

UNSANCTIONED RELIGION IN AN ATHEIST STATE: FALUN DAFA AS ALTERNATIVE MORALITY

Abstract: While most analyses of China’s campaign against the Falun Gong religious movement focus on the institutional reasons underpinning the July 1999 crackdown, we explore the moral reasoning behind the state’s actions. Applying a framework initially developed by Austrian thinker Eric Voegelin, we argue that Falun Gong invoked the ire of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on account of its theistic philosophy, which focused on transcendence of the secular world as the ultimate and highest purpose of human existence, and which is inherently in tension with the “gnosticism” of the CCP. We then employ this notion of binary moral systems to explore in greater detail two rival understandings of social progress, as well as the Party’s responses to the moral basis of Falun Gong.

Introduction

In July 1999, the Communist Party of China (CCP) launched a mass campaign to crush the Falun Gong spiritual practice.¹ Although the group was known to be peaceful and disinterested in political power, CCP leaders perceived it as a threat to their legitimacy

¹ David Ownby, *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; James Tong, *Revenge of the Forbidden City: The Suppression of the Falun Gong in China, 1999-2005*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

and rule, and responded accordingly.² The campaign against Falun Gong has been described by human rights organizations as the most intense and severe example of religious persecution since the Cultural Revolution, involving the imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong adherents, the use of torture and other coercive tactics to force them to recant their beliefs, and the killing of many who refuse.³

In the years since the crackdown, scholars and analysts have posited a number of reasons for the decision of the CCP to respond to Falun Gong in the manner that it did. Most of these explanations fall into what we here term “institutional” motivations. These include the size of the movement, which had attracted tens of millions of adherents according to Party estimates; the demographic composition of the group, which included communist party members and individuals from key military, bureaucratic, media, academic and corporate sectors; its independence from the state (Falun Gong had resisted co-optation, refusing to establish a communist party branch or submit to the control or oversight of the government); its ambiguous status as an unsanctioned qigong group (or *de facto* religion) in a state that supervises and penetrates civil society organizations to a high degree; and Falun Gong’s organizational and networking capacities, including its ability to mobilize large-scale demonstrations on

² Vivienne Shue, “Legitimacy Crisis in China?” in Gries and Rosen eds., *State and Society in Twenty-first Century China: Crisis, Contention, and Legitimation*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 60-62.

³ For example, see Sarah Cook, “The Battle for China’s Spirit: Religious Revival, Repression and Resistance under Xi Jinping,” Freedom House, 2017.

short notice.⁴

Other explanations deal with the symbolic threat that Falun Gong represented. The event widely seen as catalyzing the crackdown occurred on 25 April, 1999, when an estimated 20,000 Falun Gong adherents gathered quietly outside the Zhongnanhai government compound to request legal status and protection for the group. The demonstration was by all accounts an entirely peaceful affair, yet it could hardly have come at a worse time or place: almost exactly ten years earlier, hundreds of students held a sit-in at the gates of Zhongnanhai and demanded a dialogue with the leadership. This historical parallel was evident to Jiang Zemin, who pronounced Falun Gong to be the greatest threat to the Party since the 1989 student-led democracy movement.⁵ Other scholars have argued that Falun Gong may have evoked memories of millenarian religious sects that have challenged dynastic rule in China's past, such as the White Lotus, Yellow Turbans, and the Taiping.⁶

Yet these historical parallels can only go so far in explaining the ferocity and brutality of the Communist Party's response to Falun Gong. As Vivienne Shue writes, it is more useful to consider how Falun Gong posed a comprehensive moral challenge to

⁴ Ownby, 2008; Maria Hsia Chang, *Falun Gong: End of days*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁵ Zong, Hairen, *Zhu Rongji zai yijiujiujiu nian [Zhu Rongji in 1999]* (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2002), p. 66.

⁶ Ownby, 2008, pp. 23-44; Danny Schechter, *Falun Gong's Challenge to China: Spiritual Practice or "Evil Cult"?* (New York: Akashic Books, 2000), p. 19.

the Party's core legitimizing narratives, calling into question "the whole modernist, secular-scientific understanding of the cosmos in which the state roots its governing authority":

The challenge posed by popular religious beliefs and practices like those of Falun Gong cuts right to the heart of the Chinese state's own logic of legitimation....[Falun Gong's teachings] stand in the profoundest possible opposition to the present political order. They assail the ethical truths on which the entire political construct is meant to rest. However peacefully they practice their meditation exercises and however much they may regard "politics" as being beneath them, those swept up in the Falun Gong phenomenon never had a chance of remaining "apolitical" in China. With its slogan, "Zhen, Shan, Ren" (真, 善, 忍) – "Truth, Goodness, and Forbearance" – Falun Gong makes almost a perfect counter-hegemony. Truth! – but not the state's narrow empiricist truths. Goodness! –but not the state's dubious versions of benevolence. Forbearance! – but not the state's vulgarly assertive "wealth and power" concept of what it means to attain transcendent glory. Precisely because Falun Gong does represent such an absolute challenge – a challenge to the very foundations of the state's authority and legitimacy – government officials insist on complete extermination of the threat.⁷

Similarly, Noakes argued that Falun Gong represented a competing source of moral order in 1990s China:

At precisely the point when the excesses of totalitarianism and the move to markets were calling the CCP's historic claims to legitimacy into question, and when modernization was shifting the basis of its future legitimacy to performance, Falun Gong became a flashpoint for rising public dissatisfaction and was seen as a threat to social order and potentially destabilizing for the regime....The popularity of its religious message positioned the movement as a counter-hegemonic moral order in China, with Li's teachings rather than communist dogma as the guiding light. Falun Gong's challenge to the Party thus had two dimensions, one material, the other ideological.⁸

Our aim here is to extend and deepen scholarly understandings of the total moral

⁷ Shue, 2005, pp. 76-77.

⁸ Stephen Noakes, "Falun Gong, Ten Years On," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 2, (2010), p. 353.

disjuncture between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Falun Gong. We base our discussion on the work of Austrian political philosopher Eric Voegelin, who explored the tensions between religious transcendentalism and secular political ideologies, including *inter alia* communism, progressivism, positivism, and national-socialism, and whose framework we take as a useful theoretical tool for understanding the gulf dividing Falun Gong and the CCP. As Voegelin writes, “the true dividing line in the contemporary crisis is does not run between liberals and totalitarians, but between the religious and philosophical transcendentalists on the one side, and the liberal and totalitarian immanentist sectarians on the other side.”⁹ We contend that Falun Gong was intolerable to the Party because it represents an alternate system of morality and source of order whose theistic beliefs and transcendent aims were seen as threatening the validity of Marxism and dialectical materialism. The ideological disjuncture is most evident when considering matters of first principles: primal questions of the meaning of existence, of human suffering, and of salvation. The Party’s taking up arms against Falun Gong can thus be understood as an instinctive way of ending the metaphysical dispute.

In making this argument, we draw mainly from two sets of primary sources: Falun Gong teachings, and official statements and editorials in China’s state-run press, particularly those that coincided with the launch of the suppression campaign. According to Chiung Hwang Chen, official pronouncements justified the crackdown on Falun Gong by positing “a binary opposition between materialism and idealism,

⁹ Eric Voegelin, “The Origins of Totalitarianism,” in *Collected Works*, Vol. 11 (University of Missouri Press 2000), p. 22.

Marxism/Maoism and Falun Gong, atheism and theism.” As one article in Xinhua put it:

*Marxist dialectic materialism and historical materialism represent the world outlook and methodology of the proletariat, and that the scientific theories of Marxism established on the basis of this worldview should serve as the spiritual pillar of communists. Falun Dafa as created by Li Hongzhi preaches idealism and theism and denies all scientific truth, and thus is absolutely contradictory to the fundamental theories and principles of Marxism.*¹⁰

Although the tone of the state’s propaganda soon evolved, these early statements in the official press offer remarkably candid insights into how the Party deployed Marxism to justify the suppression, and the gravity of the ideological threat it perceived. For instance, a People’s Daily editorial in July 1999 described the anti-Falun Gong campaign as “a serious ideological and political struggle which has bearing on the fundamental beliefs of party members, on the basic ideological foundation for the Chinese people’s cause and unity, and on the future of the party and state.”¹¹ Another editorial warned: “the party’s political ambitions are to build China into a socialist country with Chinese characteristics and ultimately realize communism... If [Falun Gong]’s heretical theories spread, the party’s foundation will be shaken, and the great cause will be undermined.”¹²

It bears mentioning here that Falun Gong practitioners in the 1990s had no

¹⁰ Xinhua, “CPC Central Committee Forbids Party Members to Practice Falun Gong,” July 23, 1999.

¹¹ Xinhua, “People’s Daily Editorial on Falun Gong Ban,” July 22, 1999.

¹² Xinhua, “People’s Daily Article Calls for Strengthening Party Discipline,” July 25, 1999.

interest in challenging party legitimacy, and they viewed involvement in politics as anathema to the transcendent aims of their spiritual practice. As stated by Li Hongzhi, Falun Gong's teacher, "the form of human society—no matter what type of social or political system—is predestined and determined by heaven. A cultivator does not need to mind the affairs of the human world, let alone get involved in political struggles."¹³

Practitioners sought the state's acceptance, and wished to be seen as a positive social force that benefitted society, even within the rubric of one-party rule.¹⁴ To the millions of CCP members practicing Falun Gong, there was no conflict between practicing Falun Gong and fulfilling their social and political obligations.¹⁵

Yet the Party's leadership disagreed, arguing that Marxism cannot be reconciled with Falun Gong's theism:

One misconception is that Marxist faith is not contradictory with the practice of Falun Dafa, and party members can believe in both Marxism and Falun Dafa.... [In fact] Marxism adheres to a world outlook and methodology based on dialectic materialism and historical materialism, while Li Hongzhi, who preaches that social development was arranged by god [...] is a strong advocate of idealism. If a party member believes in Li's fallacies and has faith in Falun Dafa, he will surely betray Marxism, lose his ideological and political capability to differentiate right from wrong, fall captive to idealistic heresies, and finally lose credit as a Communist.¹⁶

¹³ Li Hongzhi, "Cultivation Practice is Not Political," September 3, 1996. <http://en.falundafa.org/eng/jjyz49.htm>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See, for example, Bay Fang's "An Opiate of the Masses?" *U.S. World and News Report*, February 22, 1999.

¹⁶ Xinhua, "Party members urged to recognize nature and harm of Falun Gong," July 26, 1999.

Chinese Communism as a modern gnostic philosophy

The CCP understands Marxism to be a secular religion—a “faith”—containing its own ontology, understanding of human history, and answers to the problem of human suffering and salvation. The outlook articulated by Marx—and put into practice in various forms by the CCP—fits neatly into what Voegelin characterized as the “gnostic” political outlook.

In his essay *Eratz Religion*, Voegelin describes the defining features of this worldview. First, the gnostic is dissatisfied with his situation—an understandable response to a world of suffering and strife, and one that is shared to some extent with believers of many religious faiths, including Falun Gong. Also like these faiths, the gnostic “believes that salvation from evil of the world is possible.” Yet the means of salvation, and the source of suffering, are understood in radically different ways. Specifically, “the gnostic believes that the drawbacks of the situation can be attributed to the fact that the world is intrinsically poorly organized.”¹⁷ The source of man’s suffering lies not in his own personal inadequacies or as a result of his sins or fallen nature, but arises because the natural order of being is itself corrupt. Gnostic political movements further maintain that the order of being will be changed or set right through a historical process, and that this salvational act of change “lies in the realm of human action.”¹⁸ In

¹⁷ Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays* (Washington DC: Gateway Editions, 1997), p 60.

¹⁸ *ibid*

other words, these are political movements that transfer the promise of salvation from the transcendent realm to the human plane. Rather than contemplation of the divine as the source of heavenly salvation, gnosticism instead asserts that deliverance will come in the form of “revolutionary action carried out by men who claim to possess a privileged knowledge of how this quasi-ontological transformation can be attained.”¹⁹ Perfect knowledge—or *gnosis*—is thus implied to be possible and attainable, at least by a certain class of revolutionary elite, which applies this knowledge to achieve the perfection of society.

The aim of gnosticism, according to Voegelin, is to “destroy the order of being, which is experienced as defective and unjust, and through man’s creative power to replace it with a perfect and just order.” For this project to make sense, “the order of being must be interpreted...as essentially under man’s control. And taking control of being further requires that the transcendent origin of being be obliterated: it requires the decapitation of being—the murder of God.”²⁰ Such a philosophy requires that God be understood as a work of man, and not the other way around.

Marx is a standard bearer for this orientation, and his own early works reveal this metaphysic. In his 1841 doctoral dissertation, he sets philosophy as against faith, characterizing belief in the divine as purely a product of human consciousness. “Human

¹⁹ David J. Levy, “Mythic Truth and the Art of Science: Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin on Gnosticism and the Unease of Modernity,” Eric Voegelin Society Meeting, 98th APSA Annual Meeting, 2002, p 2. **Also, is there any better published source for this than a conference paper?**

²⁰ Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays*, p. 35-36

self-consciousness is the supreme deity,” he wrote. “There shall be none beside it.”²¹ The dissertation examines the various attempts to establish the existence of God through logical proofs, rejecting them as “mere hollow tautologies.” Attempts to establish axioms of God’s existence, for Marx, become merely “proofs of the existence of essential human self-consciousness.”²² All such attempts to posit God’s existence fall into the same trap. “Take for example the ontological proof,” Marx counsels. “Which being is immediate when made the subject of thought? Self-consciousness.” Marx declares that “man makes religion; religion does not make man.”

There are clear echoes of Marx in the CCP’s ideological attacks against Falun Gong. The editorials that appeared in Xinhua, the People’s Daily, and Qiushi routinely invoke Marx and draw heavily on his ideas, arguing against the concept of divine sovereignty, and asserting that god is a creation of man. Marx makes clear that “for the socialist man the entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the begetting of man through human labor, nothing but the coming-to-be of nature for man, he has the visible, irrefutable proof of his birth through himself.” Thus, questions that “imply the admission of the inessentiality of nature and of man... has become [for the socialist man] impossible in practice.”²³ For a theist like Voegelin, however, Marx’s assertions represent

²¹ *ibid*, p. 24.

²² Marx 1841, p. 69

²³ Karl Marx, “The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto,” Prometheus Books, 1st edition (March 1, 1988) p. 113.

a “demonic revolt against God.”²⁴ Indeed, they provide epistemic closure for Voegelin, as they are an inherent part of Marx’s project and therefore an inevitable reaction to questions that will forever escape Marxist philosophy. “Marx knows that he is not struggling against a ‘belief’ in creation or in any other symbol that might furnish an answer to the question; the resistance rather arises from the experience and from the question itself. The question [i.e. the question of God, creation, man, meaning] must not be raised – or his idea is finished.”²⁵

Although today’s Communist Party has abandoned Marxist economic policies, the gnostic outlook at the heart of its philosophy endures: the Party elite possesses unique “scientific” insight into the nature and progression of history, and only it is capable of effecting continual progress and advancement for the Chinese nation. Marxism—along with the expanded CCP canon that includes Mao Zedong thought, Deng Xiaoping theory, the “Three Represents” and the “scientific outlook on development”—is regarded as a system of true knowledge through which all contradictions can ultimately be resolved. A communist utopia may not be imminently achievable, as Mao believed, but the perfection and fulfillment of man remains a historical possibility, one achievable by the CCP alone. In this context, the campaign against Falun Gong can be seen as the ultimate fulfillment of the Marxian moral project—the deranged patient suffering the internal contradiction of theism is treated

²⁴ Ibid. p. 277.

²⁵ Voegelin, “The Formation of the Marxian Revolutionary Idea,” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Jul., 1950), p. 293.

with the Party's ideological therapy.

Falun Gong's moral system

In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, China was left intellectually and spiritually unmoored. The traditional morality and religious beliefs that underpinned its civilization for centuries had been denounced as vestiges of a feudal and backwards past. Yet the utopian society that the Communists envisaged failed to materialize, and for a portion of the population, the rampant consumerism that took root during the Deng Xiaoping era only deepened the longing for meaning and purpose.²⁶

It was in this environment that Falun Gong first appeared in the northeast China. In May of 1992, 40-year-old Li Hongzhi gave his first public seminars on a system he called Falun Dafa, or Falun Gong. Li described it as a practice of the Buddhist school, stating that its methods and essential principles had been transmitted orally through a long lineage of masters and disciples.²⁷ At first, Falun Gong was officially classified as a system of *qigong*—a category of practices that typically involved meditation, regulated breathing, and gentle exercises meant to harness the body's vital energy and affect better health. However, Li made clear that his practice was not limited to attaining health or fitness. Instead, it was presented as a path to spiritual salvation.²⁸ In contrast

²⁶ See generally Ci Jiwei, "Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution: From Utopianism to Hedonism," (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994).

²⁷ Benjamin Penny, "The Life and Times of Li Hongzhi: Falun Gong and Religious Biography," *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 175, (2003), pp. 643-661.

²⁸ Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun* (2014 translated edition), (Taipei, Taiwan: Yih Chyun Book Co.,

to the gnostic outlook, for Falun Gong the promise of salvation does not reside in this world, but comes from transcending the human plane: one must ascend to “higher levels”²⁹ through spiritual and moral rectitude, and ultimately achieve reconciliation with the divine.

At the heart of Falun Gong’s moral philosophy are the tenets *Zhen, Shan, Ren* (truth, compassion, and forbearance), which represent the fundamental nature of the universe—the ultimate manifestation of the Buddha Law, or the Dao. This force represents the divine ground of being: it is the source of order in the universe, animating and giving rise to all things. The cosmos itself, and all that is contained in it, are thought to embody this quality of *Zhen Shan Ren*. Whereas Voegelin’s gnostic believes that the order of being is corrupt and must be overthrown, Falun Gong holds that it is inherently just and benevolent. Not only that, but the purpose of human life, and the means of salvation, lies in assimilating oneself to this divine nature and relinquishing the self. In Falun Gong’s core text *Zhuan Falun*, Li writes “This characteristic, Zhen Shan Ren, is the criterion for measuring good and bad in the universe... No matter how the human moral standard changes, this characteristic of the universe remains unchanged, and it is the sole criterion that distinguishes good people from bad people.”³⁰ In other words, Falun Gong maintains there is an immutable and unchanging truth that exists independent of

2015) p. 3

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun* (2014 translation), pp. 17-18.

human experience, society, and culture.

The CCP rejects the notion of a moral law standing above mankind. Instead, truth can only be grasped through social practice. As Mao Zedong wrote in 1963, “Where do correct ideas come from? Do they drop from the skies? No. Are they innate in the mind? No. They come from social practice and from it alone. They come from three kinds of social practice: the struggle for production, the class struggle, and scientific experiment.”³¹ In this respect, Falun Gong’s teachings are at best irrelevant, if not downright subversive, insofar as they suggest that the party is subject to judgement by a higher authority. In an editorial published soon after the suppression began, the People’s Daily put the matter frankly: “the so-called ‘truth, kindness and tolerance’ principle preached by Li Hongzhi has nothing in common with the socialist ethical and cultural progress we are striving to achieve.”³²

Since Falun Gong understands the universe to be fundamentally just and good, then from where does suffering originate? And why does it exist despite the presence of a benevolent god or gods? In addressing these questions, Falun Gong provides its own account of the fall of man: it holds that at the time of creation, all lives existed in alignment with the nature of the cosmos in a state of superior wisdom, free of suffering. Yet over time, as a result of a cyclical process of creation and decay in the universe, some

³¹ Mao Zedong, “Where Do Correct Ideas Come from?,” May 1963. In *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung & Other Works* (Easton Press 1996), p 106-107.

³² Renee Schoof, “China Detains Government Officials from Banned Meditation Group,” Associated Press, July 26, 1999.

lives developed selfishness and became alienated from the Dao. They thus dropped into a realm of delusion, trapped in a cycle of reincarnation where they suffer as a result of their sins.³³ It is a view of a fallen and corrupted man that can only be redeemed through rigorous moral practice and the painful shedding of human attachments. When encountering any difficulty, Li enjoins his followers to “look within,” seeking the source of the discordance within their own hearts, rather than in the external circumstances.³⁴

Marx likewise maintained that man has become alienated from his nature, and that this is the cause of suffering. Yet in his worldview, man’s suffering and alienation is conceived as having exogenous origins, stemming (for example) from the exercise of power by one class over another. In the Marxist paradigm, humans achieve self-actualization and fulfilment not by turning inward, and much less by turning to god, but by acting on their will to alter the given order, creating a classless society free of exploitation.

By contrast, Falun Gong holds suffering to be a natural and permanent feature of the human condition, and something that cannot be erased by any political system or social program. It exists not because the arrangement of the world is corrupt and in need of improvement, but because man is fallen: driven by ignorance and selfishness wants, he harms others and thus acquires karmic debts. Karma is said to determine one’s fortune in this life and the next, and is understood to be the underlying cause of all

³³ Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun* (2014 translation), p 5.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 262.

misfortune, pain, and illness. The Falun Gong disciple thus accepts her lot, neither seeking nor fleeing from suffering, and desists from vying or competing to advance herself. Li routinely counsels his disciples to “gain naturally without pursuit,” and to follow the course of nature: “True improvement comes from letting go, not from gaining.”³⁵ In *Zhuan Falun*, Li writes:

*[T]he things that people consider correct are, actually, often wrong. Doesn't everyone want to live a good life? Desiring a good life may infringe upon others' interests, whet one's selfish desires, take away others' benefits, or lead to bullying and harming others. One would compete and fight for personal gain among everyday people. Isn't this going against the characteristic of the universe?*³⁶

It should be noted that Falun Gong does not counsel the literal abandonment of material possessions, family, or jobs, and students of Falun Gong are not encouraged to adopt a monastic lifestyle. Yet they are to give up the psychological concern for profit, reputation, sentiment, personal gain, and other desires, addictions, or entanglements. Through this process of moral cultivation, and by suffering to repay karmic debts, the Falun Gong adept seeks to purify herself, escaping from the cycle of rebirth (or *samsara*, in Sanskrit), and ultimately attain heavenly salvation beyond this human plane. As Li puts it, “One should return to one's original, true self; this is the real purpose of being human.”³⁷

³⁵ Li Hongzhi, “Teaching the Fa at the 2002 Fa Conference in Philadelphia, U.S.A.,” November 30, 2002. <http://en.falundafa.org/eng/lectures/20021130L.html> (accessed 07-06-2017)

³⁶ Li, *Zhuan Falun*, pp. 62-63.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 6

Having addressed Falun Gong's understanding of suffering and salvation, it is worth turning as well to its understanding of knowledge. As already noted, Falun Gong believes in the existence of an objective and immutable universal truth or law, embodied in the principles of *Zhen Shan Ren*. This force permeates all things, and its presence can be felt and experienced by anyone through the process of elevating their moral character. At the same time, however, one of the first principles elaborated in the book *Zhuan Falun* is that the universal law manifests differently at different spiritual planes (*butong cengci you butong cengci de fa*). The higher a person has ascended in their moral and spiritual cultivation—i.e. the more they have discarded their karma, shed their illusions, and aligned their character to the qualities of *Zhen Shan Ren*—the more accurate and complete will be their understanding of the truth of the universe. Regardless of the level one attains, however, there will always be higher truths and states of being that are yet unknown.³⁸ No matter how far science progresses, the universe will remain infinitely vast and unknowable. Li writes:

Neither the vastness of the universe nor the enormousness of the cosmic body shall ever become known to man by exploration. The minuteness of matter shall likewise never be observed or measured by man. The profundity of the human body is such that it exceeds human knowledge, which can merely scratch the surface. Life is so complex and diverse that

³⁸ Ibid, p. 13.

*it shall forever be an enigma to man.*³⁹

Man's knowledge is thus always understood to be finite, and his ignorance infinite.

Thus, humility is considered a virtue.

This worldview has several important implications. First, it suggests that true wisdom can only be attained through inward spiritual and moral cultivation. Thus, among his many critiques of modern science, Li Hongzhi argues that it is essentially a plodding, slow, and indirect path to knowledge. Second, since no human being possesses complete knowledge, no person—or political party—is truly qualified to centrally plan an economy or a society. Finally, because man cannot fully grasp the reality of the world or the causal relationships that comprise its complex systems, any attempts to interfere with the natural order will produce unintended consequences. Hence, Falun Gong stresses *wuwei*—non-action, or acting without intention. In comparison, the Communist disposition recognizes no limits to man's capacity to know nature or to shape the world according to his designs. Mao Zedong captured this idea clearly when he declared “man must use natural science to understand, conquer, and change nature and thus attain freedom from nature.”⁴⁰

Although the above is a cursory and necessarily incomplete summary of Falun

³⁹ Li Hongzhi, “Firmament,” Sept 24 1995. http://gb.falundafa.org/chigb/jjyz_10.htm (accessed 07-06-2017)

⁴⁰ Mao Zedong, “Speech at the Inaugural Meeting of the Natural Science Research Society of the Border Region,” February 5, 1940. In *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung & Other Works* (Easton Press 1996), p 106.

Gong's essential beliefs, it should by now be apparent that Falun Gong is the antipodal philosophy to the CCP. Whereas Communism seeks freedom from nature and its constraints, Falun Gong advocates for assimilation to the natural order of the universe, which is understood to be just and benevolent.⁴¹ Liberation means not freedom from the limitations of the natural world or its laws, but rather liberation from the self—and particularly from those aspects of the self that exist in rebellion against the Dao.

Whereas Falun Gong regards the order of the world to be of divine origin, Communism views man as the maker of order and creator of his own destiny. Where the Party glorifies mundane human science as the means by which man will attain earthly perfection, Falun Gong holds that only moral rectitude can bring deliverance from suffering. Some of the most specific ways that these philosophies contrast are described in the following section, which examines competing accounts of progress or regress.

The CCP and Falun Gong: Competing Views of Progress

The CCP derives legitimacy in part from its ability to bring China to a stage of advanced development. It maintains that history is moving irrevocably forward under its guidance—away from the feudalism and superstition, from backwardness and national humiliation—toward a future in which China is materially and scientifically advanced, and the nation is rejuvenated and powerful. This might be expressed as a kind of performance-based legitimacy, measurable by steady improvements in GDP growth and

⁴¹ Li, *Zhuan Falun*, p. 18.

purchasing power, and more generally by the perception that life is improving under the Party's leadership and that the country is headed in the right direction.⁴²

Yet when a group begins to question the narrative of progress itself, this key pillar of party legitimacy is threatened. This is especially true when its critiques of progress and modernity appear to resonate with large swaths of the country. And this is precisely what Falun Gong did, espousing a deep scepticism about the progressive nature of human history. Whereas the CCP believes that society is moving forward, Falun Gong sees a process of decline, with humankind growing ever more estranged from its original nature and from the Dao. At a time when the CCP glorified the pursuit of wealth and touted the expansion of China's economy as evidence of its right to rule, Li challenged the narrative of emancipation through economic reform, arguing that material advancement has coincided with a spiritual impoverishment. As one scholar observed, Falun Gong stood in opposition to "the entire value system associated with the project of modernization."⁴³ In *Zhuan Falun*, Li describes the perils of seeking self-interest, and the corrupting influence of consumerism:

The better off [a person] is, the more selfish he becomes; the more he wants to possess, the further away he moves from the characteristic of the universe. He then heads for destruction.

⁴² On measuring CCP legitimacy, see Bruce Gilley and Heike Holbig, "The Debate on Party Legitimacy in China: A Mixed Quantitative/Qualitative Analysis," in *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 18, No. 59, (2009), pp. 339-358.

⁴³ Yuezhi Zhao, "Falun Gong, Identity, and the Struggle over Meaning Inside and Outside China," in Nick Couldry and James Curran, eds., *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) p. 211.

*Seen from a high level, while you may think you are advancing forward, you are actually moving backward.*⁴⁴

Over and over, his teachings describe the emptiness of material pursuits: “regardless of how much money you have or how high your position ranks, it is good for only a few decades. You cannot bring these things along with you at birth, or carry them away with you after death.”⁴⁵ On occasion, he also criticized the promotion of “money worship” by the state, such as in his short essay “Wealth with Virtue:”

*It is the duty of the ruler and officials to bring wealth to the populace, yet promotion of money-worship is the worst policy one could adopt. Wealth without virtue will harm all sentient beings, while wealth with virtue is what all people hope for. Therefore, one cannot be affluent without advocating virtue.*⁴⁶

As this passage makes clear, Falun Gong does not consider wealth and material development to be undesirable per se, but they are certainly not considered goods unto themselves. If society ceases to value virtue, and if its people lose a sense of propriety and moral restraint, an array of adverse consequences will result. For example, In *Zhuan*

⁴⁴ Li, *Zhuan Falun*, p. 126.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 169.

⁴⁶ Li Hongzhi, “Wealth with Virtue,” January 27, 1995. <http://en.falundafa.org/eng/jiyz02.htm> (accessed 07-06-2017)

Falun and other writings, Li argues that while China's policies of reform and opening have led to rising living standards and an easing of political restrictions, they have also resulted in higher crime rates, corruption, drug abuse, aesthetic confusion, interpersonal strife, sexual immorality, and environmental degradation.⁴⁷

In its own way, the Party recognizes the validity of these claims. Responding to Falun Gong's criticisms of modern Chinese society, the People's Daily conceded the following:

Some signs of moral decline and social evils have emerged in Chinese society, including interest-oriented human relations, coldness and indifference between people, a few corrupt officials who trade power for personal benefits and lead a decadent life, rampant drug abuse, gambling and porno activities in some places, widespread fakes and shoddy merchandise, and many other commercial and financial frauds.

Yet the Party maintains that these challenges will be resolved through continued economic development and reform under its leadership, stating:

*We're firmly determined to find solutions to these problems, one after another. And with the further development of reform and opening-up, and with steady economic growth, we will continuously find new and more effective solutions.*⁴⁸

By contrast, Li Hongzhi writes that the problems associated with modernity cannot be resolved through further modernization or by accumulating yet more wealth. Although he does not offer explicit prescriptions as to the ideal form of government, it is possible to infer from his teachings a preference for modest government—one that does not rely

⁴⁷ Li, *Zhuan Falun*, p. 417

⁴⁸ Xinhua, "People's Daily on Struggle Between Materialism and Idealism," July 27, 1999.

on the state's legislative or coercive power to enforce ethical behaviour and preserve social order, and does not seek to reshape society in advancement of a grand historical project. Instead, Li recommends a single solution as the antidote to nearly all of society's ills: moral rectitude and the nurturing of virtue, which can only arise absent of state coercion. During a lecture in San Francisco in 1997, for example, Li states:

The root cause of all humankind's ills is in fact the degeneration of human morality. Without starting there, none of humankind's problems can be solved. Starting from that, all of humankind's problems can be solved. [...] If each individual deep down inside requires himself to be a good person, is able to exercise self-restraint, and considers others in everything he does, not harming others and instead thinking about whether others can handle it, imagine what society would be like. Would laws be needed? Would police be needed? Everyone would be restraining and disciplining himself. But political propaganda and ruling by force can't make morality return either—they only achieve the opposite.⁴⁹

According to Falun Gong's teachings, the cultivation of virtue is not only an effective remedy against domestic disorder, but it will also lead to a stable and peaceful nation—presumably one that need not invest so heavily in national defense spending. In his essay “Pacify the External by Cultivating the Internal,” Li states:

A peaceful world is what people hope for. If at this point an excessive number of laws and decrees are created to secure stability, it will end up having the opposite effect. In order to solve this problem, virtue has to be cultivated around the world—only this way can the problem be fundamentally resolved. If officials are unselfish, the state will not be corrupt. If the population values self-cultivation and the nurturing of virtues, and if both officials and civilians alike exercise self-restraint in their minds, the whole nation will be stable and supported by the people. Being solid and stable, the nation will naturally intimidate foreign enemies and peace will thus reign under heaven.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Li Hongzhi, “Teaching the Fa in San Francisco,” April 6, 1997.

http://en.falundafa.org/eng/lectures/1997L.html#_Toc511984050 (accessed 07-06-2017)

⁵⁰ Li Hongzhi, “Pacify the External by Cultivating the Internal,” January 5 1996.

<http://en.falundafa.org/eng/jjyz24.htm> (accessed 07-06-2017)

Whether intended or not, these statements can be interpreted as a critique of CCP's methods. They call into question the value of China's massive domestic security force, as well as the notion that only through the guidance of the Communist Party could the Chinese people emancipate themselves from foreign subjugation and humiliation. Thus, in the official propaganda against Falun Gong, several articles sought to remind readers of the Party's great accomplishments in bringing the country glory, with one article stating "only Marxism can save China and only the Chinese Communist Party can lead us to accomplish the great cause of reinvigorating the Chinese nation."⁵¹ Falun Gong's teachings also question the very notion that a centralized state is capable of resolving social pathologies. According to a 2006 article promoted by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the idea that governments cannot effectively resolve social problems was precisely one of the reasons that Falun Gong was considered heretical and banned.⁵²

Not only does Falun Gong refute the Party's claims to possess the knowledge required to resolve social ills, it criticizes the entire ontological system of the Party, and of the ability to achieve salvation through mundane means. The CCP maintains that science—or, borrowing Hu Jintao's phrase, the "Scientific Outlook on Development"—is the key to realizing an advanced society, and thus to preserving Party legitimacy. As Vivienne Shue writes, "Scientific knowledge and technological know-how are presented

⁵¹ Xinhua, "PLA, Armed Police Support Government Ban on Falun Gong," July 24, 1999.

⁵² Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Latvia, "Q&A: The Falun Gong Cult," April 30, 2006.

by the state not only as exhibiting and belonging to a universal set of established, non-falsifiable truths; they are figured also as morally sound and good because, through science and technology, modernization will be achieved.”⁵³ Faith in science is contrasted in Party literature with idealism and superstition, which are necessarily the enemies of progress. Falun Gong rejects this dichotomy: while science has a legitimate and positive role, it is incapable of proving moral truths, or of admitting the existence of Gods or higher realms of being. Insofar as faith in science has displaced the role of religion or traditional beliefs, it is not seen as a path to progress, but rather the cause of humanity’s moral decline.⁵⁴

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Falun Gong challenged the Party’s narrative of progress by stressing the supremacy of divine authority. In Falun Gong’s worldview, the real forces that shape the lives of men are supernatural: a multitude of divine beings oversee human affairs, and history progresses according to the will of gods, not of men.

As Li writes in *Zhuan Falun*:

*The development of humankind can be controlled only by higher lives at a very lofty level, and it progresses according to the law of development. Our ordinary human society progresses according to the law of history’s development. You may wish it to develop in a certain way and to achieve a certain goal, but those higher lives do not consider it this way. [...] In fact, how human science should develop is also paced according to the arrangement of history. If you want to humanly realize a certain goal, it cannot be achieved.*⁵⁵

⁵³ Shue, p. 50.

⁵⁴ Li Hongzhi, “Lecture in Sydney,” 1996; Li Hongzhi, “Teaching the Fa at the Conference in Europe,” May 1998. Falundafa.org

⁵⁵ Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun*, p. 411.

CCP Responses

The Party took obvious umbrage to Falun Gong's critiques of modernity, interpreting them—perhaps rightly—as undermining its essential legitimizing narratives. In the initial attacks on Falun Gong in the state-run press, a prominent theme was that Falun Gong denied the “progressive tendency of history,” that it opposes the forces of materialism, and that it is “anti-science.” Eliminating Falun Gong was presented as an essential task if the Communist project is to succeed. As Xinhua wrote the day after the crackdown began:

Marxist dialectic materialism and historical materialism represent the world outlook and methodology of the proletariat, and the scientific theories of Marxism established on the basis of this worldview should serve as the spiritual pillar of communists. Falun Dafa as created by Li Hongzhi preaches idealism and theism and denies all scientific truth, and thus is absolutely contradictory to the fundamental theories and principles of Marxism. [...] In the face of this significant issue, which involves the fundamental beliefs of the communists, concerns the ideological foundation for people across the country....and has a bearing on the future and destiny of the party and the state, every CPC member must take a clear and firm stand and must unify their thinking in accordance with the decision of the party central committee.⁵⁶

The notion of divine authority, in particular, is anathema to the Communist Party, which holds human agency to be supreme. Falun Gong's “theism” was therefore a major recurring theme in the media attacks against it. Numerous articles published in the initial weeks of the crackdown concern themselves with refuting the notion of any consciousness beyond that of man, thus confirming Voegelin's idea that, for gnostics,

⁵⁶ Xinhua, “CPC Central Committee Forbids Party Members to Practice Falun Gong,” July 23, 1999.

“there can be no being or image of being that might make human will and thought appear finite.”⁵⁷ Echoing Marx, the official press posited that God is a creation of man—not the other way around. A representative editorial published in the People’s Daily denounced Falun Gong by declaring: “idealism advocates theism and attributes the development of the objective world to supernatural forces, thus creating gods... [but] the so-called ‘god’s will’ is in fact the will of man.”⁵⁸ Another article in Xinhua wrote:

*[Li Hongzhi] says that man was created by gods and life and death and disease are debts acquired in previous lives. [...] he has used the cover of " truthfulness, benevolence and tolerance" to encourage people who lack mental or spiritual ballast or have no beliefs to wish for things that don't exist.*⁵⁹

Another Xinhua article suggests that once the Communist Party has succeeded in realizing its objectives—achieving a state in which humans have fully mastered their environment and their destiny—the people will have no further use for imagined gods:

The day when the broad masses of people find themselves in the right place in China's drive to build socialism with Chinese characteristics and hold the sway over their own destiny, all sorts

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p. 30.

⁵⁸ Xinhua, “People’s Daily on Struggle between Materialism and Idealism,” July 27, 1999.

⁵⁹ Xinhua, “Analysis of Falun Gong leader’s Malicious Fallacies,” July 22, 1999.

*of saviors will disappear from the scene.*⁶⁰

According to the People's Daily, Falun Gong aims to supplant "the power of material and mankind with some kind of supernatural power, and goes further, denying the progress of history and human morality." It continues:

*The key purpose of Li's theory is to fundamentally deny the progressive tendency of human history, deny the tremendous accomplishments China has attained in the two decades of reform and opening-up, and deny the significant changes and progress of the Chinese people's ideological and mental outlook.*⁶¹

The editorial further states that "without lofty ideals and persistent pursuits, human society would never have been able to develop from its primitive stage into the current nuclear age, and mankind would never have entered the age of space flight."⁶² Another article in Xinhua similarly sought to counter Falun Gong's claims about the limits and shortcomings of modern science:

*Chinese scientists have said that Falun Gong headed by Li is a fallacious theory that goes against scientific findings. [...] Lu Bekui, president of the Nanjing Zhijinshan astronomical observatory, said that "Falun Gong defies science, and astronomical research has exposed its absurdity." He said that scientists are able to predict astronomical phenomena such as collisions between comets and the planet Jupiter. However, Li Hongzhi says that only the Falun Dafa can explain the mysteries of the universe."*⁶³

⁶⁰ Xinhua, "Li Hongzhi's 'life origin' Theory Refuted," July 29, 1999.

⁶¹ Xinhua, "People's Daily on Struggle Between Materialism and Idealism," July 27, 1999.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Xinhua, "Falun Gong Criticized by Scientists and Practitioners," July 25, 1999.

Falun Gong's emphasis on quietude and release from worldly attachments and desires was also fodder in the Party's attacks against it. The People's Daily wrote that Falun Gong "persuades people to give up all 'desires, ideals and pursuits'...and concentrate on Falun Gong exercise to 'transcend the secular world,'" thus spreading a "negative and idealistic philosophy of life among the people." The Chinese people, the editorial seems to be saying, must live for the here and now; only then can the great cause be achieved. As noted in one Xinhua article, by persuading people to "give up their ideals and pursuits," Falun Gong "militates against the building of socialism with Chinese characteristics."⁶⁴

This became a consistent theme in official denunciations against Falun Gong, whose practitioners were routinely criticized for apparently having withdrawn from worldly interests in favour of transcendental aims. In one illustrated children's textbook, Falun Gong practitioners are depicted meditating contentedly, oblivious as their lives crumble around them.⁶⁵ Alternately, Falun Gong is blamed for causing practitioners to become disengaged from their jobs and unfeeling toward their relatives. Some were able to "return to a normal life" following painstaking reeducation by the party, but those who persisted in practicing Falun Gong faced the ruination of their previously happy families. A telling anecdote reads:

He Qun, a Falun Gong practitioner in Jiangsu Province, neglected his family for the sake of

⁶⁴ Xinhua, "Xinhua Commentary on Political Nature of Falun Gong," August 1, 1999.

⁶⁵ Lu Renjie. et al., *Pictures That Expose and Criticize Falun Gong* (揭批法轮功板画) (Beijing: China Writers Publishing House 2003), p 5.

returning to "paradise" and of "getting away from all the sufferings." He was arrested for engaging in such illegal activities as printing leaflets publicizing Falun Gong. And inside the detention house, he defied the law with a fast. At the news, his parents, wife and daughter went to wise him [sic]. His mother even knelt down in front of him, crying and begging him to think about the aged parents and the young kid, but still, he showed no mercy to them ... It's true that he gave up families and affections, yet after he was sentenced to a seven-year imprisonment, his parents took over the burden of life and the debts of the family for him, as well as the blow and pains caused by the leaving of their daughter-in-law and grand-daughter. The family that used to be so happy fell apart because of this.⁶⁶

The appearance of these narratives in the official press makes clear that seeking emancipation from worldly affairs and emotional entanglements is considered highly anti-social, if not seditious behaviour. But despite its emphasis on relinquishing attachments to sentiment, Falun Gong does not counsel its practitioners to neglect the care of or responsibility toward families, or the neglect of their jobs.⁶⁷ If anything, it is the Party-state that removes Falun Gong practitioners from families, and mandates that unrepentant practitioners be denied housing, jobs, and admission to universities.⁶⁸ In a series of accounts relayed by Amnesty International, former Falun Gong labor camp detainees recall how authorities coerced their spouses to divorce them and prevented them from receiving visits from aged parents who were close to death. In one case, camp authorities refused to allow a woman to attend the funeral of her husband and young

⁶⁶ Facts.org.cn, 'How Falun Gong Treats Family,' May 3, 2016. http://www.facts.org.cn/krs/sofg/200810/14/t20081014_780731.htm. Accessed April 24, 2017.

⁶⁷ Li, *Zhuan Falun*, pp. 267-268, 276, 395; Li, "Cultivation and Work," April 26, 1999. <http://en.falundafa.org/eng/jjyz34.htm> (accessed 07-06-2016)

⁶⁸ Stephen Noakes and Caylan Ford, "Managing Political Opposition Groups in China: Explaining the Continuing Anti-Falun Gong Campaign," *China Quarterly*, 223 (Sept 2015) p. 671-672.

child because she had not yet renounced Falun Gong:

Zhang Weidi also recounted the situation of one woman, a Falun Gong practitioner whose husband and young child had died accidentally at home from gas asphyxiation while she was in the camp.

*'When her husband and daughter died she was very close to the end of her term. An official of the local government came to see her, to give her the news. He told that if she wanted to go home and see her dead husband and daughter she would first have to "transform". She refused. So she wasn't allowed to go see them. We heard her crying every day.'*⁶⁹

It is difficult to reconcile these accounts with the Party's professed interest in family integrity. One explanation may be that the CCP is not in fact concerned for the families of Falun Gong practitioners, but rather with the transcendent objectives of the religion. Practitioners had the temerity to aspire to leave behind the secular world governed by the Party, retiring to a place where its authority does not extend. The party's response to this affront must be to bring them back down to earth.

The same analysis can be applied to another claim that became a centerpiece of CCP attacks on Falun Gong: namely, that 1,400 people had died after practicing, apparently for refusing medical treatment.⁷⁰ The idea that Falun Gong's teachings "caused death" in this manner has been used to argue that the crackdown on the group is in fact necessary to protect human rights.⁷¹

As noted above, Falun Gong holds that all misfortune is a result of karma or sin,

⁶⁹ Amnesty International, "Changing the Soup but not the Medicine: Abolishing Re-education Through Labour in China," (2013), pp. 29-30.

⁷⁰ Facts.org.cn, "Why do two million practitioners dare not to see a doctor?" April 21, 2014.

⁷¹ Statement by Ye Xiaowen, Administrator of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, at press conference Held by the Information Office of the State Council, November 4, 1999. <http://www.china.org.cn/e-fabuhui/download/news/English/PressConferences/991104/01e.htm> (Accessed 07-06-2017)

which can only be resolved through suffering or, in some circumstances, divine grace. Thus, while Li acknowledged that modern medicine can address the symptoms of disease, he also teaches that medical means are incapable of addressing the underlying karmic cause of illness, which is supernatural.⁷² Falun Gong also maintains that the course of life—and the time of death—is largely predetermined. Thus, while Falun Gong does not prohibit practitioners from seeking medical treatment, many practitioners do exhibit some reluctance to do so, particularly for minor ailments. The Party’s claim that some people died after declining medical treatment is thus plausible, even if many of the specific cases it cites appear dubious.

Yet in the years preceding the crackdown, government agencies had paradoxically been praising Falun Gong for improving public health. In 1996, for instance, the State Qigong Association wrote that Falun Gong had produced “unparalleled results in terms of fitness and disease prevention.”⁷³ A 1998 survey sponsored by the State Sports Commission found that 97.9% of the 12,000 practitioners interviewed claimed better health as a result of the practice.⁷⁴ As late as 1999, an official from the sports commission was boasting to foreign reporters that Falun Gong had saved the country billions of Yuan in medical fees.⁷⁵ And in a population of several million practitioners,

⁷² Li, *Zhuan Falun*, p. 345.

⁷³ Quoted in Penny, *The Religion of Falun Gong*, p. 51.

⁷⁴ David Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China* (Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 263.

⁷⁵ Bay Fang, “An Opiate of the Masses?” *U.S. World and News Report*, February 22, 1999.

1,400 deaths would represent a remarkably low mortality rate, particularly when considering that a sizeable majority of practitioners were over 50, and many were initially drawn to *qigong* precisely because they had serious illnesses.⁷⁶ The Party's case is further undermined by the evidence that its policies—rather than Falun Gong practice—are far more damaging to the health of practitioners. In addition to widespread reports of torture and killing in custody, there are numerous accounts of government officials denying medical treatment to Falun Gong practitioners because they refused to recant their beliefs.⁷⁷

Again, this suggests that Falun Gong's true heresy is not that it actually imperilled public health. Rather, it was the message that science—in this case modern medicine—is incapable of resolving mankind's suffering: that there is a limit to man's ability to know or to conquer nature. Thus, in one early Xinhua denunciation of Falun Gong, the editors thought to remind readers of miracles of modern medicine:

*Du Guiyou, a pharmacologist, said that it is medical treatment which has greatly improved man's health conditions. He said that among other achievements, life expectancy has greatly increased due to the discoveries of medical science such as penicillin. In the early 21st century, he said, people may expect to live an average of 90 years in light of the biological engineering revolution.*⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Noah Porter, "Falun Gong in the United States: An Ethnographic Study," (2003) MA Thesis, University of South Florida, p. 63; Zheng Jian, "Better Health, Better Life: Surveys on Healing and Fitness from Practicing Falun Gong," April 2014.

⁷⁷ Amnesty International, "Urgent Action: Falun Gong Practitioner Denied Medical Care," March 31, 2011; Amnesty International, "Medical concern/fear of torture or other ill-treatment: Ouyang Wen (f), aged 48, Falun Gong practitioner," March 2, 2009.

⁷⁸ Xinhua, "Falun Gong criticized by scientists and practitioners," July 25, 1999.

That the discovery of penicillin has extended life spans is obvious enough, and Falun Gong disciples would find little cause to disagree with this assertion. Yet in the specific context of the CCP's ideological battle against Falun Gong, this is a telling passage, and one that is broadly representative of the party's gnostic outlook. Since at least the third century BCE, religious practitioners in China have sought a path to longevity and immortality through the practice of *qigong*-like exercises, and through rigorous moral practice. Buddhism holds that immortality is attainable by shedding all human attachments, desires and illusions, and thus escaping the cycle of rebirth and the suffering of the world. In many ways Falun Gong is a spiritual heir to these traditions, positing that the cultivation of mind and body can enable one to reach higher realms and eventually transcend this human plane. Yet the CCP offers a different possibility: that human life will be extended *en masse* beyond its natural limits through the application of mundane empirical sciences. It makes no demands that people engage in rigorous moral or physical conditioning, to relinquish selfish wants or to practice ascetics. It requires only their loyalty. **THIS SECTION TO BE SHORTENED.**

Conclusion

The foregoing sections have...applied Vogelín...

TO ADD...

Group is not power-seeking, just anti-CCP.

Not just institutional reasons, but the 2 were moral rivals...this underpins the institutional stuff, not the other way around...