

The Falun Gong.

Persecuted by China's government, ignored by France's.

By: Yemeli Ortega
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Beneath the trees of the Luxembourg garden, an archetypal meeting point for Parisians, a group of French and Chinese people meticulously practices a series of physical exercises every morning. Their gestures seem like a gentle and sacred martial art, but beyond the peace and beauty that they emanate, there is a story of torture and persecution.

These exercises are part of Falun Gong, a spiritual movement inspired from Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Once the most popular spiritual movement in China, the Falun Gong is today officially forbidden by the Chinese government.

“My two parents were arrested and tortured to death because they practiced Falun Gong. The police came then for me. After shaking down my apartment, they beat me until I lost consciousness. Then, took me to jail, in Shizilou”, said Yajun Feng, the only Chinese political refugee in France that could get out of prison after being persecuted for practicing Falun Gong.

“Then, I was brainwashed at the detention centre of Nanyang. They starved me and stopped me from sleeping for 22 days,” continued the tiny woman, who seems much younger than her 41, and whose permanent smile does not inspire any joy, but a tremendous effort to dissimulate deep sorrow.

Truth, compassion and forbearance. Such are the central tenets of Falun Gong, the now worldwide popular movement, founded in 1992 by Li Hongzhi. In the beginning, the Chinese government tolerated its existence, but things became very different in 1999, when the ex-president, Jian Zemin, realized that there were 70 million practitioners, in a nation of 1.2 billion people. In other words, as there were more Falun Gong practitioners than Communist Party's members, the government assumed its national security was threatened.

The “6-10 office”, an extra-constitutional body, was then created to eradicate the Falun Gong. “The government promises higher salaries to those policemen that torture us,” said Yajun Feng, while nervously waving her hands. “Defame the practitioners, bankrupt them and destroy them physically... These were the official orders of Li Lanqing, head of the 6- 10”.

Nobody at the Chinese Delegation of UNESCO accepted to talk about the subject. Nor at the Chinese Embassy in France, but its website¹ states that Falun Gong is an “insane sect” and that “China is ready to create a united front in order to fight it”. Nevertheless, the French Inter-Ministerial Mission Against Sects Abuses (Miviludes) do not consider Falun Gong a sect, since it has no membership, office, or mandatory financial obligations.

“Everything is good in Falun Gong,” said Giovanni Gianquinton, one of the about 200 French practitioners of Falun Gong. “My health has dramatically improved, I've become a better person and I've received answers to most of my existential questions. It is ridiculous to see how China's government reacts to a pacifist movement!” he exclaimed, raising the tone.

¹ <http://web.amb-chine.fr/dossier/falungong/falungong0220.htm>

“There are no words to explain what they did to me,” said Yajun Feng, “and yet, I was lucky”. Trying her best not to spill the tears welling up in her eyes, she describes 20-centimeter skewers being stuck underneath people’s nails, women’s nipples being burnt with cigarettes, and 18 ladies she knew, being taken to male prisoners to be raped. “The police uses criminals to torture us. Their sentences are reduced if they cooperate.”

After 22 days of torture, Yajun Feng signed a document that said that she gave up Falun Gong. She was then taken to Sujiatun, a forced labor center. “The first thing they did to me was a blood test. I found that weird... Now I understand that it was just the formal procedure to take my organs away and sell them.”

Indeed, in their book *Bloody Harvest*, the Canadian David Matas, international human rights lawyer, and David Kilgour, former Secretary of State of the Government of Canada, confirmed, by thousands of testimonies, that the overwhelming majority of prisoners in China, are Falun Gong practitioners, and that they received blood tests as a pre-requisite for organ transplants.

They explain that, until May 17th 2006, the now disappeared website of the China International Transplantation Network Assistance Centre (CITNAC), indicated in the English version that “viscera (soft interior organs) providers can be found immediately!”

“As I come from a wealthy family, I could pay my custody before the police took my organs away,” confided Yajun Feng. Still suffering from posttraumatic syndrome, she remains grateful for being alive, but can’t stop thinking about all those she left behind. “Who knows how many people are still in danger!” she emphasized.

“There are no official figures”, regretted Francine Serveau, an expert in China affairs for Amnesty International in France. “But it is a fact that thousands of Falun Gong practitioners are being executed. (...) Their organs are then removed to be sold. There is a huge organ trafficking operation that it is very profitable to the Chinese government.”

“Kidney US\$62 000, Liver US\$98 000-130 000, Lung US\$150 000-170 000, Heart US\$130 000-160 000, Cornea US\$30 000”. Such are the prices that used to be displayed by the web site of the CITNAC, according to Mr. Matas and Mr. Kilgour’s report.

Dr. Francis Navarro, director of the surgery and transplantation department of the Hospital of Montpellier, in France, confirmed this information. Moreover, was invited to the Hospital of Shendu University in China in 2006, to teach his transplantation techniques. “I was meant to practice a standard liver transplantation, which means that the whole organ is taken from a fresh death body. How could people in China be sure that someone will naturally die the day I was supposed to arrive, so I could have a liver, ready to be transplanted?”

Longing to stop the organ’s trafficking, Dr. Navarro alerted his colleagues and the French Secretary of State, Bernard Kouchner. So did International Amnesty. The French Association of Falun Gong and Wu Baozhang, former editor at the Chinese department of the French radio station *Radio France International*, organized a press conference at the French National Assembly last summer, to denounce the scandal.

“But nobody cares about it”, regrets Mr. Baozhang. “Economic and political interests come on top of the French government’s priorities”. Indeed, when asking the French National

Commission of Human Rights about the persecution, torture and organ harvest that Chinese government leads against Falun Gong practitioners, the answer was categorical: “We have nothing to say. We don’t even have a file on that subject”.

According to Professor Yves Chapuis, a pioneer of transplantation in France and president of the Ethics and Rights Commission at the French Medicine Academy, the French government remains very prudent because, since last year, things seem to be changing in China. “I know, from very sure and close sources, that the Chinese Health Minister, Chen Zhu, is really trying to abolish the organ harvest. A colleague of mine, who is right now in China observing transplantation practices, confirmed this information”, said the Professor, who expects a dramatic drop of the number of transplantations made in China for this year.

“There were around 5000 transplantations practiced in China during 2008. If there is no more organ harvest, there wouldn’t be anymore transplantations, right?” said Professor Chapuis before concluding “but even if the figures came to confirm that the organ harvest is being abolished, that doesn’t mean that the persecution against Falun Gong practitioners is over too.”