. The master transforms your *de* into

¹³¹ CFG, 5.1

¹³² “What we cultivate is not *qi*, which is at a lower level.” CFG, 5.1

¹³³ *Zhuan Falun*, (henceforth, *ZFL*), 1.6, “Why Doesn’t Your Cultivation Energy Increase When You Do Cultivation?”

gong that grows upward in a spiral form. The *gong* that truly determines one's level grows outside one's body, and it grows in a spiral form, eventually forming a *gong* column (*gongzhu* 功柱) after it grows above one's head. With just one glance at the height of this person's *gong* column, one can discern the level of his *gong*. This is one's level and Fruit Status as mentioned in Buddhism. While sitting in meditation, some people's Primordial Spirit can leave their bodies and reach a certain level. Even if it tries, his Primordial Spirit cannot ascend any further, and it does not dare to move up. Since it moves up by sitting on his *gong* column, it can only reach that level. Because his *gong* column is just that high, it cannot move up any further. This is the issue of Fruit Status mentioned in Buddhism.¹³⁴

With the *gong* column, we encounter another innovative aspect of Li's unique spiritual system. Again the literal quality of the *gong* column and its functions are noteworthy, as is the detail that these energies are *outside the body*. The Falun is a foreign object gracefully inserted into the body from outside, gathering and converting these spiritual substances *outside the body*; the *gong*, not native to the body, then ascends in a spiral pole, *outside the body*. This subtle externalization is, I believe, another technical detail which facilitates Master Li's hold of authority at the expense of self-realization and self-empowerment.

Inhibiting the *de* and its conversion process is karma 業, which is, not surprisingly, conceived of here as a black substance, an anti-*de*. For Li, there exists a reciprocal relationship between the black karma and white virtue that further illustrates the literal materialism at work in his worldview:

While one person is here swearing [at another person], with this swearing, a piece of *de* from his own dimensional field leaves and goes to the other person. The more he swears at him, the more *de* he gives him. The same is true with beating up or bullying others. As one hits or kicks another person, one will give one's *de* away according to how badly one beats up the other person.¹³⁵

The reduction of amorphous mental and ethical qualities to discrete (if invisible) substances may hold a certain appeal for people in a cultural discourse of materialism.

Certainly, there is no arcanum of symbols to clothe these energy-states; populist literalism

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

of the simplified characters has here triumphed over more subtle systems. Interestingly enough, Li never comes down from Mt. Meru bearing tablets of moral law; instead he is content to remain in the general realm of normative, fundamentalistic values, lumping together “all manner of crimes for money, killing and framing innocent people, practicing homosexuality, [and] taking drugs.”¹³⁶

These two substances, *de* and karma, are the products of human response to stress and challenge, and Li shares in his own way Mao’s view that life is essentially about struggle. If class struggle made Mao’s China ready for revolution, then for Li, his Chinese disciples have now far surpassed the Buddha Sakyamuni because their “Xinxing [moral mind-nature]¹³⁷ standard has been cultivated through a great deal of lifelong sufferings, hardships, and tribulations in harsh environments. Therefore, it is extremely valuable.”¹³⁸

Li views ordinary social existence primarily as an opportunity to generate *de* from conflict by attuning to the cosmic principals of “Truth, Benevolence, and (especially) Forbearance.” Therefore he discourages renunciatory urges since the exercises are just “the supplementary means for reaching Consummation.”¹³⁹ Indeed, the complete historical and economic situation in China propels Li’s disciples toward their ultimate idealistic reward in the Falun Paradise, or a paradise world of their own ethnic heritage.¹⁴⁰ If a practitioner can transcend the factional struggles, corruption, and politicized categories of

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ It is difficult to tell whether Li’s ideas of *xinxing* and *de* are perfectly interchangeable, strongly overlapping, or just closely related. Also, the *gong* column and *xinxing* level verge on inseparability. At times, there are further multiplications of this interplay, for example: “While your *gong* grows, one at high levels can see that when your attachment, a substance, is removed, a yardstick grows above your head. In addition, this yardstick exists in the form of *gong* column. The yardstick is as high as your *gong* column. It represents the *gong* that you have cultivated. It also represents the height of your *xinxing* level.” (ZFL 3.8 “What has Teacher Given to Students?”) This kind of doctrinal instability may flow from the absence of concrete symbols as found in the classical system. Furthermore, this tendency to multiply features seems like a form of embellishment: “in addition to Falun, we will also install in your body many energy systems and mechanisms that will, together with Falun, rotate and transform you automatically.” (ZFL, 1.7 “Characteristics of our Falun Gong) Such statements, which are never followed by any further elaboration, constantly erode whatever signs of cohesion Li’s system may exhibit.

¹³⁸ ZFL, 4.5, “Placement of the Mysterious Pass

¹³⁹ Li, *The Great Consummation Way of Falun Dafa*: “Movements are Supplementary Means for Reaching Consummation” is the subtitle of this particular text.

¹⁴⁰ You can also make your own private paradise out of *gong*. It appears the Falun World is Han-only, since most of Sakyamuni’s disciples we hear are in Han-land to learn Dafa before it’s too late. See *Lecture at the First Conference in North America* (henceforth, *North America*), 12 of 58 (PDF, May, 2001.)

Chinese society, then they can leave behind the whole foul business of ordinary human existence:

There are different conflicts for people of different social classes. The upper-class society has conflicts of the upper-class society, all of which can be properly dealt with. In any social class, one can be a good person and care less for different desires or attachments. One can be a good person at different strata, and one can practice cultivation at one's own social level.

Nowadays, whether in a state-run company or in other enterprises in this country, interpersonal conflicts have become very unique. In other countries and throughout history, this phenomenon has never occurred. Consequently, conflicts over self-interest are shown to be particularly intense. People play mind games and compete for a tiny bit of personal gain; the thoughts they have and the tricks they use are very vicious. Even being a good person is difficult. For instance, you arrive at your workplace and find the atmosphere there not right. Later, a person tells you that so-and-so has publicized you badly and reported on you to the boss, putting you in an awful situation. Others all stare at you with an unusual look. How can an ordinary person tolerate that? How can one put up with that? "If someone makes trouble for me, I'll return the same. If he has supporters, I do, too. Let's fight." If you do this among everyday people, they will say that you are a strong person. As a practitioner, however, that is completely awful. If you compete and fight like an ordinary person, you are an ordinary person. If you outdo him, you are even worse than that ordinary person.¹⁴¹

From the automatic operation of the Falun to the overdue rewards of suffering, one can begin to appreciate why Master Li's broad-ranging and socially-tailored message found such a sympathetic audience. The hardships of the daily workplace "have never occurred" before- the stress of being a postrevolutionary Chinese has multiplied the potential for spiritual growth so that confronting daily life with the spirit of "Truth-Benevolence-Forebearance" is now more efficacious than the Arhat's long austerities. Anytime personal hardship and injustice are given meaning through some grandiose historicization, the specter of millenarianism cannot be far off. So it is with Falundafa, whose vision of cyclical, cataclysmic history looks to be the product of Folk Buddhist Kalpas, science-proven mass extinctions, and an undertone of historical class struggle. Since the ban, the Chinese government has branded Falun Gong a "doomsday cult", and this label is as much for international sympathy as domestic consumption. Responding to

¹⁴¹ *Zhuan Falun*, 4.2, "Transformation of Karma".

the charge, Falundafa has attempted with some subterfuge to downplay its apocalyptic foundations. Some scholars, most notably Stephen D. O'Leary, a leading author in the contemporary field of millennial studies, have somehow managed to miss the millenarian essence that pervades nearly every aspect of Falundafa. In his paper "Falun Gong and the Internet," O'Leary prematurely concludes that

"it seems the Chinese government has misrepresented his [Li's] teachings. Oddly, neither the official Falun Dafa websites nor any of the other Falun Gong websites show any reference to doomsday predictions or the end of the world...There is no mention made in the works available via the Net of impending disasters, the destruction of the world, or the exclusive salvation that Master Li is supposed to offer. These charges seem to come solely from the Chinese government."¹⁴²

Such a judgment can come only from a wholly inadequate perusal of the Falundafa texts, which it is true do not contain specific doomsday predictions. Li has successfully maintained enough ambiguous maneuverability to transform the nature of the "Last Havoc" tribulation through different phases both before and after the crackdown. But Li clearly and repeatedly establishes the millenarian setting of his great career as an unprecedented cosmic savior. In the main text *Zhuan Falun*, Li proclaims that we are in "the last days of the Last Havoc",¹⁴³ "This is the last time for us to teach the Orthodox Law in the Period of Decline,"¹⁴⁴ and "At present only I myself in the whole world am teaching the Orthodox Law in public. I have done something never done by anyone before, and opened such a large door during the Period of Decline. This, in fact, is a chance that does not occur once in a thousand years or even in ten thousand years."¹⁴⁵

Li knows this because he has researched the cataclysmic succession of the eons: "After a meticulous check I once did, I discovered that mankind had been left in complete

¹⁴² Stephen .D. O'Leary, "Falun Gong and the Internet," reprinted in Schecter, *Falun Gong's Challenge to China*. O'Leary tentatively adds a parenthetical disclaimer : " [The Chinese Government] however, may be in possession of lecture tapes or untranslated works which it has yet to share with the world."

¹⁴³ *ZFL*, 1.7 "Characteristics of Falun Dafa". A footnote (no.33) to the present on-line version adds for further clarity "The community of cultivators holds that the universe has three phases of evolution (The Beginning Havoc, The Middle Havoc, The Last Havoc), and that now is the The Last Havoc's final period." Also see *Zhuan Falun* 1.3, "Zhen-Shan-Ren is the Sole Criterion",

¹⁴⁴ *ZFL*, 3.8, "What Teacher Has Given to his Students".

¹⁴⁵ *ZFL*, 3.3 "Practicing Only One Cultivation Way".

destruction 81 times.”¹⁴⁶ These destructions are the apocalyptic cleansings that must always terminate the waning of *Dharma*. Since the principal sign and cause of this impending purge is moral degeneracy, Li’s revitalizational revulsion for humankind’s perversity forms a significant part of his overall millenarian rhetoric. As he plainly states this old-fashioned idea, “when people are bad...natural and manmade calamities will increase.”¹⁴⁷ In a 1998 lecture conference in New York, Li preaches what appears to be an emerging pre-ban millennialism which, like any good millennial doctrine, places the community of the saved in the very crux of cosmic history. Several of his statements are worthy of citing in length, since they illustrate Li’s concept of history and his role as a truly universal savior. Here, a disciple questions Li about his ambiguous millennial pressure:

Question: Teacher, you often say that time is pressing. Meanwhile you also said that Dafa would spread far and wide among ordinary people for a long time. Is that a contradiction?

Master: I’m indeed saying that time is pressing. I’ve said that I am not merely saving people. After you reach Consummation, I still have to do other things that I can’t tell you about. I can’t teach the Fa for very long in the human world. If I say that time is pressing, you should simply speed up your cultivation. Don’t misinterpret my words or confuse them with any talk of catastrophes spoken of by the evil religions nowadays. The time for cultivation is indeed quite pressing. There won’t be a catastrophe, but there is a deadline for the end of cultivation. Once the whole truth is revealed, everything will end, and you will no longer be allowed to cultivate. Yet humankind will continue. Cultivation practice will exist forever, although it will be in a cultivation form of the future.¹⁴⁸

This scenario in which humanity survives and another cultivation system develops is no different from his characterization of those 81 purges of civilization, so if he intends to dispel confusion, he at least preserves some equivocation. Earlier in this lecture, Li addresses this subject of “evil religions” and humanity’s degenerate slide towards the apocalypse, and explained why there will be no catastrophe.

¹⁴⁶ *ZFL*, 1.4, “Qigong is Prehistoric Culture”

¹⁴⁷ *North America*, 27 of 44. In addition to some of Li’s more serious comments above, he also observes that “In the past, many prophets said that a time would come when people would be dressed like goblins. You now you see the hair is dyed red, with a mane left in the middle and both sides cleanly shaven.” *Falun Dafa Lecture in New York City*, (henceforth, *NYC*) 11 of 43.

¹⁴⁸ *North America*, 24 of 44.

There are also some evil religions¹⁴⁹ that are spreading. All of them teach about the end of the world—they all talk about these things. Of course, I've said that catastrophes do exist. Buddhism also believes in them, and Christianity, Catholicism, and Daoism share the same viewpoint. This is the law of the cosmos' evolution, but it's absolutely not like what the cults have professed. Moreover, I've also observed that such an event might indeed exist at a certain period in time, but it's not unsolvable. I can proclaim here to everyone in all earnestness that all of those alleged catastrophes on earth, the doom of the universe, and things of this sort in the year 1999 are absolutely nonexistent. Why would there be catastrophes? Let me tell you a principle. Suppose that as humankind's morality decays, all matter is rotting. In other words, it has become tainted. At present, the cultures of humankind are in a muddle—they are messy combinations of all sorts, and human races are becoming more and more mixed. These have indeed driven humankind to slide to a very dangerous stage—this is certain. As I said, catastrophes happen because humankind is depraved... Why are those so-called "catastrophes" non-existent, then? I said that there are now 100 million people in China studying our Dafa.... If all of them are trying to be kindhearted, are cultivating, and are behaving as good people, what would happen to all these good people if the universe or Earth were destroyed? Isn't this the principle? Destruction is only carried out when the planet is no longer good. With so many good people around, how could it be destroyed? In other words, such danger no longer exists. (Applause)."¹⁵⁰

So the supremely virtuous Dafa disciples have counterbalanced the "evils" of racial miscegenation and other depravities. But Li does not give exclusive credit for this upliftment to the righteousness of the practitioners. We learn that the impending destruction of the world and its present mode of civilization has been averted by power of Li's *gong*. This preservation of the earth is linked with what is perhaps the most grandiose aspect of Li's vision- the regeneration of all matter in the universe. As was noted above in a variety of contexts, qualities of material existence are morally based in Li's estimation, and so the Decline of Dharma literally entails a physical deterioration of all substances in the cosmos. As the great healer, the ultimate *qigong* master, it is Li himself who has effected this supreme regeneration of the ruined universe, just as he has regeneratively healed and upgraded the bodies of his disciples. Continuing in his delivery at the 1998

¹⁴⁹ This term, frequently used by Li to denote all new religious movement and an perhaps an unspecified range of others as well, has been changed in more recent translations to the more sympathetic 'cult'. While this term is no doubt meant to go down more smoothly with westerners, it must also be an unintentionally ironic response to the Chinese government's characterization of Falun Gong as an 'evil cult.'

¹⁵⁰ *North America*, 18 of 53 (May, 2001, PDF).

lecture in New York, Li admits to being even more than the universal savior of humanity:

What I'm saying is that this task that I am undertaking doesn't just offer salvation to human beings. I also want to rectify all deviated lives and substances. (Applause) Otherwise, it will be dangerous up there [in celestial paradise worlds] as well, and you'll have no safe place to stay, no matter how high a level I enable you to cultivate to. So all this needed to be done....The image I carry is simply of a human being, Li Hongzhi, with a complete human figure sitting here talking to you. So you should just regard me as a human being like you....Having said that, I'd also like to take this opportunity to inform you that this cosmos has basically been rectified, leaving only humankind and substances in this most exterior layer still unfinished; but completion is in progress. My *gong* is able to completely restrain this layer of matter from splitting, exploding, or other such activities—it can fully restrain it. (Applause) So the phenomena predicted in history absolutely no longer exist....To the eyes of beings in very high realms, humankind is like garbage. They don't regard humans as their species: "You want to spare them, why? If you keep them, you must rectify them." This doesn't just apply to humankind—all substances, plants, animals, and numerous things on the earth are included.¹⁵¹

This fascinating doctrine of universal rectification represents one of the largest externalizations of internal conscious transformation, now thoroughly fused with a new age materialism. The great chaos of the Middle Kingdom could only be restored to harmony by a complete purification of all creation. And the Middle it remains, as cosmic nadir mentioned above, and as the focal point of karmic-historical struggle. But the fundamentalist streak in Li also plays on that terrestrial centrality of human civilization to objectify all (non-human) existence into standing reserve, created solely for the benefit of ontologically distinct humans.¹⁵² Perhaps because being told your "humanity is garbage" demands a compensatory boost of self-importance, and so Li can reassure his disciples that "Nothing would exist if there were no human beings on the Earth. Precisely because of the existence of human beings, everything else exists on this earth. All animals, creatures,

¹⁵¹ *North America*, 12-13 of 44. This concept of regenerating the substance of the universe bears a certain resemblance to the doctrine of *Tikkun*- 'the repair of the world' propounded by Yitzhak Luria, dean of the Safed Kabbalists. This theory of *Tikkun* was of considerable influence to the millenarian foment of the Shabbatean episode in the 1660's. See G.Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schocken, 1946, and also by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi, Mystical Messiah*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976.

¹⁵² In general, Li's pessimism extends to nature, which he mentions very little. In this, the urban domain of Falundafa may have helped eclipse nature and ensure a more otherworldly teleology, since the earth is not perceived as a positive energetic center, as in the *wuxing*, but as a dump. After all, "humankind are like garbage." (*North America*, 13 of 44)

and plants are born for human beings, destroyed for human beings, formed for human beings, and to be used by human beings.”¹⁵³ Since Li and his devotees are bound for a Falun Paradise world, they need not worry much about this one, even while subjected to some of the worst air pollution in the world. Worried about this, a student asked Master Li “The air is heavily polluted. Is it very bad for cultivation?” “No, it is not a problem for cultivators,” Li reassures him. “As the high-energy substance is gradually replacing your body, you won’t be effected by pollution.”¹⁵⁴

Li also entertains notions concerning race and gender that resemble nineteenth-century essentialisms. The same lecture cited just above begins inauspiciously in reply to the query “Is spending my husband’s money considered losing virtue- *de*?” While Li quickly dismisses her concern, he then launches into an analysis of what Li identifies as the closely linked phenomena of moral decline and the rise of women’s liberation. Apparently, it is mistaken to believe

“that women were oppressed in the ancient times. In fact, it is not like what modern people think at all. In ancient China, as well as all over the world including western society, men knew how to treat their wives, and wives knew how to take care of their husbands; that’s the way Yin and Yang should coexist...But nowadays, think about it, once women’s liberation is advocated, women feel that they are oppressed and they should stand up; but what follows that? Divorce, fighting, abandoned children, and other social problems emerge. The fundamental cause isn’t whether women are liberated, but the degeneration of human society’s morality...There’s been a reversal of yin and yang in modern times, and it’s most noticeable in China. Look at the athletes—women always win more medals, while men seldom win medals. I’m just illustrating a point. Why is it that yin is very strong and yang is very weak in everything? This factor is caused by the reversal of yin and yang. And then there’s the side-effect of advocating so-called women’s liberation. It is the degeneration of society’s morality that causes the changes in people’s hearts in society. Actually, deep down inside, women don’t like their husbands to be like lambs or like women, right? They hate that their husbands aren’t manly enough and can’t be strong and tough. But when men do get strong and tough, women can’t deal with it. Isn’t that true?”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ *Falun Dafa Lectures in the United States (FLUS): Falun Dafa Lecture in New York City* (Mar. 23, 1997), p.11 of 43.

¹⁵⁴ *FLUS: Exposition of Falun Dafa in the New York Seminar* (Mar. 22, 1997), p.37 of 43.

¹⁵⁵ *FLUS: Exposition of Falun Dafa in the New York Seminar* (opening response). Perhaps, like all fundamentalisms, the appeal of security is more comforting to some than the terror of freedom and responsibility.

Interestingly enough, observers of the movement in China say that women outnumber men. Since control of the woman's role as child-bearer is always implicit in a male-privileged regime, it is interesting to hear Master Li console a woman worried that marriage and children might bind her with attachment : "As a matter of fact, I've said that human society still needs to reproduce. If the number of our Dafa disciples were several billion instead of 100 million, wouldn't this become a very serious problem? Isn't this the issue?" ¹⁵⁶ In terms of patriarchy, this sentiment speaks of genuine megalomania, and suggests Li may aspire to be a Universal Monarch as well as cosmic Buddha.

While the decomposition of harmony has set the sexes adrift into antagonistic contradiction, racial intermarriage, according to Li, threatens to sever the soul's spiritual roots from humanity's transdimensional homelands- astral planets pure in racial color. It must be said, essentialist categories of race need no introduction to the Chinese palette of perceptions. So perhaps it was not too bizarre when a whole string of Dafa disciples asked a series of questions on issues of race and spiritual destiny- "If people of mixed race practice cultivation, which paradise will they go to?" And though Li's quasi-platonic vision of race would strike most as socially retrograde, it is not particularly innovative:

"As far as humans go, people of mixed race no longer have corresponding human races in heaven. If they're cultivators, their outward appearances are no longer important and it all depends on the person's Primordial Spirit (yuanshen). If his Primordial Spirit is of the white race, he's white; if his Primordial Spirit is of the yellow race, he's yellow; if his Primordial Spirit is of the black race, he's black. It's a different matter if he practices cultivation...

Question: Can a person of mixed race succeed in cultivation?

Teacher: Whether someone can cultivate and whether he can succeed in cultivation are all up to the person himself. If a person of mixed race can persist in cultivation, he can reach Consummation just the same. When he succeeds in cultivation his Primordial Spirit will return to wherever he came from.

Question: What did you say last time that a person of mixed race has lost?

¹⁵⁶ *North America*, 38 of 44.

Teacher: He has lost the body that comes from the top down through to here. Let me put it this way: People of the yellow race have people of the yellow race up there, and people of the white race have people of the white race up there. He's lost this thread.¹⁵⁷

This repatriation of the world's misplaced souls is perhaps indicative of how Chinese nationalism is still strongly colored with a postcolonial consciousness. The fundamentalist response, though perhaps not surprising, represents a retreat from the more progressive attitudes sponsored by the Communists and also evident in student and intellectual dissent.

As the Party grew into an entrenched caste, it inevitably turned reactionary and intrinsically conservative. A century of modernist statemaking has diminished the familial ritual complex and its ideological culture, and in this lacuna the Party and its civic apparatus became the institutionalized body of social conservatism. Due to the superficial (or nearly absent) rule of law, the inevitable product of the personality-cult, this institution has engendered a degree of corruption so extensive that it retards economic development. And though many Chinese may still revere Mao as a great leader, his philosophical rhetoric is no longer gospel. For all the good-faith party members and the cynical alike, the mind's imperative for meaningful order demands some ideological compromise between the familiar discourse of the last half-century and some appealing alternative. The most hopeful elements of Maoism- self-improvement through ideology and utopian millenarianism- appear to have deviated toward idealism and reincarnated in Falundafa, whose materialist vision of karma supplies a concrete ethical equation. Plus, some of the other aspects of the Chinese Communist experience are also evident, not least of which being the same cult of personality, with a full gospel to boot. An aging generation sick of chaos and frightened by change can find a measure of security in Li's religious cosmos; a comforting, conservative authoritarianism blessed with the reassuring absolutism of the normative.

But the fantastic, otherworldly element of the Falundafa experience is the one

¹⁵⁷ *FLUS: Exposition of Falun Dafa in the New York Seminar*

ingredient these modern revolutions must avoid in materializing the drama of history in their political mobilization of national consciousness. The discourse of science at the foundation of the nation-state cannot permit naked idealistic heresy to sway people's commitment. Instead, the irrational has been nationalized, but the liminal state of effervescence raised by revolutionary (and apocalyptic) zeal is eventually exhausted by the digging of graves. Contrary to Marxist determinism, it appears that people will no time soon give up their fascination with mysterious and hope-provoking wonders, and so the potential remains for the revolutionary urge to desecularize. Furthermore, the totalism of one-party rule finds its nearest kin in theocracy. The intolerance for criticism and competition shown by the one-party state has hardly changed much under Master Li.¹⁵⁸ Their faith restored, the witnesses to communism again struggle with cow-demons and snake-spirits. These old enemies of the people have now assumed the guise of any who opposes the Fa, be they evil *qigong* masters, or as in the Cultural Revolution, high state figures as well. While Li's enemies and competitors are suitably demonized, the simple existence of alternative religions and particularly Buddhism invokes that same impulse to polemic suppression that ensures Falundafa's own persecution under the Communists.

Since Falundafa wears the terminological robes of Buddhism, Li must carefully delineate the boundaries of his domain. Falun Gong is said to be "of the Buddha School 佛家 and is not Buddhism 佛教."¹⁵⁹ Apparently, part of Li's problem in maintaining his exclusive ideological control comes from "Some monks from the temple and some lay Buddhists who think they know quite a lot about Buddhism, so they indulge in unbridled propaganda among practitioners of our cultivation system."¹⁶⁰ First, Li trumps his Buddhist predecessors by harnessing the rhetorical disdain for 'religion' in postrevolutionary China: "A religion has the form of a religion, but...Falundafa shall not

¹⁵⁸ Falundafa's career of public protest began and ignited with indignation over printed defamation, and now all opponents of the Fa are thoroughly demonized.

¹⁵⁹ ZFL, 3.2 Compare with Yiguandao's use of the term *jiao* 教 to categorize other 'teachings' as inferior to their *dao* 道.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

take the form of religion.”¹⁶¹ In keeping with his deteriorational view of history, Li decries the progressive decay of Buddhism, its many branches of development all essentially deviations.¹⁶² As for the Chan Buddhists,

So far as we understand, this school has run into a bull’s horn (a dead end)....[Since] Zen[sic] Buddhism believes Dharma cannot be preached...they have been unable to preach any Dharma at all....If you go to a Zen house, do not ask questions. If you do, you will get a stick-hit on the head, which is called “stick warning”. It means that you cannot ask questions...[t]hat is to say, they have reached the tip of the bull’s horn.”¹⁶³

Li maintains a certain ambivalence in his treatment of Buddhism. On the one hand he can appropriate Buddhist eschatology in order to remind everyone that “Sakyamuni said the monks have great difficulties saving themselves, let alone offering salvation to other sentient beings during the Period of Decline,” but he does admit “Of course, there are still monks who are truly cultivating themselves and credit-worthy.”¹⁶⁴ Likewise he accepts that “Tantra is a righteous Law,”¹⁶⁵ and I suspect Li may have received training of some Tantric derivation. But in case anyone feels tempted to study Buddhism, Li reminds them that “The Dharma preached by Sakyamuni 2500 years ago was aimed at those simple-minded ordinary people at an extremely low level, just newly born out of primitive society. The Period of Decline he referred to meant today. People nowadays will not be able to use that Dharma to cultivate themselves anymore.”¹⁶⁶

Despite the decimation of Buddhism in postrevolutionary China, the persistence of his disciples’ questions about forms of Buddhist practice suggests that as a mass movement, Falun Gong may have attracted considerable numbers and varying persuasions

¹⁶¹ Ibid. Besides, “The Dharma of Buddhism is only a small portion of the Buddha Dharma.” Li understands the Buddha could become free because he “lessened his karma by enduring the suffering of sitting cross-legged in meditation.”

¹⁶² “Would it be Buddhism if someone changed it?”, *ZFL*, 4.4, “Filling Energy into the Top of the Head” (灌頂).

¹⁶³ *ZFL*, 1.2, “The Law Varies from Dimension to Dimension”. Li also offers a technical critique of Chan based on his phobia of trance. “No matter how empty your mind is, it is not permissible for you to loose your own consciousness....the concept of emptiness in Zen Buddhism is that nothing is left and consciousness is lost completely. They are not cultivating themselves... [they are] only being motionlessness. Therefore, they are cultivating someone else, namely, their ‘paraconsciousness’ 副元神.” *North America*, 35 of 44.

¹⁶⁴ *ZFL*, 5.7, “Light Opening”.

¹⁶⁵ *CFG* 5.5

¹⁶⁶ *ZFL*, 1.3, “Zhen Shan Ren is the Sole Criterion...”.

of Buddhists, as well as also those with a new interest in discovering Buddhism. But Li is a strenuous defender of his hegemony, and he cautions that “Some lay Buddhists try to take our practitioners to the temple for conversion to Buddhism when they hear that we practice *qigong* of the Buddha School. I tell you, all of our students here, do not do such a thing in any way. By doing so, you are disrupting both our Great Law and the commandments of Buddhism.”¹⁶⁷ And when a practitioner asked: “Can we listen to audio tapes that chant Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara’s name? Can lay Buddhists who live at home chant scriptures after they have learned Falun Gong?”, Master Li unequivocally replies “I think not.”¹⁶⁸

Besides, why would someone want to study an exhausted “religion” from the feudal past? After all, the Falun Gong “cultivation system cultivates in quite a big way, unlike many other systems...The principles Sakyamuni and Laozi taught in their lifetime were confined to the principles guiding our galaxy. What does our Falun Gong cultivate? We do our cultivation according to the evolutionary principles of the universe...We cultivate such a big thing, the same as the cultivation of the universe.”¹⁶⁹

In the very personification of this ambivalence to Buddhism, Li has encountered some controversy concerning his birthday, which he claims is May 13, the same day as the Buddha’s birthday in the traditional lunar calendar. (And the same day that in 1992 Li ‘revealed’ Falundafa to the world.) The Chinese government, however, charges that “On September 24, 1994, Li changed his date of birth from July 7, 1952 to May 13, 1951 and acquired a new ID card....so by changing his birthday Li could pretend that he is a reincarnation of Sakyamuni.”¹⁷⁰ The campaign to identify Li with Buddha is sometimes not so subtle, as in a Falun Gong movie where a golden statue of Buddha gradually morphs into Li, sitting in the lotus posture.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, it appears that all of the Buddha’s disciples have reincarnated “in Han-land,” presumably, so that they may be

¹⁶⁷ ZFL, 3.3, “Be Constant in a Single Cultivation System”.

¹⁶⁸ CFG 5.5 Also see ZFL 6.5, “The Mind Must Be Upright”

¹⁶⁹ ZFL, 1.7, “Characteristics of Falun Dafa”.

¹⁷⁰ “Li Hongzhi and His Malicious Fallacies” (July 29, 1999), <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/7240.html> .

¹⁷¹ Real Player video “Introductory Sequence”, www.falundafa.org/media/Instruction.ra . This scene features Li performing more orthodox-looking Tantric mudras, which practitioners are specifically warned not to try.

reunited with their master and exit the world upon the termination of the kalpa.¹⁷²

Interestingly, Li has very little to say about Daoism, and this may be due to the urban context of Falundafa and a mechanistic theology uncondusive to the sacralization of nature. But his condemnation of other *qigong* masters is intense. Li complains that “all pseudo-*qigong* masters are possessed by evil spirits....Now some pseudo *qigong* masters...[are] using *qigong* as a means to seek fame and make a fortune. They are trying to form an evil clique to expand their forces.”¹⁷³ As evil arrays for battle against its nemesis, like *qigong* bandits assailing the knight-errant of the *Dharma*, a strange combat is joined in the convention halls:

There have also been some bad ones that we have had to deal with. For instance, when I gave a class in Guizhou for the first time, someone came to find me during the class and said that his grand master wanted to see me. He described his grand master and how he had practiced cultivation for many years. I found that this person carried negative [*Yin*] *qi* and looked very vicious with a yellowish face. I said that I did not have time to see him and turned him down. Consequently, his old master was upset and began to make trouble for me, persisting to make trouble for me everyday....Whenever he brought some bad things upon me, I would just clear them up. Afterwards, I would resume my lecturing.

There was a Taoist in the Ming Dynasty, who was possessed by a snake at the time of his Taoist cultivation. Later, this Taoist died without completing his cultivation.¹⁷⁴ The snake took over the Taoist's body and cultivated a human form. That man's grand master was that snake in human form. Because his nature had not changed, he transformed himself into a big snake to make trouble for me. I thought that he went too far, so I caught him in my hand. I used a very powerful *gong* called "the dissolving gong" to dissolve his lower body and turn it into water. His upper body ran back home.

One day, the volunteer director at our instruction center in Guizhou was contacted by that person's disciple who said that his grand master wanted to see her. The director went there and entered a dark cave where she could not see anything except for a shadow sitting there with eyes beaming with green light. When he opened his eyes, the cave would be bright. The cave would be dark again if his eyes closed. He said in a local dialect: "Li Hongzhi will be coming again, and none of us will again cause those troubles this time. I was wrong. Li Hongzhi comes to offer salvation to people." His disciple asked him: "Grand Master, please stand up. What's wrong with your legs?" He answered: "I can no longer stand up as my legs

¹⁷² NYC, 8 of 43.

¹⁷³ ZFL, 2.5, "The Issue of Pursuit" Perhaps this line of analysis derives from the spontaneous movement with its trance-possession experience. Also see ZFL, 3.6.

¹⁷⁴ This issue of animal spirits possessing the bodies of cultivators is a favorite theme for Li.

were injured." When asked how they were injured, he began to describe his trouble-making process. At the 1993 Oriental Health Expo in Beijing, he again meddled with me. Because he always committed bad deeds and interfered with my teaching of Dafa, I then eliminated him completely [sic]. After he was eliminated, his fellow sisters and brothers all wanted to take action. At that point, I said a few words. They were all shocked and became so scared that none of them dared to do anything. They also came to understand what was going on. Some of them were still completely ordinary people though they had practiced cultivation for a long time.¹⁷⁵

This interesting tale illustrates how the undertone of struggle and opposition was well established in Falundafa long before the proscription. Indeed, any millenarian movement, however framed, requires a confrontation with cosmic evil within the realm of lived experience. While the fantasticization of the world is already somewhat effected by *qigong* itself, this aura of struggle adds the polarizing urgency of historical showdown. But at the individual, psychic level, practitioners are faced with the threat of "demonic interference" largely in the form of sexual temptation in dreams.¹⁷⁶ But humanity is also (still) menaced by Asuras, who have converged upon the earth and "enjoy eating human beings. Over the past few years they have also come out to teach *qigong*."¹⁷⁷

In order to protect his disciples from these demons, inferior cultivation methods, and the dreaded morass of ordinary human existence, Li must carefully dissuade his students from reading religious or philosophical literature other than his own. An essential hallmark of illiberal authoritarianism, Li's rhetorical suppression of potentially "subversive" literature threatens to exacerbate the loss of genuine tradition and culture that facilitated the rise of his ideology in the first place. He tells his millions of followers

"the *Danjing*¹⁷⁸ and the *Daozang* (the Daoist Cannon)...Do not read those heterodox books...Do not even open them,...as soon as this has occurred...an evil spirit in the book will get into you....Do not even read the several ancient books mentioned above as well as other related ancient books that involve specializing in only one cultivation way."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ ZFL, 5.7 "Light Opening" (some editions translate this section title 開光 as "Consecration").

¹⁷⁶ ZFL, 6.2 "Demonic Interference During Practice". This concern for loosing vitality through nocturnal emission has been a round for a while, even if the demonized personification of the process seems recent. See Shapiro, "The Puzzle of Spermatorrhea in Republican China".

¹⁷⁷ ZFL, 5.3, "Cultivation of the Evil Way".

¹⁷⁸ A famous treatise on Internal Alchemy, *DZ* 235.

¹⁷⁹ ZFL 4.5, "Placement of the Mysterious Pass".

Furthermore, reading such standards as *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* and the *Book of Change* are likewise suspect, perhaps not due to any evil essence per se, but their outdated alternative ideology, Li fears, will drive his disciples into deviancy.¹⁸⁰ Meanwhile, an issue has been raised concerning Li's own writings, namely that they often "do not conform to the standards of grammar." An apology is offered, explaining that the high-level spiritual truths encoded in the language transcend mere grammatical convention, and so Li's profound words should not be fettered by ordinary human expectations.¹⁸¹

Of all of Master Li's hegemonic imperatives, none is more controversial than his disfavor for medical treatment. The charge that over 1,400 practitioners have died due to refusing medical care (or through acts of insanity) is foremost in the Chinese government's list of accusations.¹⁸² While Li tries to rhetorically escape this allegation, his attitude toward medicine flows from his views on karma and the necessary value of suffering. Basically, viruses and bacteria that cause illness are merely surface phenomenon driven into manifestation by a person's karma.¹⁸³ By taking medicine, one merely disrupts the timely elimination of karma, therefore postponing and prolonging one's karmic retribution. And for his disciples, Master Li promises he will heal them all by "pushing the karma out to the surface." Thus, medical treatment of any kind impedes the Master's healing efficacy. While trying to mask the coercion, Li clearly pressures his disciples to avoid medical treatment:

But you still feel that you're suddenly getting sick you find it terribly uncomfortable and painful, can't bear it, regard yourself as an everyday person, and go take medicine. Then you can go ahead and take medicine, as we've never said that everyday people can't take medicine. We only say that your enlightenment quality isn't up to par and that you didn't pass this test well. We have no rule that says you can't take medicine when you practice

¹⁸⁰ *ZFL* 6.5, "Mind Must Be Upright".

¹⁸¹ The apology is in a brief preface and is the first small item of text encountered when the link to *Zhuan Falun* is opened. Li makes further defense of his variant language in an article entitled "Using at Will", filed under the "New Articles" category.

¹⁸² For an early Government indictment of Falun Gong's dangers, see "Falun Gong Practice Causes Health Problems and Death" (July 29, 1999), <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/7241.html>.

¹⁸³ Note that pathogenic theories of Traditional Chinese Medicine have been completely abandoned in favor of scientism and Li-ism.

cultivation—we don't have a rigid rule like that. But I'm teaching you the principles of the Fa. You want to let out this karma, yet you take medicine and press it back in—how are we supposed to cleanse your body?¹⁸⁴

While this policy no doubt jeopardizes the health of the Falundafa faithful, it must be seen as part of Li's strategy of authoritative absolutism. Though his rhetorical context deals mainly with western medicine, it must be remembered that Traditional Chinese Medicine is a kind of cultural nexus where, in its fully developed form, virtually the entire classical heritage of philosophy and culture converges. More often than not, doctors of Traditional Chinese Medicine are themselves practitioners of some type of *qi* practice, as their art is nothing less than the skillful manipulation of *qi*. Therefore, they potentially represent one of the most subversive threats to Li's hegemony, and are therefore demoted to the ineffectual realm of ordinary humanity.

And since so much of twentieth-century *qigong* has focused on the *waiqi* healing abilities of *qigong* masters, Li ensures that none of his disciples ever use *qigong* to heal others, and by this he monopolizes the healing efficacy that before was the currency of self-empowerment.¹⁸⁵ This tactic eliminates the possibility of a usurper claiming healing power from Falun Gong, while further centralizing the dependence of Falundafa disciples on their master. The public application of *waiqi* treatment was once part of the democratizing force within *qigong*, responding to the changing social forms in which selves were constructed and healed. As scientific nationalists sought to reform the Chinese subjective landscape, servants of the people redistributed the treasures of life, and in the 80's and 90's many masters took their medicine show down the capitalist road. But now Li alone heals the body of the universe; autocratic centralism has emptied the people of their capacity for self-regeneration. Nature offers no organic renewal in this urban spirituality, healing is a manufactured product bought by obedience and conformity.

This grand revelation of the Great Falun Dharma is orchestrated in much the same spirit as Mao's call to "Bombard the Command Post." By rhetorically discrediting all

¹⁸⁴ NYC, 5 of 43.

¹⁸⁵ See for example ZFL 2.5, *North America*, 20 of 44.

competing *qi* systems and the entirety of Chinese learning, Li hopes to dislocate all other ideological constructs and systems of authority, substituting his own unmediated messianism in their place. His truly resilient core of devotees, diminished but perhaps emboldened by persecution, have been trained for most of their lives, willingly or not, for millenarian confrontation. Now borne into ceaseless extremism by “the negation of the negation”, the dialectics of revolution have returned to the electric fringes of idealism. The revolutionary state, sustained only by inertia, struggles in vain to stop the wheel from rolling on.

4 Beyond Forbearance

**The Fa rectifies the Cosmos, the Evil is completely eliminated.
The Fa rectifies Heaven and Earth, immediate retribution in this
lifetime. - Li Hongzhi, verses for "Sending forth righteous thoughts" ¹⁸⁶**

The Chinese government banned Falun Gong on July 22, 1999, and since then estimates place the number of practitioners arrested or detained well in to the tens of thousands, with many thousands if not tens of thousands still held in "reform through labor" camps, psychiatric hospitals, and other police facilities, usually without benefit of trial.¹⁸⁷ The Falundafa organization claims over 250 practitioners have died at the hands of Chinese security forces, though Amnesty International reports only ten such deaths with confirmed certainty.¹⁸⁸ Beating and torture of detainees appears to be routine, while other forms of retribution include the imposition of heavy fines, loss of employment, and dismissal from the Party.¹⁸⁹ But despite more than two years of heavy-handed suppression, during which time the government periodically declared a "decisive victory", Beijing's machinery of control has failed to silence the steady stream of small-scale protest, especially in the more visible and symbolic sphere of the capitol.¹⁹⁰ For the unintimidated disciples, the Dafa principle of "forbearance" has become a a spiritual charge to defiance.

Since worldly struggle helps generate *de*, the spiritual advantage of postrevolutionary self-

¹⁸⁶ www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/6/12/11429.html

¹⁸⁷ Amnesty International, Annual Report 2001, "The crackdown on Falun Gong and other so-called "heretical organizations," AI-index: ASA 17/011/2000 . Available at www.amnesty.org . Though working in a difficult situation, Falundafa's own internal information system does not comply with the standards of verification respected by most journalists. This is one of Rahn's points of caution. Many of the figures quoted in the mainstream press find their source in the Hong Kong based "Information Center on Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China." Rahn reveals that the Information Center, operated by "Lu Siqing, also known as Frank Lu, was the source for over issued 1,110 reports in 1998 that were based on his Center's information. Lu's organization is a one-man operation and he receives his information via phone calls from mainland China. Lu states that he gets his information out faster than "other famous' human rights groups and that his reports are quoted "first" by the western press.' To conclude this section on press coverage: I suggest that there needs to be more independent verification of information. If it cannot be verified, then that should be stated, as did the New York Times, when it added in several of its reports that 'This information cannot be independently verified.'" (Rahn, 2000)

¹⁸⁸ Amnesty, Annual Report; for Falundafa 's own version see www.faluninfo.org, which is primarily a 'news center' for publicizing alleged human rights abuses.

¹⁸⁹ Amnesty Annual Report.

¹⁹⁰ See for example "Decisive Victory Achieved in Fighting Against Falun Gong Cult", www.china-embassy.org/eng/7216.html .

cultivation rises now to an historic level under persecution. This struggle is nothing less than pitched battle against the “old forces” of evil, personified now by Jiang Zemin.

While Falundafa interprets their persecution in terms of their cosmic millennialism, the Chinese government likewise relies upon that vocabulary which mandates their policies.

Beijing charges that:

“As an evil force, the Falun Gong cult has disrupted social stability, endangered the safety of the State and damaged the bodies and minds of those who believe in it...Police have evidence which indicates members of the Falun Gong cult, founded by Li Hongzhi, have stolen 59 classified State documents, 20 of which are top secret...The theft of State secrets is just one of the many serious offenses committed by Li and his illegal organization. Considering the anti-scientific, anti-social, anti-human and anti-governmental nature of Falun Gong, it should not surprise us if more crimes are discovered.”¹⁹¹

As some scholars have pointed out, the government’s campaign against Falundafa resembles the persecution of *Yiguandao* and ‘heterodox Daoist sects’ in the 1950’s.¹⁹² The old standby label “heterodox sect” 邪教 has been revived, now with reference to the western-styled discourse of “cults”. In the government’s attempts to make its suppression of Falundafa internationally palatable, it has tried to categorically link Falun Gong with the Branch Davidians, the Solar Temple, and Aum Shinrikyo.¹⁹³ This of course raises the thorny issue of defining a cult, since nearly every religion is considered a cult by someone. Such factors as coercive sequestration, financial extortion, psychological manipulation, and violence form the substantive core of the category. But one can find rhetorical manipulation, socially-pressured financial contribution, and the intermittent incitement to violence manifesting squarely in the mainstream of many of the world’s religions. Furthermore, the success of “cults” is often facilitated by a mainstream religious climate uncondusive to the exercise of critical thought. This reveals that the construction of the category of “cults” may have more to do with insulating authority structures than preserving religious purity per se. And while there are no small number of religious groups

¹⁹¹ “Falun Gong Crimes Further Exposed”, www.china-embassy.org/eng/7231.html .

¹⁹² See ter Haar, www.let.leidenuniv.nl/bth/ .

¹⁹³ See for example “President Jiang Zemin Comments on Falun Gong's Harms” , www.china-embassy.org/eng/7237.html

whose activities raise serious concerns of civil and human rights, the use of othering strategies also helps to shift problems away from, for example, a state law enforcement policy and onto a group whom the dominant classes of society can feel relieved and justified in suppressing.

Certainly, the Chinese government has attempted to create this kind of response in China, but is hampered by several factors. First, the widespread acceptance and practice of *qigong* makes such movements less liable to inspire the kind of reflexive disapproval one can see in the American mainstream's attitude toward unfamiliar religious movements. Second, the government's credibility may severely lacking, particularly when so many people and their networks are effected by the ban on Falundafa. And the spectacle of the Chinese Communist Party attacking a group for its cult of personality, waging thought control, causing deaths, and clinging to an unhelpful ideology, could appear to some in China and internationally as rather ironic.

As the modern inventors of "brainwashing", the Chinese regime still practices psychological hospitalization of political prisoners.¹⁹⁴ Since this thesis has sought to suggest the quasi-religious, or at least post-religious structures of the CCP and Mao Zedong thought, we should not be surprised to learn that a Hong Kong Dafa spokesperson pointed out that by the state's own definition, the CCP was also a cult.

Now most scholars might concede that Aum Shinrikyo embodies the characteristics of a coercive cult. The use of electronic devises, for example, to subject neophytes to sensory and informational overload escalates the force of psychic imprintation beyond levels common to most religions or any other natural cultural process.¹⁹⁵ Obviously, Aum's scheme for mass violence and the control required to execute such a plan suggests many normal constraints on behavior had been replaced with

¹⁹⁴ Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism; a Study of "Brainwashing" in China*. (New York: Norton, 1961)

¹⁹⁵ On Aum Shinrikyo, see Ian Reader, *Religious violence in contemporary Japan : the case of Aum Shinrikyo*. (Honolulu : University of Hawaii Press, 2000.) and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the mind of God : the global rise of religious violence*. (Berkeley : University of California Press, c2000.)

a locally convincing justification for genocide.¹⁹⁶ However, mainstream societies likewise manage to persuade and compel people into dreadful acts, often with similar millennial historicity and patriotic piety. The antisocial polarization of cultic groups seems to give high contrast to their violence and other problems that may be shared by the dominant culture. Violence and control by the bourgeois state, for example, are both submerged in the mundane and screened by segregation, while the antisocial cult (or terrorist) is afforded no shielding, but rather is comfortably othered so the mainstream can calibrate its sense of revulsion together with its sense of identity. Thus, any concerns about a religious group or community should probably be reflexively applied to the dominant system .

As the case of French *anti-secte* legislation has shown, the process of legally defining socially impermissible religious behavior is apt to produce an overly broad or otherwise flawed system of legislative heterodoxy. If religious groups abuse their followers, as is sometimes the case, then surely all such forms of abuse would violate existing laws unrelated to religion. If some aspects of sectarian rhetoric and organization appear to be problematic, then such concerns should be publicly addressed through the proper domain of education and debate. Outright suppression does nothing to equip individuals with the critical tools needed to make their own informed decisions.

Falundafa bears none of the more infamous hallmarks of cultic abuse, such as overt violence, extortion, and sequestration. All Falundafa activities are free of charge, and there is no compulsion to visit the practice sites or participate in other activities, nor is there even a registry of members. What could raise suspicions of cult-like status is Master Li's ideology and rhetoric, which at every turn asserts his exclusive authority and cosmic efficacy. Also, his views on the karmic perils of medical treatment pose an unmistakable threat to followers, even if the worst for some might only be feelings of anxiety or guilt

¹⁹⁶ Though the actual execution of such a plan is certainly sufficient to identify a religious group as illegal and antisocial, the fantasy of similar apocalyptic violence may be widespread in the United States, as indicated by the sensational popularity of the *Left Behind* series, in which predominantly white, right-wing Christians (exclusively protestant) are saved from violent divine judgment inflicted on all other ethnic, religious, and political movements which are in any way different from the book's targeted audience.

over “failing a test” and acting like an “ordinary human being.” And within Li’s messianism there exists the potential for apocalyptic crisis. This alone, however is a feature shared by many religious movements, but what primarily distinguishes Li and his movement from say, Madame Ching Hai or Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh is the political (and cultural) environment in China. Falundafa is ideologically inseparable from the postrevolutionary experience, and as an expression of cultural trauma and political frustration, Falundafa’s totalistic messianism is an unavoidable affront to one-party hegemony. Given the general tendency to label any discomforting alternative religion as a cult, the Chinese government’s attempts to lump Falundafa together with more violent movements of modern infamy must be met with some skepticism. But that is not to say there is no potential for greater danger in the Falundafa episode.

Of the many public protests connected with the Falun Gong affair, none has been more controversial or influential than the self-immolation of six alleged Falundafa disciples in Tiananmen square. On January 24, 2001, the day before Chinese New Year, five people entered Tiananmen square, doused themselves with gasoline, and set themselves on fire. A CNN camera crew who witnessed the event (and were briefly detained) said that once engulfed in flame, the people raised their arms in a “classic Falungong meditation pose”¹⁹⁷. According to the same CNN crew, “One badly burned victim was seen writhing in agony as police looked on without offering help. Two ambulances arrived around 25 minutes later to take the injured away.”¹⁹⁸ One woman died from her burns, while her twelve-year old daughter suffered severe burn damage.

Interestingly enough, the whole episode was captured on Chinese television, and the government managed to exploit the event with tangible results. Some reports suggest that after this incident, Chinese public opinion of Falun Gong appears to have swung from a divided neutrality towards a more negative view.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ “Massive Chinese security stamps out Falungong protests”, (AFP, January 24, 2001) All articles mentioned here, plus a wealth of others are available at www.cesnur.org .

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ “China Scores a Propaganda Coup Against Falun Gong”, Erik Eckhom (“New York Times,” February 4, 2001) A dissenting journalistic view is offered by Philip P. Pan, “Human Fire Ignites Chinese Mystery” (“Washington Post, February 4, 2001) .

The Falundafa organization swiftly denied the self-immolators were Dafa disciples, claiming their beliefs in non-violence strictly forbid any killing, including suicide. In their defense, Falundafa produced a short video called "Uncovering the Truth of the Self-Immolation Incident" by piecing together tape from the Chinese television.²⁰⁰ They claim the footage proves that the Chinese government actually staged the "suicide" attempt specifically to generate a television to defame Falun Gong. Having seen the video, I believe Falundafa's allegations cannot be easily dismissed, though the burn victims need not be government zombies for them to be unrepresentative of the movement.²⁰¹

Besides, it is possible a small group of people agitated themselves into a state of religiously-inspired conviction and carried out the act. The negligence of the Chinese authorities would in this case appear to be the logical extension of their overall campaign of cruelty, and thus no conspiracy theory is needed to account for the lack of care shown for the victims. Furthermore, it being the eve of the largest Chinese holiday one could expect the heightened undercover security force seen responding to the incident. In any event, the truth may eventually be revealed, but divergent perceptions of the incident have already taken root, and none are good. It was a different Dharma that invoked self-immolation in Vietnam, and from there the Diem regime soon met its end. But in the Dafa-related immolations, the sacrifice bore fruit for the state.

Though the self-immolation case does not represent the typically peaceful expression of Falun Gong protest, it exists in unfortunate proximity to an escalation of Master Li's rhetoric of resistance. On January 1, 2001, Li issued a statement on the internet entitled "Beyond the Limits of Forbearance" in which he essentially incites his devotees to a more active confrontation with the "evil forces" controlling the government.

If the evil has already reached the point where it is unsavable and

²⁰⁰ Downloadable and on-line versions of this short piece are available at www.clearwisdom.ca/eng/2001/Feb/25/VDO022501_1.html

²⁰¹ To complicate the situation, the Chinese government in February 2001 threatened to charge western journalists for homicide in connection with the immolations on the grounds the news agencies had advance warning and were in position to film the suicide attempt. The government claimed that some of the most graphic, close-up footage was from a confiscated CNN tape, but CNN denies this, saying their staff were arrested immediately when the conflagration began. See "China May Charge Foreign Reporters Over Tiananmen Burning" by Philip P. Pan ("Washington Post," February 9, 2001).

unkeepable, then various measures at different levels can be used to stop it and eradicate it. Going beyond the limits of Forbearance is included in the Fa's principles....Master has not talked about going beyond the limits of Forbearance. Once told, it could create obstacles for disciples who are in the process of cultivating. In particular, it could render them unable to handle themselves correctly in the midst of evil's test of Dafa. However, the way the evil is currently performing shows that they are already utterly inhuman and completely without righteous thoughts. Such evil's persecution of the Fa can thus no longer be tolerated. Completely eliminating the evil is [the aim of] Fa-rectification”²⁰²

Note how the evil ones (“they”) are said to be “completely without righteous thoughts”. While this reflects the new technique-and-slogan of “send forth righteous thoughts”, it also offers a rhetorical strategy for dehumanization of the opponent, who is here characterized in terms of dualistic apocalypticism. As a justification for drastic action, such demonization could foreshadow a further escalation of resistance. And it appears Dafa disciples need feel no “benevolence” toward the evil inhuman beings who oppose the Fa.

Now practitioners who sign renunciations of Falun Gong under duress are to be seen by the faithful as puppets of cosmic evil, threatening the “Fa-rectification” of the universe. In a recent article, the officially authorized minghui.net²⁰³ editors told mainland practitioners

All of the students who have not done well in labor camps have already tarnished their own cultivation. But this is not to say that they can no longer reach Consummation. The Fa-rectification is still continuing, cultivation hasn't concluded, and our merciful Master is still waiting for students who have not done well for various reasons to catch up. Whether or not Consummation can be achieved hinges on how our students themselves will treat the path they take from now on, and how they will make up for the losses they have caused Dafa because of their own misconduct.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Li Hongzhi, “Beyond the Limits of Forbearance”, www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/1/2/6668.html.

²⁰³ This has become the principal organ of information, communication, and policy in the Falundafa virtual exile. The english language site is www.clearwisdom.net . See “On Important Matters, Practitioners Must Pay Attention to the Attitude of Minghui Net”, www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2000/7/16/7662.html .

²⁰⁴ “Double Your Efforts to Make Amends, Catch up With the Fa-Rectification Process”, www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/1/2/5469.html

Master Li himself has warned those under the pain of torture and the threat of arrest that “stepping forward and validating the Fa” and “defending the Fa from evil” are essential to discipleship.

If a person has obtained the Fa but isn't able to validate the Fa, does he still deserve to be a Dafa disciple? No matter how he ‘persists in studying the Fa and doing the exercises’ at home, he is being controlled by demons and is ‘enlightening’ along an evil path.”²⁰⁵

The pressure to endure hardship or forfeit salvation is applied with all the weight of history:

Since Master has borne for you almost everything in history, during the Fa-rectification period disciples must not depart until the Fa-rectification is over....Over the course of prehistory, everything of yours was being created, all along, according to how magnificent the disciples would be in the Fa-rectification period....As you consummate your own paradises you are, at the same time, eliminating your last karma, gradually getting rid of your human thoughts, and truly stepping forward from humanness. Most fundamentally, you all still need to establish your great mighty virtue in the process of eliminating the old forces’ persecution, and return to your highest positions....*If during the evil’s persecution a Dafa disciple doesn’t do well or slacks off, it’s very possible all his previous efforts will have been for nothing....*If what you do is no longer worthy of a Dafa disciple, think about it, everyone, if under the greatest mercy since the beginning of heaven and earth and under Buddha’s infinite grace you still can’t do well, how could there be another chance? *This period of time will not last long*, but it can forge the mighty virtue of magnificent Enlightened Beings, Buddhas, Daos, and Gods of different levels, and even Lords of different levels. It can also destroy overnight a cultivator who has reached a really high level but who has become less strict with himself. [emphasis added]²⁰⁶

If it occurs to any Falun Gong practitioners that this strategy could conceal a manipulative maneuver, then such sentiments are not among those published on minghui.net and pureinsight.org, where hundreds, if not thousands of statements by practitioners portray a tenacious and repentant dedication to Li and the grand scheme of

²⁰⁵ Li Hongzhi, “Serious Teachings”, www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2000/9/28/8105.html .

²⁰⁶ Li, “Fa-Rectification Period Dafa Disciples”, www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/8/16/12965.html .

universal rectification.²⁰⁷ Not a few of the stories posted there claim to be from mainland practitioners who have endured imprisonment, interrogation, and mistreatment, but refused to give their names or sign a statement denouncing Falun Gong.²⁰⁸ But there is a whole genre of online confessions entitled “Solemn Declarations” in which scores of Dafa practitioners vent their grief and guilt over signing statements renouncing Falun Gong. All of the Solemn Declarations include a recantation of their forced signing, and they all express a resolution to “catch up with rectifying the Fa.”²⁰⁹ These Solemn Declarations, it should be noted, bear all the signs of a self-criticism, made in good faith.

Many specifically cite “attachments to family” as driving them to apostasy, as it appears the families of detainees may have pressured them into signing. It seems probable that family members unconvinced by Falun Dafa may also have formed a negative opinion of Falun Gong *and* the government as a result of all the trouble.²¹⁰ By “eliminating attachments to the family” and reorienting conceptions of allegiance to the master and his cosmic purge, Falundafa again calls to mind certain resonances with the Maoist cult of personality. This is not only a strategy of mass mobilization; increasing detachment from other familial and social ties helps create what Rahn calls “a feedback loop system where practitioners only relate to other practitioners, thereby mutually reinforcing belief in the teachings, identification with the group, and eradication of any conflicting or alternative views.”²¹¹ Such are the techniques of revolutionary totalism, and also of counterculture.

²⁰⁷ In keeping with Rahn’s concerns about Falundafa centralized control of internal information and the undocumented nature of this type of internet information, one must raise the possibility that some of the postings at these websites are composed by the editors or their circle and then credited to unnamed practitioners. The sheer number of items posted strongly suggests some of them must be genuine, and it is not impossible that most or all of them are independently authored. However, the with clear advantages flowing from the hypothetical fabrication of practitioner accounts, the culture of propaganda evident in Falundafa rhetoric may well employ subterfuge given the life-and-death stakes.

²⁰⁸ See for example, “Passing Tests with a Tranquil and Righteous Mind,” www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/1/24/5050.html ; “Validating Fa in Prison”, www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/3/14/5748.html .

²⁰⁹ For example “Solemn Statements to Renew Practice in Dafa”, www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/3/1/5941.html . While this group of four confessions perhaps feature this theme, they are in every one I have read.

²¹⁰ See for example, “Giving Myself the Last Chance” , <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/6/3/11011.html> , and “Solemn Declaration”, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/8/19/13021.html>

²¹¹ Rahn, “The Falun Gong: Beyond the Headlines”, For presentation at the American Family Foundation’s Annual Conference April 28, 2000. www.let.leidenuniv.nl/bth/FalunRAHN.htm .

With the “soft ban” on reading non-Dafa religious texts and the fears over medical treatment, Falundafa doctrine carries an array of tendencies which could accelerate this self-referential “feedback-loop” to the point of sectarian extremism, but it is unclear whether this has really happened. Even in the Mainland where the pressures might help create more social insularity for Dafa practitioners, the ban itself might likewise prevent numbers of disciples from convening physically. Thus, as a space for social and ideological identity-making, the internet has become the locus for organization and exchange.

The internet is the primary portal through which Master Li addresses his community of believers, and the Falundafa web presence functions as both a platform for proselytization and a kind of fortress from which to defend itself against forces both internal and external to the movement. Falun Gong embraced the emerging internet technology fairly early as a vehicle for its development, inaugurating its original website www.falundafa.org in 1996, the same year Li immigrated to the United States.

In late 2000, the Falundafa web presence underwent some remodeling and restructuring, and now there are five or six principal sites. The original falundafa.org remains but its portal and Western language pages are no longer the colorful altars of symbol and script they once were. The previous design was removed, probably so that curious westerners would not be frightened off by a giant rotating swastika. Instead of the more aesthetic icons, pictures of harmless westerners happily practicing Falun Gong now inhabit white sanitized pages. As before, all of Master Li’s texts, audio, and instructional videos are available for download here, but a more lively presence is maintained at www.clearwisdom.net, the English version of www.minghui.net, the central cite in Chinese. Here, the full range of news stories, personal testimonies, and Li’s new articles all jostle together in a busy interface. In addition to this site, another called pureinsight.org predominantly features practitioner testimonials with a considerable amount of redundant content reproduced from the [minghui](http://minghui.net)/[clearwisdom](http://clearwisdom.net) sites. The testimony on these sites includes all the wild talk of miracles, visions, and cosmic rectification that is not to be found on the sanitized [Falundafa.org](http://falundafa.org) site, except of course where buried in texts. The

cold-war styled broadcast site www.falundafaradio.org still delivers Chinese language Dafa news and revelation across the electronic blockade into the mainland.

Another more recent development is the information portal www.faluninfo.net. This site is dedicated to framing the group within the context of its human rights crisis, and does not offer any of the more theological content found at the other sites. Though it carries a few releases from news agencies such as CNN and the Associated Press, the faluninfo site primarily features articles from their own internal sources. These articles are sometimes attributed to the Falun Dafa Information Center or the acronym FDP in much the same style as mainstream print-media. It is unclear whether such nomenclature is an attempt to appropriate an aura of credibility, or merely a stylistic and organizational development. In any event, the faluninfo site hosts a large number of “first-hand accounts” of the persecution, and has recently identified specific individuals in the Chinese government as chief ringleaders of the crackdown.

While Jiang Zemin remains the arch nemesis, a certain Luo Gan has emerged as one of the instrumental voices behind the proscription, and is allegedly in charge of a government committee called the “610 Office” that was established to deal with the Falun Gong situation. The faluninfo site claims that its information on Luo and his “610 Office” comes from sources well-placed within the government. If this is so, then the disclosure of such intelligence on faluninfo.net represents one of the more diplomatically strategic maneuvers Falundafa has yet achieved. Already, a civil suit has been filed under the Torture Victim Protection Act and the Alien Torture Claims Act against Luo’s alleged second-in-command, who was in New York at the time and could thus be charged under the statute.²¹² By naming their tormentors in the government, Falundafa raises more realistic and vulnerable targets for diplomatic and political pressure. And if an identifiable faction within the government can be blamed for the excesses of the persecution, thus giving the government a face-saving retreat route, it is possible that a combination of public opinion and factional politics could produce a favorable resolution to the current

²¹² <http://www.faluninfo.net/devstories/610/index.asp> . Here, they cite an Agence France Presse report from July 19,2001.

campaign of terror.

In keeping with the times, faluninfo labels the “610 Office” and its direction of the persecution as “state-sponsored terrorism.”²¹³ Meanwhile, the *South China Morning Post* reported on September 19, 2001 that the Chinese government was already retooling its anti-Falun Gong propaganda to exploit the new international campaign against terrorism.²¹⁴ And on October 19, reports allege that an “undisclosed American business” in Beijing received in the mail a Falundafa book that was “suspected of anthrax contamination.”²¹⁵ Already, Falundafa spokespeople in the Falundafa Information Center have charged that this incident is another government frame-up like the Tiananmen suicide-immolations. Certainly, the unfolding reaction to global terrorism will increasingly influence the nature of the Falun Gong persecution and resistance, surpassing the rhetorical value of the “cult” discourse.

Now that the United States’ fickle concentration has been transfixed by terrorism and war, Falundafa’s fresh media offenses seem to be foundering. Yet another website, www.sos-earthwalk.net, has been launched to support Falundafa’s latest bid for attention.²¹⁶ Presently, several teams and individuals are walking substantial distances in order to raise awareness of the Falun Gong persecution. Earlier in 2001, some Dafa practitioners walked from Seattle to San Francisco, and others walked, at least in stages, to the gathering in Washington, D.C. during the summer. Now, these protest-walks have been organized in four global regions- Europe, America, Asia, and Oceania. While these treks will no doubt be a great and challenging experience for those making them, it remains to be seen whether they will generate much media coverage. Recently, Falundafa practitioner and cross-country walker David Lee Jerke passed through Knoxville, where two Falun Gong seminars were held in conjunction with his arrival. But despite numerous

²¹³ <http://www.faluninfo.net/devstories/610/index.asp>

²¹⁴ <http://www.scmp.com>, 9 September, 2001. Vivien Pik-Kwan Chan, “Local foes in mainland’s sights”.

²¹⁵ <http://www.faluninfo.net/DisplayAnArticle.asp?ID=4968> . The faluninfo report cites Associated Press and Deutsche Presse-Agentur as sources of the incident.

²¹⁶ Interestingly enough, a map on the website indicates a walk-route across Asia starting from India and running through Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey and thence into Europe through the Balkans. The mere proposition of such an enterprise suggests a certain disconnection from world affairs.

phone calls and e-mails to news outlets, no local media of any sort turned up to cover his walk from Washington D.C. to Los Angeles.

These walks are part of Falun Gong's "SOS Urgent: Rescue Falun Gong" campaign that began earlier in the year. While the "SOS" slogan has become a uniform aspect of international Falundafa activity, it may lack the image-savvy sophistication needed to capture the attention of modern media consumers. In an age where image is essence and communication is compressed into sound-bites, the "SOS" campaign fails to connect with the contemporary media culture of image-driven psychology. For example, at the Washington, D.C. rally in July 2001, the photo-op lectern from which congresspeople and other speakers addressed the crowd bore the wordy "SOS" slogan which trailed off out of camera shot. The words "Falun Gong" fit only with difficulty in photos taken of that day's main speakers. Lacking an appealing or eye-catching style, the utilitarian look of the "SOS" material falls behind in the cutthroat marketplace of the American concentration span. This is not to imply that the substance of the "SOS" campaign or the earth-walks is unfounded or misguided, but rather to suggest that there is some general miscue within the Falundafa attempt to harness the western media. I suspect that this failure flows in no small part from the culture of propaganda in the Chinese media, and perhaps from a more literate political culture where text *is* image already. But since Dafa practitioners interpret their world in loose terms of karma, it might be appropriate to recall how so much of the Falun Gong crisis (and the Falun Gong theology) has developed over the struggle to control information. From the initial banning of Li's books in 1996, through to the Tianjin Incident and beyond, Falundafa's feisty spirit for resistance was provoked not only by the government's suppression of speech, but also by critical speech in the media. Even before the ban, critics of Falundafa in China received threats for voicing opposition to the group.²¹⁷ Falun Gong has demonstrated an inability to negotiate with media powers, preferring instead to construct its own media apparatus in cyberspace.

Though the highly personal, face to face level of grass roots instruction and
²¹⁷ See, for example, Fang, "An Opiate of the Masses? Millions of Chinese embrace a mystical exercise movement." *U.S. News and World Report*, 22 February, 1999.

interaction continues (outside the mainland) as the embodied arena in which Falun Gong principally operates, even these spaces primarily orchestrated via the internet. The hierarchy of instruction flowing down from Master Li and the primary organizers of Falundafa extends outward to the myriad local instructors and groups who all, almost without exception, also have a website that anchors their presence in the informal legitimacy conferred by the network, while also providing the practical means for advertisement and communication.

If one wishes to learn Falun Gong, it is not even necessary to leave one's desk, and in fact, the routines of the practice could even be performed in an office cubicle. Videos of Master Li demonstrating the movements, digitally superimposed like a giant culture hero over famous Chinese landmarks, are available for free download or online viewing, along with the Chinese and English audio supplements, and of course, thousands of pages of text. If such a course of study is too virtual, then a few clicks will take you to local instructors who will probably agree to e-mail requests for a private lesson. And if one wishes to find the community of practitioners in their natural habitat of the morning practice ground, then maps and directions are frequently posted online, guiding neophytes and other practitioners to the territories on which Falun Gong ultimately stands.

For a movement of so many millions, it is perhaps surprising that no schismatic elements developed until 2000, when Hong Kong businesswoman Belinda Peng claimed that on May 13 (Li and the Buddha's Birthday) the *fashen* of Master Li left its former corporeal abode and entered her body, where it now resides. Though only a relatively small number of followers claim to accept Peng as the new master, her proclamation of leadership received such amplification via her website, www.falundafa.com.hk that Li himself felt compelled to issue a lengthy and angry denouncement on the main website, reminding the faithful that "I alone am the principal being...Nobody should pay attention to what that saboteur in Hong Kong has instigated or give her and audience."²¹⁸ Since then, this schismatic development has become known as the "Hong Kong Incident", and

²¹⁸ Li, "Deter Interference", falundafa.org/book/eng/jw_34.htm .

at least one online confession has appeared in which a Dafa practitioner guiltily recants her flirtation with Peng's Dafa heresy.²¹⁹

When the Chinese government initiated its crackdown, it extended its old-fashioned propaganda blitz into cyberspace via official press sites and other government networks, including the web pages of China's foreign embassies'. In May of 2000, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences went online with an anti-cult webpage (www.cass.net.cn) to expose and denounce a whole range of activities seen as evil by this official research society. When western headlines were momentarily seized with the news of massive hacker attacks against big websites like Yahoo, Amazon.com, and others, it took only a few weeks for the possible utility of such techniques to convince the Chinese authorities to launch similar attacks against the Falundafa websites in Canada and the U.S.²²⁰ Though difficult to sustain over time and of dubious international legality, the Falundafa sites were temporarily jammed, but in the long run, the Chinese are left with more serious problems facing their drive for more controls over their domestic access to the internet.

New legislation that became effective on January 1 2000 outlines in vague generalities sweeping new restrictions on transmission of state secrets or data injurious to state interests. The broad language of the act casts long shadows over China's surging internet industry, drawing particular concern from foreign companies effected by the regulation of encryption software, which must now be provided by government. Tighter regulations on internet business operation. have been implemented that both restrict foreign investment and require more detailed record-keeping of internet use.²²¹ In order to stave off government intervention, many operators of chat room sites and message boards employ a staff of company censors called "web worms" who monitor discussions and remove statements that exceed certain limits.²²² The range of speech tolerated is clearly uncertain, and gray areas around the margins of acceptability may have already expanded

²¹⁹ "Tao Hualian's Solemn Declaration", www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/6/21/11597.html.

²²⁰ "China jamming Falungong websites in new crackdown", April 13 (AFP).

²²¹ "Whitewashing the Web", www.dfn.org/focus/china/netreg-0010.htm.

²²² Matt Pottinger, "Chinese 'web worms' police themselves", (Reuters, Jan 21).

the domain of permissible criticism, but already enforcement of government control over internet communication is growing. In 1999 the City of Shanghai alone closed down 127 internet cafes for hosting politically incorrect language.²²³ In addition, some twenty city and provincial governments are organizing special internet police in order to 'administrate and maintain order' in cyberspace. And as American corporations enter into arrangements with Beijing under the cover of Permanent Normal Trade Relations, the firm Exotrope is working with authorities to develop a new generation of internet censorship software, but a spokesman for the online human rights group Peacefire claims that this technology is "zero percent effective."²²⁴ The Chinese have long blocked access to the websites of western news agencies, human rights groups, Tibetan exiles, and now Falun Gong. But according to Digital Freedom Network's executive director Bobson Wong, enterprising internet users in China "can easily bypass government censorship."²²⁵ By mirroring content, avoiding registration, and e-mailing content, Chinese internet users can outmaneuver the cumbersome censorship apparatus. At best, the government can arrest a few and make examples of them, and in June of 2001, the Digital Freedom Network confirmed that three Chinese had been arrested for disseminating Falun Gong information on the internet.²²⁶

As a logistical tool of resistance and a text-based speech -space, the internet suggests that the ingenuity and tenacity of Falundafa so frequently demonstrated in China has only grown tougher and more sophisticated under persecution. But as this crisis drags on and its online documentation accumulates, the personal face of suffering is in danger of drowning in the digital white noise.

If cyberspace exists as a parallel dimension of information, many Falundafa practitioners perceive their struggle against terrestrial oppression to likewise transpire in a parallel spiritual dimension. A whole genre of visionary accounts has sprung up on the

²²³ "Chinese officials shut down 127 illegal cafes", www.dfn.org/news/news000131.htm#chinanet .

²²⁴ "American company partners with China to advance censorship", www.dfn.org/news/news000625.htm#2808. Also see "Willing partners in repression?", www.dfn.org/focus/china/multinationals.htm .

²²⁵ Bobson Wong, "Improving Internet access in China", www.dfn.org/focus/china/chinanet.htm .

²²⁶ "Academic arrested for using Net to distribute Falun Gong articles", <http://www.dfn.org/focus/china/wangzhenyong.htm> .

minghui and pure insight webpages, many of them allegedly reporting the visions of children. The constant theme of these visions is demonic battle, and in this supernatural warfare, Falun Gong and its “supernormal capabilities” manifest as a military technology. As an expression of the parallel between personal transformation and cosmic rectification, the visions of the struggle at the core of Dafa practice likewise manifest in concentric spheres of extension. While the imagery of demons arises in large part from Li’s colorful rhetoric and most essentially from the essence of struggle, I believe that the frequency of visionary experience may be due in part to the technical aspects of the Falundafa practice that facilitate the suggestible state of consciousness. First, the whole dismissal of “mind-intent” relieves practitioners from focused mindfulness of their movement. Instead, they rely on the guidance of Li’s voice on audiotape to walk them through the sets. This relaxing of the mind may facilitate calmness, but it likewise cultivates a state susceptible to suggestion. As mentioned above, the particular idea of sitting concentration (*ding*) may also engender a consciousness prone to develop objects in the mind as projective reflections of the “I” sense. And now the relatively new technique of “send forth righteous thoughts and eliminate the evil” takes the experience of sitting and actively recruits the mind to join the struggle against the “old forces.” This relatively new addition to Falun Gong practice is a somewhat formal sitting technique, performed with some simple hand gestures and a revealing chant:

The Fa rectifies the Cosmos, the Evil is completely eliminated.

The Fa rectifies Heaven and Earth, immediate retribution in this lifetime.

Here, the the program of universal regeneration bespeaks that vengeful undertone latent in all apocalypticism. While the issue of retribution is a growing subject for Dafa culture which I will discuss below, I believe the overt psychic involvement of the meditating practitioner with this war to purge the old evil is a major incentive to visionary expression of conflict.

Some apparitions are no more than typically Buddhist personification of mental energies, as with the case of one practitioner, who recalls how once at 9 o'clock,

again we sent forth righteous thoughts. During the first five-minute period for clearing out our own bad thoughts, I saw a creature. It was made of karma (it must have been thought karma) and it looked very ugly. I saw that this creature was being generated by my mother-in-law. It was gripping her neck tightly and was trying desperately to prevent her from sending forth righteous thoughts. It was actually so afraid that its teeth were chattering. My mother-in-law persisted in sending forth righteous thoughts and in an instant, this creature disappeared and has never come back.

Here, the elimination of personal karmic affliction is effected by the generation of righteous thoughts. But more cosmic and external forms of evil likewise succumb to this victorious moral projection. The visionary glimpses of transdimensional battle usually involve Master Li or his *fashen* and *falun* joining the fight, and sometimes the practitioners themselves weaponize their *gong* and combat the demons themselves. One particularly interesting account comes from a Chinese practitioner who claims to have had a series of visions in a reeducation camp. Among his or her fantastic perceptions documented online is the following account, worthy of quoting in length:

Suddenly, I saw a demon coming. I was fighting as quickly as I could. Although I had listened so much to the stories of fighting wicked lives, now I was amidst the real fighting. I could not defeat him after using all my means. It made me so exhausted; I felt that I could not bear it. Then, I realized that I represented righteousness, and he represented evil, and that righteousness will defeat evil. I defeated him right after my righteous thoughts came out. Another demon came out right after that. When my palm extended, my whole body was almost absorbed by him. I knew I could not deal with him so I shouted, "Master, please save me!" Master's voice sounded around me, "Eliminate the evil." So I said loudly, "Eliminate the evil." I saw something like a ball fall down from the demon's mouth. It became smaller and smaller and went into a very deep dimension. That demon was a god's beast for riding. It was a tiger. He had stolen the magic instrument from his master and wanted to be the king. That magic instrument was in his mouth. He had no means to do harm after the magic instrument had been withdrawn. After seeing this, groups of demons came to deal with me. What should I do? I was not afraid at the time but was thinking: "I have the ability to defeat them. I remember that Master told us before that we could cultivate a falun and that this falun could be produced without limit. I should use falun. So I said, "Falun is rotating between the sky and the ground." I then saw numerous falun fly from my body, whirl around the demons and mince them up. The demons did not dare come again. The first round was over. I felt thirsty and very exhausted, knowing that I had used many supernormal abilities. I started to practice the

Strengthening Divine Powers exercise. After I finished the exercise, I felt very relaxed.²²⁷

While this encounter involves a particularly rich plot and characterization, many other accounts offer similar kinds of experiences, including a whole sub-genre of visions seen by children.²²⁸ Most of these supernatural revelations share an axis of adversity, reflected in episodes of miraculous protection and demonic combat. In these fantastic vistas, Chinese Dafa practitioners can taste what they have never known- victory over their oppressors. This yearning for righteous triumph has spawned another category of web-literature with its own titular link, “Evil Deeds Provoke Retribution”.²²⁹ In this large section, practitioners have recorded hundreds of cases where they claim the justifying action of the Fa has brought setback, sickness, and death upon those who persecute or slander Falundafa. These cases of “retribution” are unapologetically severe, reading like the body-count synopsis of a dark comedy. While perhaps understandable given the circumstances, and certainly in keeping with the logic of apocalyptic theodicy, the triumphalism of these grim reports seems to stand in considerable tension with the principle of “benevolence,” and this impulse toward vengeance, even as a response to “slander”, is indicative of the dark underbelly of Falundafa’s totalism.

²²⁷ “With Teacher at the Helm, The Fa Saves All Beings,” Part I, www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/5/4/9259.html

²²⁸ See, for example, “A Mystical and Divine Paradise: What a Nine Year Old Disciple Sees”, www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/9/8/13662.html ; “What Shanshan Saw in Other Dimensions in the Progress of the Fa-Rectification” (Parts 1-10!), www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2001/4/28/9140.html ; and many others.

²²⁹ www.clearwisdom.net/emh/85/

5 Toward Consummation

“What would you be doing on earth if you had completed cultivation?” Li Hongzhi ²³⁰

Undoubtedly, like all messianic movements must, this one too shall end. The circumstances under which this occurs will obviously shape its resolution, but a “Great Disappointment” could easily crash the whole movement if Li either calls “time” or passes on without an accepted successor. In fact, the time for potential danger or extreme action will come when Li dies or issues some drastic edict, which might be opposed by one or more of the “editorial” circle, thus forcing some behind-the-scenes power struggle. As with the case of Mao’s late political and cultural strategy, Li’s vision will not conductibly facilitate routinization and denominalization into a stable post-Li succession. And how long Li can sustain his commanding authority and the liminality of millennial anticipation will also determine how and when this crisis ends.

In Li’s ideology, individual cultivation and cosmic rectification are building toward “consummation”, but the exact nature of this climax is indeterminate, or at least unrevealed. Eventually, Li promises, all evil will be finally eliminated, since he has nearly completed this universal purge of the old forces. But if the imperfection of the world, or worse yet, the reign of the CCP, continues beyond Li’s lifetime or “completion” of Fa-rectification, then Falundafa will find itself in that uncomfortable crisis-zone of failed prophecy. Given the size of the Dafa movement, this could be a real problem.

Perhaps the best internal hope for Falundafa lies in the prospect of a successor to Li who preaches a moderation their Fa, claiming that his or her revelation has surpassed that of the Master. If the struggle against evil and suffering can be re-generalized and de-historicized, then the threat to the state and the crisis-mentality might give way to a more stable form of participation. But if Falundafa survives beyond its Master, it could adopt a postponement of the final Fa-rectification, and thus smolder on with the potential for

²³⁰ www.falundafa.org/book/end/north_america.htm .

periodic outbreaks of protest or destabilization.

In terms of its crisis of illegality in the mainland, it is difficult to visualize a decriminalization under the CCP. Jiang is unlikely to approve a successor who might criticize or reverse his own major policy. It is not inconceivable that a factional shift or coup could throw control to a more liberalizing group of leaders, especially if the military saw in this some advantage. But given the increased role of the security forces in Jiang's neo-Legalism, the chances for such a factional reversal seem slim, particularly with the relatively passive student culture. Thus, a practical solution to Falundafa's proscription may prove unforthcoming, thus derailing the Fa-rectification, and with it the hopes of millions.

In order to minimize the damage caused by this eventual disappointment, it might make sense for more orthodox Buddhist groups to engineer some program to reintegrate Dafa practitioners back toward a more grounded version of Dharma. Likewise, classical learning, together with the traditional cycle of sacrifice, temple-worship, and holidays might help restore a sense of order into a world. Under such conditions, the reestablishment of harmony would not demand such millenarian urgency. As long as the world-order remains unmoored by religious and symbolic orientation, then the urge to revolutionary metamorphosis will continue to draw from the more recent vocabulary of unfinished social transformation.

The rhetorical script of the Cultural Revolution now hangs as an inescapable counterpoint to all that can be symbolized by Jiang Zemin's recent invitation of capitalists into Party membership. The Party has indeed formed an elite caste little better than colonial kleptocracy, confirming Mao's theoretical fear that justified the Permanent Revolution. The new reactionary technocratic class, which inhabits a system inclined toward corruption, was created by Party rule and synthesized by the incomplete negation of pre-revolutionary class antagonisms. Thus revolution and history itself bears within it the seeds of its own reaction, left lingering by the compromise of synthesis. Trotsky first envisioned the Permanent Revolution as the remedy to this dialectical *regressus*, and Mao

refined this idea with his dialectical innovation “the negation of the negation.” Though in terms of dialectical theory, this may have been one of Mao’s distinctive contributions, it is really a philosophical rendition of apocalyptic finality. Perhaps an internal immersion in the void could produce a nirvanic revolution born from absolute negation. But history has shown that the material destructiveness of mass revolt and class struggle will necessarily transmit violence and injustice into the social future for decades to come. Thus, the absolute annihilation of old forces seems misguided at best, and can become pathological if unchecked.

If the laboratory of history has discredited Mao’s philosophy, the union of uncertainty and sentimentality has inspired a revitalization movement around Mao, and is generating a fundamentalism with a politically threatening scripture of anti-institutional people power. This revival will tend towards idealism, despite its class origins, since the police state reduces other, more recently failed democratic avenues, and because no one would invest much material in Mao Zedong thought anymore.²³¹ Indeed, Mao now inhabits the idealist spirit realm, where he has managed to increase his powers after death- in the minds of many Chinese he has become a powerful ancestor-Boddhisattva capable of calling down blessings and protection to his devotees.²³² Such developments are probably a sign of cultural health in China, and disembodied emperor-ancestors are safer protectors than living messiahs.

Maoism and Buddhism both teach that human beings can transform their lives in such a way as to eliminate or reduce suffering. Both of these imported ideologies reacted with indigenous utopianism and philosophy, spawning new visions of social and individual transformation. Now, in the late period of Chinese socialism, Falun Gong stands as the first domestic progeny of these most influential foreign systems. For Falundafa to arise at all suggests that those elements of Chinese socialism which persist do so in part because of

²³¹ Labor unrest is unlikely to turn to Mao or idealism, it seems, since the rise of a capitally sound bourgeoisie would benefit working classes, as would the rule of law, which Maoism has delayed for forty years. However, state employees may long for the security of unchallenged economic centralism, though they too invest their ideological capital in an economic materialism.

²³² See Penny.

their resonance with traditional narratives. But the disjuncture wrought by modernity and revolution has opened a set of issues unique to the Chinese legacy of cultural continuity. Even if cultural networks of tradition have been irreparably severed, the Falun Gong episode suggests that China will Sinify globalization as it encroaches, but not without concession to the mediocritizing force of mass consumerism. But if Chinese culture and religion are to remain vigorous, distinctive, and more than a sentimentalism, a critical engagement of literary and historical tradition must reappear as the core of education and cultural literacy in China, lest a new economy help undo what even late revolution could not efface. Though a product of the imperial paradigm, Chinese humanism, in its various forms, may hold the seeds for the development of democratic culture in Chinese terms.

The Falundafa affair helps to illustrate how Maoism has significantly retarded the development of genuine democratic culture in China. Despite the grass-roots, mass-line nature of Falun Gong, its particular messianic reflex displays a consistent illiberal totalism that is fundamentally antagonistic to the humanistic and pluralistic culture required for an open, democratic society. And messianism itself, while proto-revolutionary in general, tends, as it does here, to ultimately disempower human beings. The flight from personal agency and responsibility to the reassuring refuge of the national-cosmic father represents a core impulse in human nature which ensures the timeless appeal of authoritarianism. As a form of salvation and transformation, Falun Gong represents the urge for freedom from oppression and suffering, but the rhetorical and theoretical solutions offered by Falundafa lead to further dependancy and narrowness.

But the world of *qigong* still carries the legacy of Chinese mystical humanism. The Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist visions of human perfection are all rooted in the premise of self-empowerment, even where transmission from the master plays an important role. For the practitioners of *qigong*, this self-realization flows from the experiential identification with the transpersonal forces of cosmological elements. Universal and social order turn about the same axis in which the practitioner finds their psychic and somatic

balance. Through an empiricism based on subjectivism and subjectified nature, *qigong* forms one arena in which knowledge is converted directly into power. This power can be harnessed for healing, self-transformation, and the subtle amplification of human wonder and awe. It can also be channelled outward to empower some transformation in the social realm. The forces of history and the forms of rhetoric largely determine how this power will manifest. And after a century of revolutionary mobilization, the old prerevolutionary vanguard of Chinese folk religion has reincarnated in the rhetorical body of the Chinese Revolution. Millions still await the great consummation of a world-transformation that was promised long ago, but which has never come.

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Vita

Stephen Flanigan grew up in the mountains of East Tennessee, where he attended the University School at East Tennessee State University for twelve years, graduating in 1988. He then attended ETSU and studied Classical Mediterranean History, Latin, and Philosophy, graduating finally, after some excursae in travel and work, in 1995. About that time, Mr. Flanigan embarked upon a year and a half of Sanskrit study with Dr. James Fitzgerald of the University of Tennessee, though fate compelled him to return to the mountains for a time, where he studied Classical occultism, Jewish mysticism, Yoga and Taijiquan, while pursuing his long romance with trail running in the mountains. He returned to formal academic study in the fall of 1999 and entered the Masters program in the Department of Religious Studies at Knoxville, and received his degree in December, 2001.

Mr. Flanigan's studies focus on late imperial and modern China, and primarily concern embodied forms of applied mysticism and their symbolic systems, with particular reference to symbolic diagrams and techniques of meditation. As an historical expression of these same impulses, the subject of religious sedition is also of particular interest to Mr. Flanigan, and he anticipates pursuing research in the reemergence of religion in the Chinese countryside, with an eye to the social and political implications of this rural revival. Also, he hopes to explore the roles of Chinese Traditional Medicine in sectarian literature and folk religion in order to better understand the movement of this culturally central set of ideas among social classes and religious paradigms.

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