

Can Media Kill?

How Chinese Media Breeds Violence, Inhumanity



Tortured repeatedly over the course of a year with electric shock batons and severe beatings, 49-year-old Mr. Ma Xue was released from police custody in an emaciated state (above). (Mr. Ma before being tortured, at right.) Tens of thousands in China like Mr. Ma have been detained and tortured simply for practicing Falun Gong—a traditional Chinese exercise and meditation practice.

Mass Violence Requires Mass Media

Recent history has shown that genocide and mass killings are not carried out by autocratic rulers alone. These crimes against humanity require the support and mobilization of a large following, and the willingness of most others to look the other way.

In Nazi Germany, how many tens of thousands of Germans operated death camps, stormed the homes of Jews in the night, and willingly shot countless others? In Cambodia during the mid-1970's, how many of the Khmer Rouge's Communist forces were needed to kill between 1-2 million people in four years? And in 1994 in Rwanda, how many husbands, fathers and sons took up machetes and other farm tools to slaughter the Tutsis?

Who were these people that would torture and kill so many of their fellow human beings, and what drove them to do so? A complete answer to this question would perhaps require an in-depth study of historical context, psychological factors and so on, but there is one element that is constant in each of these tragedies, playing a vital role throughout: the media.

Weapons of Mass Deception

Whether it is the dehumanization of Jewish people in Nazi rhetoric, or the shrill calls upon the people of Rwanda to kill Tutsis, the role of the media in mass torture and killing is unmistakable. In each of these chapters of history, the media was utilized to bring about two phenomena: 1) the demonization of the target group to such an extent that they were no longer looked upon as human, thereby making their "extermination" not only tolerable, but desirable; and 2) intertwining the extermination of a group together with a patriotic, national or ethnic cause, thereby channeling people's affection for their nation or ethnicity into the "extermination" campaign.

Tragically, this same cycle is occurring in China today, where media is utilized to dehumanize and stir up nationalism, justifying and leading to large-scale violence against a group. Tens of thousands have been tortured. Thousands are dead, and the death-toll continues to climb daily.

In 1992, a Chinese spiritual practice

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China's Communist Party Leverages U.S. Media

An Open Letter to the Associated Press

On January 21, the AP's Beijing Bureau released the story "Chinese Government Shows off Repentant Falun Gong Followers," which covers carefully staged interviews with individuals reportedly involved with a 2001 incident in which five people set themselves on fire in Tiananmen Square. The AP's article propagated the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) hate propaganda against Falun Gong around the world, providing no voice to Falun Gong representatives or spokespersons, nor coverage of the wealth of information available to refute claims made by the CCP concerning the self-immolation tragedy. We at the association, undoubtedly like many of your readers, can only wonder: Does the AP not realize this article is serving as a mouthpiece for the Chinese Communist Party in its deadly campaign against Falun Gong?

The CCP's official portrayal of the January 2001 Tiananmen Square self-immolation tragedy is engulfed by unanswered questions. Over the past four years numerous reports by independent media and human rights bodies worldwide have questioned and repudiated claims by the Chinese Communist re-

gime linking Falun Gong to the immolations. As early as August 2001, the statement of International Education Development (IED) at the United Nations noted, "...we have obtained a video of that incident that in our view proves that this event was staged by the government." Many have raised serious, yet unanswered questions. *The Washington Post* is one of several parties that have called into question official CCP narratives of the event.

Communist leaders in China have from day one used the incident to breed hatred and violence against the Falun Gong, both in China and beyond. It has been, in the truest sense, a Beijing "propaganda victory," as *The New York Times* called it. If Beijing's claims about the incident were not suspect enough at first, its adaptation and packaging of the incident in subsequent months should be more than enough grounds for suspicion. That Beijing barred foreign journalists from interviewing the victims (while giving State press regular access) for an entire year, and even went so far as to detain those who sought to inves-

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How does the Chinese Communist leadership utilize state-run media and information control to drive the “eradication” of Falun Gong?

1. State-Ordered Book Burnings

Immediately following the official “ban” on Falun Gong in China, all books, recordings and other Falun Gong materials were forcibly confiscated from millions of households. Public book burnings were held in many city streets as both a way to destroy Falun Gong materials that reveal the benign reality of the group and reinforce among the public that practicing Falun Gong was officially “illegal.”

Falun Gong books and materials were also shown on national television being bull-dozed and destroyed en masse in giant shredders.

The confiscation of this “illegal” material effectively removed from circulation information that explained what Falun Gong is, thereby setting the stage for the state-run media to become



the only source of information on the practice. The media's barrage of vicious propaganda could thus have quite an effect.

2. Internet Blockage, “State Secrets”

Employing a staggering 100,000 Internet police (according to CNN) and having invested billions of dollars in the “Great Firewall” of China, Chinese authorities have secured a strong hold over most Internet content and communications in China.

Falun Gong-related websites and human rights or news websites that might carry reports pertaining to Falun Gong and the persecution of the practice in China are strictly blocked.

All information about Falun

Gong practitioners being tortured or killed is considered “state secrets” and those who expose such cases “traitors.” Many are detained and tortured themselves for posting to or downloading from the Internet such information.

E-mails, phones and text messaging are also monitored. Those caught sending or receiving Falun Gong-related content are pursued by police, with many receiving up to three years of forced “re-education through labor.”



56-year-old Ms. Zhao Chunying was abducted and tortured to death by Chinese police after she posted on the Internet abuses she suffered at the hands of Chinese police.

Mass Violence Requires Mass Media

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of exercise and meditation known as Falun Gong, which teaches “truthfulness, compassion and tolerance,” was first introduced to the Chinese public. Part of China’s traditional culture, it was taught for free in parks and other public places, and spread by word of mouth. Its health benefits propelled it across boundaries of age, class and race. By 1998, some 100 million were practicing.

Fearing Falun Gong’s popularity was overshadowing his own legacy, in 1999 then-Chinese leader Jiang Zemin banned the practice and instituted a policy to “eradicate” it, using systematic torture on its adherents.

In order to enlist the general public in the “fight” against Falun Gong, Chinese state-run

media has been utilized in its full capacity to demonize the practice, and to twist the persecution of Falun Gong into a campaign to “defend” China.

According to the *Epoch Times*, over 300,000 news articles and programs “smearing and targeting Falun Gong were published or broadcast” throughout China in one six month period. Over the past five years, television stations have held numerous propaganda marathons vilifying the practice, with some programs running 24-hours a day. And the disinformation campaign reaches beyond the state-run media agencies: school children are forced to recite poems attacking Falun Gong; college entrance exams contain dozens of questions criticizing the practice; train tickets contain accusatory verses; comic books ridicule the practice; and work-

places hold mandatory “study sessions” on it. The entire society is thus engulfed in an anti-Falun Gong fury.

To date, there are over 35,000 documented cases of Falun Gong followers being brutalized or tortured in police custody. Millions of homes have been ransacked, with mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, dragged off and never heard from again. An estimated 2 million are held in labor camps and detention centers across China. Thousands have been tortured to death.

Today, as in Nazi Germany, Khmer Rouge Cambodia and genocide-stricken Rwanda, the media is a driving force, propelling the Chinese populace to wage a genocidal war on itself, while causing countless others to quietly, shamefully pretend they do not see.

3. Bending the Will of a Nation

When Jiang Zemin – China’s former top leader – ordered the “eradication” of Falun Gong in 1999, the order was issued as a three-part directive: 1) Destroy their reputations; 2) Destroy them financially; and 3) Destroy them physically.

In response, virtually every institution in society was mobilized to carry out the directive. The media, which is entirely state-run, aired programs, in some cases, 24-hours a day, vilifying Falun Gong. During the time span of a single month, for example, the People’s Daily published 347 articles attacking Falun Gong, many of which were not merely anti-Falun Gong “opinions” but fabricated stories, casting Falun Gong as murderers and “rats” of society, deserving punishment in the form of arrests, interrogation, torture and if necessary, extra-judicial killing.

The media, therefore, carries out a very specific role in the overall campaign to “eradicate Falun Gong.” The aim is to bend public opinion against the practice to such an extent that private citizens will aid the police in the illegal arrest, detention, interrogation and torture of non-violent and innocent persons.

Campaigns of Propaganda, Torture and Killing Planned and Implemented in Tandem

In June of 1999, Jiang Zemin established the 610 Office, an extra-judicial, Gestapo-like agency charged with designing and implementing the “eradication” of Falun Gong in China. To date, of the more than 35,000 documented cases of torture or severe abuse, and thousands dead

“Make them [Falun Gong] like rats scurrying in the street—in that everyone will want to smash them... shoot them once confirmed... Thoroughly eradicate humanity’s malignant tumor.”

— Excerpts from a prominent website run by a media executive from Wuhan Province

from torture and mistreatment, a majority have occurred at the hands of 610 Office officials or those working under their direction throughout China.

The 610 Office was organized, from the beginning, to work alongside the Propaganda Department. Liu Yunshan, the director of the Propaganda Department was appointed to run the 610 Office, and Li Dongsh-

eng, the deputy director of the Central Chinese Television Station was appointed deputy director of the 610 Office.

Thus, officials in charge of disseminating anti-Falun Gong propaganda were working side-by-side in the same department with those directing the brainwashing centers, torture and extra-judicial killings of Falun Gong practitioners.

The Tiananmen Square “Self-immolation”: Potent Hate Propaganda

On January 23, 2001, five individuals allegedly set themselves on fire in Tiananmen Square. Within hours, Chinese authorities flooded the state-run media with grisly photos of the event, claiming the self-immolators were Falun Gong practitioners. Days later, a *Washington Post* article revealed that at least two of the self-immolators had never been seen practicing Falun Gong. And further evidence uncovered in the subsequent weeks revealed the incident was staged.

Inside China, however, where

all media were saturated with programs accusing the Falun Gong, the incident became a key tool for Chinese authorities to bend public opinion against Falun Gong. The “self-immolation” infuriated a misled public whose anger, over time, was directed toward the group.

People changed from sympathizing with the Falun Gong to attacking the practice. Hate crimes targeting Falun Gong followers increased and Jiang’s faction within the Central Government also escalated its persecution.

FACT: A *Washington Post* reporter went to the hometown of two of the alleged self-immolators to investigate, finding no one had ever seen them practice Falun Gong.

FACT: Police on Tiananmen Square were carrying numerous fire extinguishers, which were used to put out the fires of the self-immolators almost immediately. According to foreign reporters that have spent years on the square, the police there normally never carry fire extinguishers. Additionally, the self-immolators were wearing heavy, protective clothing.

FACT: Video footage taken from surveillance cameras show one person shooting the whole

event up-close with a video camera. The up-close footage is later used in a barrage of propaganda against Falun Gong. Chinese authorities claim the up-close footage was taken by CNN, but CNN says they have no footage from the incident.

FACT: National Taiwan University’s Speech Processing Laboratory, a world leader in the areas of Chinese language speech identification, synthesis, and verification, analyzed the voice of one of the self-immolators named Wang Jindong from a number of different interviews broadcast by China’s state-run television. The laboratory concluded that the Wang Jindong interviewed in one of the programs is a different person than

“...we have obtained a video of that incident that in our view proves that this event was staged by the government.”

— The International Education Development (IED) NGO in an August 2001 statement made before the United Nations in Switzerland about the Tiananmen Square Self-immolation incident.

the Wang Jindong appearing in the other programs, suggesting that the government hired different actors at different times.

FACT: According to the Xinhua News Agency (the Chinese government’s news agency), the self-immolation incident took place at 2:41 p.m. After adding the 7 minutes it took to put out the fires and the 20 minutes that it normally takes for a vehicle to go from Tiananmen Square to Jishuitan Hospital, the ambulance should have arrived at Jishuitan Hospital between 3:00 and 3:30 p.m. Yet several medical personnel at the hospital have confirmed that the ambulance didn’t arrive at the hospital until around 5:00 p.m. What happened during those hours of disappearance?

Award-winning Documentary

In November 2003, the English film “False Fire,” which examines the suspicious points of the Tiananmen “self-immolation” incident, won an honorary award at the 51st Columbia International Film Festival for its analytical approach and exposure of the tragic event.



www.falsefire.com

4. Cloaking Hate Mongering as News

Communist authorities have utilized the state-run media in China to create innumerable fabricated news stories aimed at demonizing Falun Gong. Violent crimes committed by people with no connection to Falun Gong were re-written by the state-run media to frame Falun Gong followers for the crimes. Some of this hate propaganda has found its way into Western media reports.

A typical case: On July 2, 2002, China’s Xinhua News agency published a story entitled “16 Beggars Poisoned: the

Suspect is a Falun Gong Member.” Local media, however, told a very different story.

Seven hours before the Xinhua article was published, local media reported that the case had not yet been solved. The Xinhua report, however, said the case had been solved. According to Xinhua the alleged murderer was one Chen Fuzhao, said to be a Falun Gong member. The local media did not mention Falun Gong at all.

Furthermore, the Xinhua account lacked details about the crimes, while the local article

had many details about the still-open case.

Days later, a member of the Department of Propaganda for Cangnan County told U.S. reporters “with great certainty” that this case had not been solved, and that in fact more than 500 policemen were still investigating the case.

Still, Xinhua’s version of the story was repeated by state-run media throughout China. International wire services outside China then picked up the so-called news story, distributing it around the world.

5. Communist Party Leverages U.S. Media

An Open Letter to the Associated Press (continued)

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tigate the story, were obvious indicators that something was afoot.

What a startling and regrettable thing, then, that the AP’s latest story would present the 2001 immolation following the CCP’s script so closely as to be almost indistinguishable. The article failed to raise any basic challenges to the information the State provided through carefully staged and regulated interviews. Secondly, it gave no voice to Falun Gong. Thirdly, it did not engage – much less present – the wealth of information that suggests the immolation incident’s falsity. It seems nearly all critical faculties were suspended.

Why, if not to serve its own terrible agenda, would China’s regime set up for foreign press interviews with its alleged immolation survivors? According to Reporters Sans Frontiers (Reporters Without Borders) and other human rights organizations, the Chinese regime tries to stamp out any and all independent reporting on Falun Gong. Foreign journalists are not allowed to interview practitioners; unless, that is, the practitioners are under the control of their captors. Those that attempt to do so are detained, interrogated and threatened, face the possible revocation of their reporting licenses, and could even be physically abused themselves. Many Chinese citizens have been arrested, tortured, and even killed for reporting on rights violations against the Falun Gong. Falun Gong is al-

lowed absolutely no voice in China.

With so many resources meant to end independent reporting on Falun Gong, why would Chinese officials open the doors and usher in foreign media on this occasion (the immolation anniversary) and under such carefully engineered circumstances? And was this not the same stunt (only with different scripted lines) pulled three years ago? Their agenda should be obvious: to paint Falun Gong as a menace and to sidetrack would-be scrutiny of the regime’s violent persecution.

To date, we have received more than 160,000 letters from individuals across China openly declaring that the statements they made while imprisoned and under severe abuse do not represent the truth of what they think or how they were treated. Imagine the ferocity, the barbarity, that was unleashed to make so many people say and do things against their consciences in captivity? Could the immolator interviewees be any different? Is theirs any less a coerced voice – one manufactured in custody over long, untold months? The Chinese Communist Party has been torturing people into “confessions” and “repentances” since as early as the 1940’s. This should be nothing new to the AP or any journalist, for that matter. And all of this, of course, is meaningful only if first one establishes that the immolators ever were Falun Gong adherents.

Yet, in the face of such horrors – what many human rights lawyers are calling genocide – the report from your Beijing Bureau has offered something of a CCP apologetic, reconstituting the very same hate propaganda that makes possible the torture and deaths of so many. We would think that as a news organization the AP has a moral and professional responsibility to dig into this story, find the truth, and report it. It may not be easy, but nobody ever said good journalism was. True, it may upset the current powers in Beijing, even making for a rocky business partnership. But then such is the cost of fair and accurate reporting, is it not?

The persecution of Falun Gong is vast in scope and horri-

— The Eastern U.S. Falun Dafa [Falun Gong] Association

Why is Falun Gong Persecuted in China?

Chinese Government Insiders and Overseas Scholars Identify Two Reasons Why a Faction in the Chinese Leadership Targets Falun Gong

1. Chinese Communist leaders suppress broadly freedom of religion and thought: Christians must join official, government-run “patriotic churches,” or risk persecution. Baptism and Roman Catholicism are illegal. Uncensored versions of the Bible are illegal and designated “evil cult materials.” (Although many Americans do not know this, it is indeed true.)

2. Top communist leader grew resentful of Falun Gong’s widespread popularity: Falun Gong was taught for free and spread by word of mouth. Its health benefits appealed to people of all walks of life and ages. By 1998, some 100 million were practicing. All of this proved irksome for Chinese leader Jiang Zemin. He saw in Falun Gong and its popularity a challenge to his moral authority over the Chinese people—the prac-

tice was rooted in people’s hearts and history, unlike communist doctrine. Whereas Jiang demanded that people attend “ideological sessions” to study his own theories, Falun Gong was something people all across China were doing of their own choosing. The contrast wasn’t lost on Jiang “This is obviously very personal for Jiang,” one Party official told the *Washington Post*. “He wants this organization crushed.”

“Few spiritual or religious peoples in the world today face the degree or depth of persecution as do the members of the Falun Gong spiritual movement in China.”

– Rabbi David Saperstein
Former Chair, U.S. Commission on
International Religious Freedom

“Reports continue of deaths of detained [Falun Gong] practitioners following torture and extreme ill-treatment...in all cases where the victims were Falun Gong practitioners, the government has denied any wrongdoing, even in the face of multiple eyewitness testimonies.”

– Amnesty International
Torture: A Growing Scourge in China

What is Falun Gong?

Falun Gong – also called Falun Dafa – is a form of qigong or “Chinese Yoga,” with roots in traditional Chinese culture. It consists of gentle exercises and meditation, along with teachings for self-improvement.

Aside from its popularity (roughly 100 million people), what is usually said to distinguish Falun Gong is its emphasis on the practice of refining one’s moral character in accordance with three core values: truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance. These three values form the backbone of Falun Gong’s philosophy and practitioners of the discipline aspire to live by them in their daily lives, striving to achieve, over time, a state of kindness, selflessness and inner balance.

The discipline of Falun Gong was first made public in May of 1992 in China by Mr. Li Hongzhi, who adherents regard as the practice’s founder or teacher.

From 1992 to 1994, Mr. Li lectured on invitation in almost every major Chinese city, giving 54 series of talks in all. All instruction at that time was overseen by the Chinese Government’s top qigong organization, the China Qigong Scientific Research Society. Since the exercises of Falun Gong were relatively simple and easy to learn, those who had learned

could easily show others. Soon, people began establishing practice sites in parks and public recreation areas throughout China. Furthermore, news reports and word of mouth told of Falun Gong’s health benefits and positive impact.

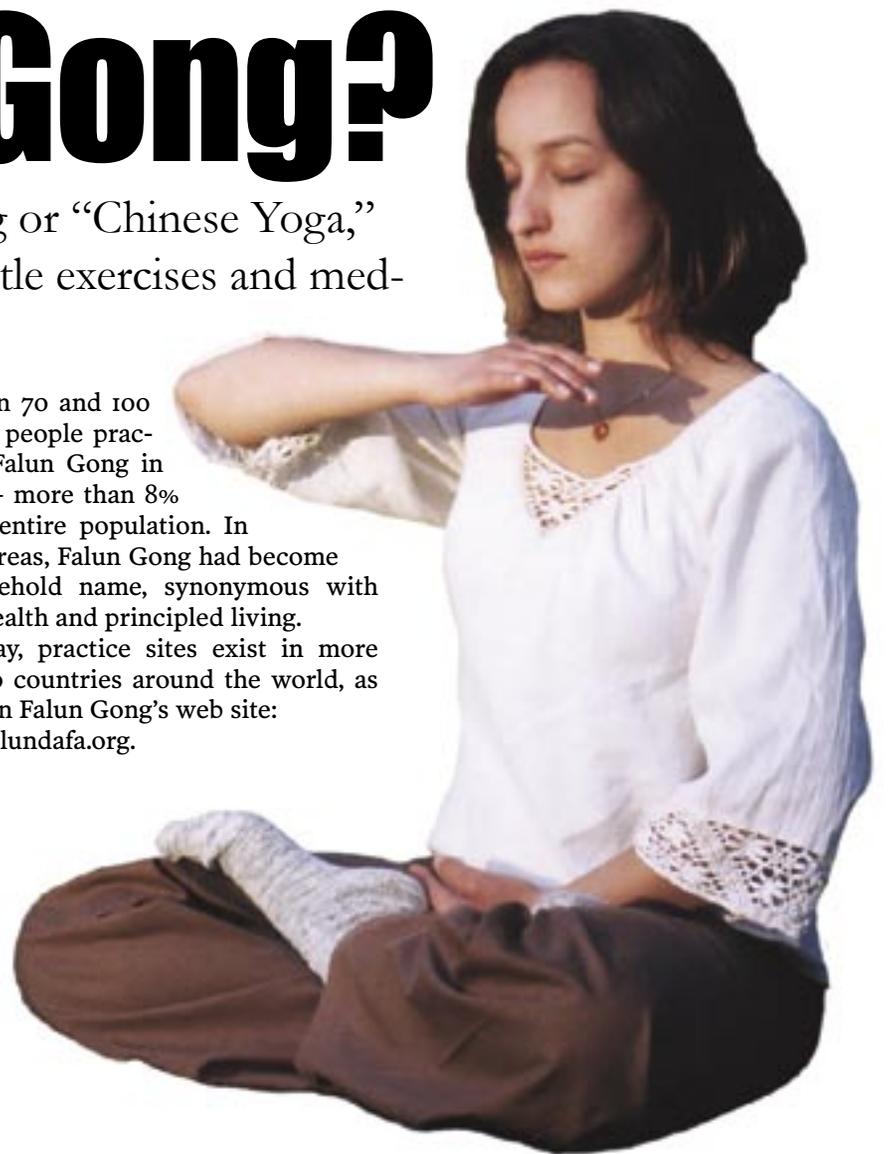
During the early-to-mid 90’s, Falun Gong was also widely embraced by the Chinese Government. Mr. Li was invited to speak at many government venues, such as the Hero’s Foundation in the government’s Public Security Department and received numerous awards such as the “Star Qigong” award given to Mr. Li at the 1993 Oriental Health Expo in Beijing.

By 1996 Falun Gong had established itself as the fastest growing spiritual practice in China, and perhaps, the world. With Mr. Li’s third book, *Zhuan Falun*, landing on Beijing’s best-seller list, millions were said to be practicing by then.

By the end of 1998, a Chinese Government survey concluded there were

between 70 and 100 million people practicing Falun Gong in China – more than 8% of the entire population. In many areas, Falun Gong had become a household name, synonymous with good health and principled living.

Today, practice sites exist in more than 60 countries around the world, as listed on Falun Gong’s web site: www.falundafa.org.



For more information about Falun Gong: www.falundafa.org 877-325-8699 (Toll Free)

For news and information about the persecution: www.faluninfo.net, or call 888-842-4797 (Toll Free)

To find out how you can help: www.fofg.org, or call 866-343-7436 (Toll Free)