

PART 2 - YOU'RE A CULT – A REVIEW OF CHINESE SECTS, HETERODOX MILLENARIAN & SYNCRETIC AND CHINESE INTERNAL ARTS BY DAN DOCHERTY

“Bonkers” is the epithet which the legendary man on the Clapham omnibus would use to describe Mr. Li Hong-zhi, founder of *Falungong* (Law/Principle Wheel Cultivation Energy) – also known as *Falundafa* (Law/Principle Wheel Great Law). Li’s work “*Zhuan Falun*” (Turning Law/Principle Wheel – ISBN 962-8143-04-02) is almost 400 pages long, in parts descending into unreadable gibberish and yet...

I have seen Falungong practitioners exercising in London, New York State (at the North American Qigong Association Annual Conference) and Hong Kong. I have discussed the exercises with the well-respected Dr. Roger Jahnke of the NQA and Dr. Alan Peatfield of University College Dublin. Both agree that the Qigong aspect that is practiced in public is basic and reasonably efficacious. Neither flinched or demurred when I described Falungong as a classic heterodox, millenarian, syncretic cult. However, much of the stated philosophy of Falungong is Buddhist in nature and quite admirable. Li emphasises losing attachments and increasing *De* (virtue) by accepting tribulations such as illness, and standing up to an unsympathetic spouse by continuing to practice. The three main *Fa* (Laws/Principles) of Falungong are Truthfulness, Compassion and Forbearance. You will have already noticed some similarities in belief with the White Lotus.

Let’s look at some of the criticisms of Li and Falungong from the Chinese Communist Party (Chicoms) as made in “Li Hongzhi & His Falun Gong (Deceiving the Public and Ruining Lives) (New Star Publishers ISBN 7-80148-238-7). The book sets out Li’s background stating that he was born in 1952 in Jilin, but later falsified his birthdate to make it appear he was a reincarnation of Sakyamuni. He went from being a trumpeter in a police band to police guesthouse attendant to working in a factory security section. However, they say he gave himself a false background as a child prodigy student of mysterious Buddhist and Taoist masters – pretty standard stuff for someone with Messianic tendencies. Tony Blair similarly lied about attending football matches in his youth to appear to be a man of the people.

A first accusation is “Hawking the theory of “doomsday” by declaring that mankind has come to the brink of destruction” and “Claiming that only he himself and his “Falun Dafa” can save mankind.” Mao said (Little Red Book, P. 2), “Without the efforts of the Chinese Communist Party, ... China can never achieve independence and liberation...” While in the short 1969 Constitution of the Communist Party of China, there are seven references to “Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse-tung thought” and three references to Mao himself. Hmm, messianic tendencies seem to be a common theme.

Second is, “Cursing the human race and regarding the earth as a rubbish heap (for bad people).” Whole sections of Chinese society, landlords, intellectuals, the bourgeoisie and even the peasants were sent by Mao and the Chicoms to their deaths during the “Hundred Flowers Campaign”, “The Great Leap Forward” and “The Cultural Revolution.”

Third is “Distorting and belittling religion and claiming that “Falun Dafa” is the orthodox law”. Article 88 of the 1954 Constitution of the People’s Republic of China states, “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief.” If you were to quote this to the Taoists, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Tibetan Lamas interned in the *Laogai* camps over the years they might look somewhat askance. Mao said (Little Red Book, P. 52), “The only way to settle questions of an ideological nature or controversial issues among the people is by the democratic method, the method of discussion, of criticism, of persuasion and education and not by the methods of coercion and repression.” Try telling that to the relatives of the late Wang Pei-sheng and Wu Gong-zao, both sent to the *Laogai* by the Chicomos just for being what they were, teachers of Tai Chi Chuan.

A fourth accusation is “Using “Falun Gong” to amass dirty money, ...tax evasion and money-laundering.” This from a party whose local cadres are selling off peasant land without prior consultation or subsequent compensation, many of whose high-ranking police and military officers are responsible for large-scale software pirating and gangsterism. Li says that practitioners should not charge fees as he does as he has expenses such as travel, bed and board, producing teaching material etc. He certainly seems less grasping that the average American TV evangelist.

It is alleged that 1.404 people have died as a result of Falungong practice. To Western ears that sounds like a lot, but is nothing compared to the tens of millions killed by the Chicomos.

But Li is “bonkers”. He talks about installing a “Falun” (his sect’s logo is the reverse of the Nazi *Swastika* – itself also taken from Buddhism) in the abdomen which rotates clockwise to absorb energy and anti-clockwise to emit energy and benefit others. One wonders if this is more ridiculous than the Taoist concept of *Dantian* (Cinnabar Fields) or the good and bad angels which the Franciscan nuns told me I had on respective shoulders, though I was never sure which was which. Li also talks about the Third Eye between the eyebrows which connects to the Pineal Body at a high level; we can use it to see through our dimension into other time spaces and at a lower level through walls or human bodies. Some of us can read with hands, ears feet or even stomachs. Other skills developed by Falungong cultivation include clairvoyance and the ability to tell the future.

Li is criticised by the Chicom government for saying that illness is a matter of karma (Li interprets this as a kind of psychic baggage) and that practitioners gain karma and lose *De* (virtue) if they try to heal others. Conversely it can be regarded as a tribulation to increase *De*. Li deals with the vexed question of Qigong related psychoses by saying that there is no “cultivation insanity” and that problems and strange behaviour are the result of immoral minds and a show off mentality.

However, he talks about demonic interference which can manifest it in ambient noise every time one tries to practice or in sexual fantasies; these are tribulations so there is no need for treatment. Li says that only one in a hundred Falungong practitioners get it – if some of their claims to the size of their organisation are correct this could involve anything from 300,000 to 700,000 people. He goes on “All of our practitioners should be sure never to behave abnormally among ordinary people.”

Referring to sex and pornography, “There were no such things in our ancient Chinese traditional arts.” My book of erotic Ming prints is available for his perusal.

On the plus side, if one has genuine energy one can give it to others unintentionally. Furthermore Li quotes Sakyamuni who mentioned, “Precept (Morality) and abandoning all desires and hobbies until nothing was left so that one could attain the state of Samadhi” (trance meditation).

If we followed ancient Chinese science and the TV wasn’t invented people would have one in their foreheads and “they can watch anything they want to see.” “Without trains and planes people will be able to levitate in the air.” “The flying saucers of the extraterrestrial can... become large or small.”

Unlike the case of Tai Chi Nei Kung and certain other systems of Qi/Neigong, there is no *Bai Shi* (ceremony of ritual initiation) in Falungong, however there is the idea of filling the headtop with energy, somewhat analogous to the Tai Chi concept of suspended headtop. Indeed Li’s writings use a lot of terms from Taoist Internal Alchemy such as “Mysterious Gate One Aperture”, which Li accuses false Qigong masters of using to refer to the penis (or presumably the vagina), or the “Primary Infant”. He goes on to criticise the concept of three *Dantian*, saying that “*Dan*” is everywhere.

Li pour scorn on “fine arts Qigong” such as music Qigong, Calligraphy Qigong etc and says it is plundering Qigong for money. He is not wrong. He differentiates martial arts Qigong from “internal body cultivation”, saying that the former requires practice in motion so one cannot achieve a state of tranquillity or send Qi to the *Dantian*. I sense he would not win the sympathy vote with Tai Chi Chuan practitioners.

Li talks of shoe imprints on trilobite (fossils) more than 260 million years old, of the oceans swallowing tall and ancient architecture from civilisation that were tens of millions of years old. “Some people do not eat or drink for ... over ten years, but they live very well.” “Not only trees are lives, they also have very advanced thinking activities. “Historically the record for the longest sitting time is over 90 years.” “If I cannot save you, nobody else can do it.”

Li makes valid points about the dangers of “dual cultivation between a man and a woman” though he is naïve in claiming that the practice originated outside of China. He is also correct in stating that the Taoist School is more concerned with developing the body through Internal Alchemy whereas Buddhist meditation is more concerned with the mind, though some Buddhist schools such as Li’s do both. Typically, however, Li brings in other dimensions and the idea that through his cultivation practice human cells are replaced by high energy matter. He talks of a Ming dynasty practitioner who was possessed by a snake which transformed his body into that of a snake to make trouble for Li who caught the snake and used “Dissolving Gong” to dissolve his (its?) lower body and turn it into water while the upper body ran home. The name Jesus comes to mind.

Li correctly states that both gradual and sudden enlightenment are acceptable as the result is the same and that “after the lectures you will also be able to become a good person.” After reading them I felt terrific.

As well as these two books from the two protagonists there is a rather good if overly academic analysis of the story in “FALUN GONG The End of Days” by Maria Hsia Chang (Yale University Press; £16.99; ISBN 0-300-10227-5).

The Chicoms first took action in 1996 when they became aware that Li’s “*Zhuan Falun*” (Turning Law/Principle Wheel) had sold more than 1 million copies. They banned it and 4 other Qigong publications. By that time official estimates of Falungong membership were around 30million. The cult claimed double that; many of them government servants. By April 25th, 1999, as a result of Chicom oppression, cult members held a silent demonstrated outside Communist Party HQ, the Forbidden City, Beijing. After the student rebellion of 1989 and the massacre that followed, the response was predictable. Li emigrated to the USA in early 1998; in July 1999 the Chicoms banned Falungong and all Falungong material; active members were sent to prison and labour camps and psychiatric hospitals almost all without trial. In the past several years there have been protests at the Chicom torture, murder and organ-harvesting of Falungong detainees. Li himself has been accused of being a CIA agent; sect members were accused of treason.

All for non-violent protest, practicing Qigong and believing two or three impossible things before breakfast. All the while Li encouraged martyrdom and criticised the Chicoms from the relative safety of exile.

Yet in 1992 according to Li’s followers, Jiang Ze-min, President of China and head of the Communist Party had private Falungong treatment for arthritis and neck pains, indeed at the time Qigong was seen as an ideal solution to the health care crisis; an ideal way to improve public health and to save money. Li’s sect was also a member of the Chicom controlled Qigong Research Association of China, though they resigned when the persecution started.

When I visited Wudangshan with editor Ron in 1999, we chatted to some of the locals; to a man they told us that the Falungongers were bad people and the Chicoms were right to repress them. It was evident that despite being banned, some groups were still active. In 2006 when we chatted to some of the senior Hubei province Tai Chi teachers, they told us that there was no Falungong around anymore. In fact the green ribbons we saw park Tai Chi and Qigong instructors wearing indicated that their teaching was state approved and licenced. Unlicenced teachers are banned from the parks and only a few Qigong systems – all without ritual or religious overtones, are allowed. Falungong is not one of them.

It is clear that Falungong was a danger to the state. It had millions of true believers, a millenarian religion/philosophy, a charismatic leader and worst of all it gave people hope that it could bring about the end of decades of oppression and corruption by the Chicom regime with which it was favourably compared. It was for them a reprise of the Taiping and other rebellions. There cannot be two tigers on one mountain.

The last book I wish to mention in this series on sects and cults is “Original Tao – Inward Training and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism” by Professor Harold D. Roth (Columbia University Press, 1999; ISBN 0-231-11564-4), of Brown University. I consider this to be is one of the finest works on classical Chinese mysticism and

meditation ever written. The background, the translation (with Chinese text presented alongside) and the explanatory notes are all clear and first-rate.

Professor Roth's book is a translation of *Nei Yeh* (Inward Training), a collection of poetic verses on the Tao, which he dates from the mid-4th century BC during the chaotic Warring States period and he uses the title "Original Tao" as "...it represents the earliest extant presentation of a mystical practice that appears in all the earliest sources of Taoist thought." The text was buried in a work called "Guan Zi" attributed to the famous minister, Guan Zhong, of the 7th century BC.

Roth points out that philosophers were not the only influence at court, often practitioners of *Fang Shu* – technical and esoteric arts such as medicine, breath cultivation, divination, demonology etc., held greater sway. Much of what was passed down was by oral transmission and the mnemonic nature of *Nei Ye* suggests this is how it, like the Tai Chi Classics, was originally transmitted.

The terminology found in *Nei Ye* also has resonances with the Tai Chi Classics. The character *Zheng* crops up again and again – it is often translated by Tai Chi exponents (especially those of the Cheng Man-ching tradition) as "erect" but as Roth points out in the present work *Zheng* means correctly aligned and I would argue this is how it should be translated in the Tai Chi Chuan Classics.

Other TCC Classics terms and concepts used include: Wu Chi (No Ultimate/Limit), Zhong (Centrality) Ding (Fixed/Stable), Qi Jing Shen (the Three Treasures of Internal Alchemy) Xin (Heart/Mind), Yi (Intent), Hua (transform), Bian (Change), "Zheng Xin Zai Zhong" (Align the mind in the Centre)", "(Qi) flows through the nine apertures", longevity, "Vitality comes from peace of mind and meditation reduces sense desires."

Roth believes that early (non-religious) Taoism consisted "of a number of closely related master-disciple lineages all of which followed a common cultivation practice first enunciated in "Inward Training". These individual lineages would have mainly been small independent groups and could not be said to be a cult like Falungong or even an organised sect like the Complete Reality School. The links between early Taoists and what Roth calls the "cult of immortality" to which practitioners of physical and macrobiotic hygiene belonged need further examination as does the influence of both on Tai Chi Chuan and Qigong. However, then as now such activities were unpopular with the political elite, because to take them seriously meant devoting your life to them and failing in your duty to produce descendants and serve the state.

CONCLUSION

I hope through this extended review of books on and approaches to meditation and the way it was and is done ranging from master-disciple to guru and groupies, to show readers that the once a week class in the local hall or sports centre is far removed from the various Chinese points of origin.

One further point, the Chicoms are not only banning all except a few internal art practices, but have also introduced a grading system of nine levels for Qigong such as has already been done with Chinese martial arts. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*