

Comparing the Pandemic Cover-Up to the CCP's Latest Persecution Campaign

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By a Falun Dafa practitioner outside of China

Every few years since it took power, the CCP has ordered a political campaign to target a specific group to renew its intimidation of the Chinese people. As qigong became trendy in the 1990s, Falun Gong, an ancient spiritual and meditation discipline based on the principles of “Truthfulness, Compassion, Forbearance,” quickly stood out from thousands of qigong schools because of its free instruction, profound spiritual teachings, and powerful health benefits.

Even though the government initially promoted Falun Gong as it brought down the country's healthcare costs, its overwhelming popularity and complete independence from government control eventually prompted the CCP to choose it as the target of a new political campaign. In 1999, ten years after the massacre of pro-democracy students at Tiananmen Square, the CCP ordered the persecution of Falun Gong.

Combining its decades of experience in carrying out political struggles with the fast development of modern technology, the CCP was able to make the persecution of Falun Gong more covert, cunning, and sophisticated than all its previous campaigns. With strict online censorship and the promise of economic benefits to the West, not only the Chinese but also the rest of the world have turned a blind eye to the massive arrests, detention, torture, and killing of Falun Gong practitioners.

Looking back at how the persecution of Falun Gong has evolved in the past two decades, one can't help but see the astonishing similarity in the cover-up tactics used in both the persecution of Falun Gong and the coronavirus pandemic.

“If the rest of the world had been more aggressive in combating all this misrepresentation and cover-up and denial and counter factual narrative in dealing with organ transplant abuse; if the global system had insisted on transparency and accountability in dealing with organ transplant abuse; and if China had [faced] global pressure for transparency and accountability in its health system in dealing with organ transplant abuse, we wouldn't have this coronavirus now,” said David Matas, a Canadian human

rights lawyer who has investigated the CCP's state-sanctioned organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience.

“One can assume the Chinese Communist Party did not intend to cause the spread of the coronavirus, but what they have been actively engaged in is willful blindness. And I would say that the rest of the world also has joined them in this willful blindness. And we are now all suffering its consequence.” Matas continued. [1]

Below, we look back at the CCP's history in hopes that it can provide some clues in how to prevent this tragedy from happening again.

Censorship

Just as the CCP didn't allow anyone with information about the coronavirus outbreak to disclose it, they also prevented Falun Gong practitioners from exposing the persecution of their faith. Both private and state-run media outlets, websites, and personal blogs were ordered not to publish information about the persecution.

Similarly, the authorities' blocking the publication of coronavirus genome sequences is akin to its banning the publication of Falun Gong books and audiovisual materials.

As a result, people couldn't see authentic information, only government propaganda.

A Falun Gong practitioner told Minghui.org in 2011 that he attended a county-level work meeting about starting another round of editing local chronicles. The chief editor said, "It's absolutely not allowed to put down a word related to the 610 Office (an extralegal agency created specifically to persecute Falun Gong) or Falun Gong in the articles. The international society is criticizing China's human rights situation. The persecution of Falun Gong can't appear in the local chronicles. In some areas, the articles were rejected and had to be re-edited just because they put down information related to Falun Gong." [2]

According to an employee of Baidu, the largest search engine in China, a significant portion of "sensitive words" it censored were related to Falun Gong, such as variations of the name; torture methods described by practitioners; Gao Zhisheng, a Chinese lawyer known for defending Falun Gong practitioners; and the book Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party, which sheds light on the CCP's history of deception and killing.[3]

After arresting and torturing Falun Gong practitioners, the police often threaten them not to report the incident to

Minghui.org, the central news and communications platform for Falun Gong practitioners around the world. Meanwhile, the police also monitor practitioners' cellphones, landlines and emails in attempts to prevent them from raising awareness of the persecution. At the beginning of the pandemic, authorities monitored Dr. Li Wenliang's social media and reprimanded him for "spreading rumors" about the outbreak.

But the censorship didn't stop Falun Gong practitioners from getting the word out. With all information channels strictly controlled by the CCP, some practitioners chose to intercept TV signals to broadcast information about the persecution. Between 2001 and 2005, a total of 129 practitioners, nearly one-third female, were arrested for tapping into TV cables to get the word out. More than 85% of the practitioners, numbering 110, were given prison terms ranging from 3 to 20 years, with an average length of 12.5 years.

By 2017, 11 of the sentenced practitioners had died from torture-induced injuries or health problems, while 10 other practitioners have also lost their lives over the years. Some of the surviving practitioners are still serving time in prison, while others, though released, struggle to deal with the long-term injuries they sustained while in detention. [4]

Other practitioners have been sentenced and tortured simply for talking to people about Falun Gong or distributing literature about the persecution. Ms. Liu Wei, a resident of Tonghua City, Jilin Province, was arrested on August 17, 2011, for talking to people about Falun Gong. She was sentenced to 4.5 years twenty days later by Ji'an City Court. [5]

In another case, Mr. Wang Baoshan, a practitioner in Tangshan City, Hebei Province, was arrested at work on July 3, 2017, days after a banner reading “The World Needs Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance” was found in a neighborhood. He was later sentenced to 5.5 years and fined 20,000 yuan. [6]

Disinformation

Alongside the coverup of the persecution, the CCP also spread disinformation and propaganda to demonize Falun Gong practitioners and justify the persecution.

By the end of 2000—a year and a half after the CCP launched the suppression of Falun Gong—the campaign had failed to garner support among many of the CCP's rank and file. Then-CCP leader Jiang Zemin had toured southern

provinces earlier in 2000 to shore up support for the campaign among local leaders. Meanwhile, public support for the campaign had waned.

On January 23, 2001, five individuals allegedly set themselves on fire at Tiananmen Square in Beijing. The entire scene was caught on camera from multiple angles. Beginning just hours after the event, state-controlled media was flooded with reports that the self-immolators were Falun Gong practitioners. These reports included grisly footage of the victims, portraying Falun Gong teachings as directly responsible for the tragedy.

In the next few weeks, state-run media continued to report on it non-stop, quickly turning people across China from respecting and sympathizing with Falun Gong to becoming infuriated and attacking the practice. Hate crimes targeting Falun Gong practitioners increased, and the CCP escalated its persecution with increased arrests, torture, killing, and forced organ harvesting.

Two decades later, the self-immolation hoax remains the biggest misconception most Chinese have about Falun Gong. [7]

Mislabeled

In the pandemic, coronavirus patients were recategorized as having other diseases in order for the CCP to cover up the severity of the outbreak. In the persecution of Falun Gong, however, such mislabels went both ways: healthy practitioners were labeled as mentally ill, taken to mental hospitals, and injected with toxic drugs, thus becoming real patients; meanwhile, others with mental illnesses but who never practiced Falun Gong were labeled as practitioners and said to have become crazy after learning the practice.

In another propaganda campaign against Falun Gong, the CCP fabricated “1,400 death cases” and claimed that these people died from practicing Falun Gong. A closer look at the cases revealed that some of the “victims” never existed, some never practiced Falun Gong, and one who was said to have refused medical intervention died in the arms of the physicians who treated her. [8]

In one example, Wang Anshou, a worker at the Taishan Machinery Factory in Xingtai City, Shandong Province, killed his parents with a spade when he experienced a relapse of a mental disorder. The Xingtai City People's Court civil case verdict given on November 10, 1999, states, “It is the court's observation that the defendant suffered from a mental disorder before he got married and

had tried to hide the fact. After getting married, the defendant had recurrences of mental illness many times and he had problems for a long time trying to cure his mental disorder. The defendant killed his parents with a spade when his mental illness relapsed...” “The defendant's wife’s firm request for a divorce is supported by the court.”

The CCP blamed Wang's killing spree on his practicing Falun Gong, despite the fact that the court verdict says nothing about him practicing Falun Gong. In addition, he had had a mental disorder since 1988, four years before Falun Gong’s public introduction in 1992. [9]

Concealment

Practitioners’ resilience and persistent efforts to counteract the slander have led more people to see through the CCP’s lies. This turned into a dilemma for the Party. Beginning in 2003, the CCP adopted a strategy called “loose outside but tight inside,” turning the persecution from a public spectacle into a hidden, underground agenda. CCP insiders called it “a war without smoke.” [10]

After the persecution went underground, the CCP claimed that Falun Gong had been defeated and that it had disappeared from China, trying to direct international

attention away from its human rights abuses. This tactic mirrors the CCP's claim of victory in fighting off the virus.

Destruction of Evidence

In 2006, “Annie,” the ex-wife of a surgeon, became the first whistleblower to expose the CCP's forcible removal of vital organs from living Falun Gong practitioners for sale to wealthy Chinese and foreigners. This explained why the number of organ transplants skyrocketed in China after the persecution of Falun Gong began, despite the lack of an established organ donation system.

Annie, who made her first public statement about the organ harvesting atrocity in March 2006, said that her husband told her that he had personally removed the corneas from approximately 2,000 Falun Gong prisoners in Sujiatun hospital in Shenyang City within two years before October 2003. He said that none of the cornea “donors” survived after the procedure because most of their vital organs were also removed and their bodies were then burned. [11]

In response to that allegations and international investigations about forced organ harvesting, the Heilongjiang Province CCP Office issued an announcement on March 25, 2006, ordering all relevant departments to

destroy classified documents, much like how the CCP destroyed virus samples in the current pandemic.

The announcement mandates, “In destroying these documents, one shall make sure there is no way to recover the original documents. Documents on paper shall be burned or shredded and turned into pulp. The paper shredders used should meet the requirements for shredding classified documents. Shredded documents shall be sent to designated places to be destroyed. Two or more people are required to be present, and no one shall leave the scene before the documents are fully destroyed.” [12]

In fact, many more orders in the persecution were given verbally, especially those by the extralegal, Gestapo-like 610 Office, and those who received the orders were forbidden to record the instructions.

In its attempts to cover up the organ harvesting crime, the CCP established a voluntary deceased donor program in 2010 but received few registrations due to culture barriers discouraging Chinese from donating their organs.

According to the China Organ Harvest Research Center (COHRC), “Official accounts indicate that the percentage of organs sourced from donations jumped from 23% in 2013 to 80% in 2014, with voluntary donations becoming

the sole official organ source in 2015. It is not plausible that such a complete transition in this system could have taken place in just one or two years.” [13]

A study reported in BMC Medical Ethics concluded that “rather than the ‘untarnished voluntary system promised by officials,’ a ‘voluntary system appears to operate alongside the continued use of nonvoluntary donors (most plausibly prisoners) who are misclassified as ‘voluntary.’ The study also said the goal of the manufactured data was ‘to create a misleading impression to the international transplantation community about the successes of China’s voluntary organ donation reform, and to neutralize the criticism of activists who allege that crimes against humanity have been committed in the acquisition of organs for transplant.’”[14]

Redirecting Blame

Oftentimes, when countries like the United States condemn the CCP for its notorious human rights record, the CCP criticizes them for interfering with China’s internal affairs. Meanwhile, inside China, the CCP blames overseas Falun Gong practitioners who expose the persecution for “colluding with foreign anti-China forces” and “damaging China’s image.”

When CCP spokesperson Zhao Lijian blamed the U.S. Army for bringing the virus to Wuhan during the Military World Games in October 2019, one can't help but remember how former CCP chairman Jiang Zemin personally handed out a pamphlet defaming Falun Gong to more than ten heads of state during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit held in New Zealand at the end of 1999. In France, Jiang Zemin labeled Falun Gong an "evil cult" to foreign media in order to advance his persecution policy. [15]

History repeats itself. Whatever the case, the "always glorious" CCP never admits wrongdoing. Sometimes it plays the victim, and sometimes it plays the savior of the world. But whatever face it puts on each time, its repressive and authoritarian nature will never change.

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