

Movements of Power and Acts of Resistance:
Falun Gong and the Politics of Everyday Life

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Abstract

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Any attempt to appreciate the complex reality of the Falun Gong from a political perspective is immediately challenged by the limitations of available discourse to evaluate the political character of the silent performance of morning exercises in Chinese parks by individuals belonging to widely contrasting social, educational and economic backgrounds. Three possible analyses of the Falun Gong's resistance are offered: as an example of a Human Security concern featuring a necessary tension between an unstable State and its members; as an example of a New Social Movement, through which the formation and organization of the group can be seen to reflect similar movements worldwide; and as an expression of a type of non-discursive political resistance which is located in the *bricolage* of everyday activities. These discussions allow consideration of various locations where the political in the Falun Gong may be (simultaneously) located, while also allowing further meditation upon the strategic possibilities implied by such non-violent, trans-societal activism for dominated communities worldwide.


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Michael Blackburn

Chapter One: Falun Gong as an Interpretive Problem

“This was an apolitical protest but it also is a very political act.” This description, offered by a Chinese academic who is left nameless in a *New York Times* report (1), brings into immediate focus the paradoxical and fascinating story of the Falun Dafa (or Falun Gong). Formed in 1992 by charismatic leader Li Hongzhi, a long-time martial arts practitioner who was subsequently forced to move to New York to avoid arrest, the Falun Dafa has grown into a qigong based movement which claims tens of millions of members in mainland China alone. This quiet group came to international attention in 1999, when a series of unexpected and peaceful protests revealed a significant gap in the seemingly omniscient gaze of an authoritarian government which is so often successful at its attempts to neuter acts of resistance. The counterpoint to this revelation of possibilities for resistance, however, can be seen in the People’s government’s response to these protests: a brutal crackdown, featuring the largest number of mass arrests since the Tiananmen square protests a decade earlier, and which even now leaves hundreds of prisoners of conscience in People’s Republic of China (P.R.C.) prisons.

Any attempt to appreciate the complex reality of the Falun Gong from a political perspective is immediately challenged by the limitations of available discourse to evaluate the political character of the silent performance of morning exercises in Chinese parks by individuals belonging to widely contrasting social, educational and economic backgrounds. Although popular explanations of the situation abound, often emphasizing the situation as a symptom of the problematic of the PRC’s governmental stability/legitimacy and its failure to recognize “Western” (2) values, such approaches

fail to address the political nature of the group itself, let alone that of its loosely affiliated participants or their daily activities. While such conventional approaches are worthwhile and of obvious value to those preoccupied with policy making, I am more concerned here with the question of how the exercises of the Falun Gong might be understood as acts of resistance. More specifically, I am interested in the implications of the various locations in which the political practices of the Falun Gong may be identified and the strategic possibilities implied by such non-violent, trans-societal activism for dominated communities worldwide.

This paper, therefore, will focus on the problems posed, and insights offered, by looking at the on-going protests of the Falun Gong as acts of political resistance. I argue that the complexities of the Falun Gong significantly exceed the pre-existing analytical categories, and that prevailing discourses fail to provide any one approach that is sufficient to understand the core problem of analyzing the paradox of political actions which are explicitly apolitical in character. This thesis will instead view the group and its actions from a number of perspectives, not in an effort to discover that explanation which is “most true” but rather to appreciate that which is revealed, and that which is obscured, by each.

In this first chapter, the basic methodological approach of the project is made explicit, and a general mapping of the overall paper is offered, so as to clarify both its intentions and its self-acknowledged limitations. In refusing the possibility of a teleological or essentialist description of the Falun Gong, this thesis asserts a multifold and fractured understanding of a phenomenon which cannot be meaningfully assessed through any one interpretation. That no one story is sufficient or superior, however, does

not imply that all stories are equally valid or worthwhile. This first chapter thus recognizes two possible interpretive approaches which, through their shared inappropriateness for the reality of the situation, are useful in highlighting those qualities which make the Falun Gong uniquely deserving of a discussion that draws on theorists as diverse as Michel Foucault, Marshall McLuhan, Michel de Certeau and James C. Scott. This introduction ends with a brief description of the subsequent chapters. Here I try to delineate the theoretical flow of an argument that, despite its denial of linear and singular understandings, I claim does provide valuable insights into how everyday, silent resistances of the weak can be viewed through a political lens which focuses the theoretical eye on spaces, actors and actions that traditional political analysis might otherwise overlook.

Throughout that which is referred to as “western culture,” a shared and consistent preoccupation can be identified with the discovery and articulation of “the Truth.” Although this desire to penetrate illusion and ignorance to reveal that which is universal and authentic has been expressed in a variety of ways, leading to several rabid debates about epistemology, such discussions clearly share certain ontological similarities, in their common assumption that there is one, singular and knowable essence which legitimate academic discussion must reveal. Ironically, criticism of this shared tendency has often focused on the formulation of equally singular explanations of how and why such an epistemic valorization found such fertile ground in Western Europe; critical theorists offer competing approaches to explaining this philosophical preference, viewing it as an epistemological artifact of the preferences of monotheistic cultures, as a consequence of the development of the sovereign State, and so on.

Despite the dominance of this tendency, however, contemporary social and political theory also allows for multi-form and segmented understandings of situations and phenomena, and this paper seeks to draw on such approaches. It seeks to work on an epistemology based on partial and provisional understandings, designed to better illuminate a shifting phenomenological field to which no assured ontological claims can be assigned. This problematic of representation, in which the task of appreciating a social movement, or their actions, is somewhat eclipsed by the methodological task of determining how best to approach such phenomena, and how one can most safely speak of them. In social movement theory alone, for example, there is wide-spread debate between neo-Marxists (or neo-Weberians) such as Habermas, who view social movements as symptoms of the structures of capitalist societies, resource mobilization theorists such as McCarthy and various American sociologists, who examine how movements are formed and maintained, and thinkers like Melucci, who emphasize the role of social movements in the “pre-political” realm of everyday life. (3) Although my analysis is conscious of these serious and on-going debates, it does not claim to fully address or resolve them; to explore the consequences of these discussions would deserve many years and many volumes. The point rather is to make explicit the problematic of how best to approach an interpretation of the Falun Gong’s practices, as seen as a type of “soft” political resistance, while still allowing for a discussion of the topic that does not swamp potentials for activism in methodological quagmires.

The approach that this discussion employs is thus one in which various stories (or interpretations) can be told simultaneously, with an eye not to revealing the best explanation of the phenomenon but to appreciating what is made visible, and what is

cast in shadow, by each. This especially involves a direct rejection of essentialist understandings of the world, as well as a denial of Hegelian teleologies, in which succeeding theorizations are seen to be progressive, carrying the reader continually closer to a final synthesis in which Truth is revealed. What such analyses offer in certainty and clarity, I believe, they lose in accuracy; the complexity of any situation in the world seeps beyond the analytical boundaries enforced by intellectual understandings. As this paper will assert, this is especially vivid in the case of the Falun Dafa, an organization which is entirely apolitical in the eyes of most theories of political practice, and even in the opinion of its own leaders and supporters. For me to reconcile this inadequacy of conventional understandings of the political with my suspicion that there is something intensely political taking place in these Chinese parks, fractured and fluid conceptualizations must replace the authoritative and stable ones offered by traditional discourse.

There is nothing exclusively non-Western, post-modern or radical about such an approach. Although there is a comfortable simplicity offered by the suggestion that Western thought is linear, atomistic and competitive, while Eastern thought is fluid, fractured and complimentary, (4) there is a wide range of conceptual flexibility offered throughout world thought. That the English language contains the vocabulary to describe a philosophy that is “fluid” and “situational,” for example, highlights the ability of “Western” thought to conceptualize such approaches. As R.B. J. Walker notes, “Claims to novelty, in short, already have an appropriate location within the conventions of contemporary intellectual life;” (5) to assume airs of radicalism around such a methodology is to display considerable ignorance of the range of available approaches.

More sensitivity must be afforded to concerns regarding how to reconcile the spatial variance between the thematic object of this paper (mostly taking place in China) with a body of theory which is mostly of European origin, and an author from rural Nova Scotia (by most accounts, about as far as is possible from the “Far East”). The problem can be viewed as one of representation, in that there is a problematic in the application of European values, ideas and norms to situations occurring in different parts of the globe. The vehemence with which many approach this issue is understandable, being a response to Enlightenment universalism and the tragic consequences experienced around the world of various forms of colonial mentalities. One possible response would insist that a case of resistance occurring in China can only be addressed by Chinese thinkers working within Chinese paradigms; an equally extreme approach might argue that since intellectual thought is based on the faculty of pure reason, the conclusions of such analysis are universally applicable. Navigating the spaces between these poles is more challenging than identifying their weaknesses, however, and the considerable limitations set in place by the cultural values and modes of thought which inform my words and ideas must be accounted for.

While such cultural sensitivity is necessary, an essentialization of this East/West bifurcation must also be viewed suspiciously. This binary distinction seeks to represent very real and important cultural variance, but it also operates as a theoretical construction which can have damaging consequences. One way of understanding the results of this construction of “the East” as an objective Other to the subjective European experience, the history of its formation as a governing narrative which was eventually assumed by Asians as well as Europeans, and how contemporary media and policy

continue to reflect such division, is offered by Edward Said (6). In recognizing the violences and discrimination which provide silent background to the ostensibly value-free attempt to recognize cultural difference, Said's account of the practices of "orientalism" influences this paper's tendency to underplay the problem of cultural imposition. While some might seek to more carefully examine the problematic of a "Continental" analysis of a phenomenon occurring in China, this thesis argues from the position that the geographical and cultural distance between phenomenon and analytical source need not force us to deny their mutual complementarity.

This methodological decision is further informed by Walker, who argues that much of our social and political thought is governed by inside/outside relationships—artificially conceptualized distinctions which purport to be value-neutral, but which in fact are insistently hierarchical. Just as the distinction between political theory and the study of "real world" political events is both a misinformed one, and one which by its definition under-rates one in favour of the other (although which of the binary set is undervalued sometimes depends on who is looking), so too does the entrenchment of a strict East/West distinction automatically imply a normative hierarchy between the two. While I am too much a product of my environment to claim complete freedom from such binary conceptualizations, I seek in this discussion to underplay this problematic, not with the intention to impose my Western reason on the world, but to avoid the silent violences which accompany the rigid enforcement of such distinctions.

In addition to this particular methodological quagmire, several other related questions are forced upon this discussion which I have chosen not to unpack in detail, despite the importance and complexity of their challenges to this project. One such

problematic, which might be related to the “politics of academic discourse,” brings into question my own relation to this material and the ‘object’ of its attentions. As a qigong practitioner, as a student of politics, as a human rights activist—my academic voice echoes with its own hidden meanings and preoccupations, as I speak of a group which, in my voice, becomes a silent and studied object that I seek to interpret. Although I am not prepared to conclusively justify or explicate myself as ‘objectifying’ author of this work, I recognize and remain conscious of this inherent and problematic absurdity, as I struggle not only with the project I have set for myself but also the ambiguous politics of assigning any type of meaning onto the actions and lives of human beings. This is a question which I expect to continue exploring throughout my academic and activist careers.

As I have stated, this discussion is intended not to disclose the “True” way of interpreting the soft resistance of the Falun Gong, since the reality of the group and its actions exceeds available descriptive categories. By instead exploring the insights and blind spots of a few possible understandings, this paper may be found guilty by some of the modern sin of relativism. Many mainstream thinkers understand this condition to mean that, since no one telling is adequate, it must therefore be that all stories are equally true. While it may be that one of the consequences of this methodology is that no interpretive framework that is offered can be rejected absolutely, it is very much the case that competing stories can be evaluated, and in some cases dismissed, if they are found to be of little usefulness or relevance to the situation. I will briefly put two such “unuseful” stories to good use. By explaining why I find such analytical vectors reasonably easy to dismiss, I am able to better highlight that which is fascinating in the

case of the Falun Gong, while also clarifying the criteria by which an analysis might be found more or less valuable.

One way by which the Falun Gong might be understood would refer to the paradigm of human rights discourse. (7) In doing so, one might view the situation faced by the Falun Gong as one to be understood primarily in terms of the violation of their rights at the hands of the CCP; one might progress from there to elucidate the reader on the range of abuses administered to the people, while making strong recommendations regarding how best to end such injustices. The desire to approach the issue from such a perspective is an understandable one, and it may even seem irresponsible to do otherwise when one learns of tragic stories like that of 60-year-old Chen Zixiu, a Falun Gong follower from Shandong province who was detained for four days in February for allegedly planning to visit Beijing to perform her qigong with other Falun Dafa members. When her family arrived at the police station to claim her corpse, “Her body was covered with bruises, the teeth were broken and there was blood coming out of her ears.” (8) Like most readers, I am appalled by this level of inhumanity, and am moved to respond to it, but the scope of this particular discussion falls outside of such reactions, for two central reasons.

Firstly, while there is clear value in observing and responding to the attacks on the members of this group, the present discussion is devoted not to the decrying of abuses committed against them but rather to develop an understanding of how they are asserting themselves in the face of such strict oppression. Put crudely, the point here is not to delineate the degree to which they are victims, but rather to explore the ways in

which their actions could be understood as heroic, and inspirational to oppressed peoples worldwide.

More significantly, however, I wish to avoid certain recurring debates and issues which rights-oriented discussions tend to repeat. Throughout the history of European and American literature on human rights, and to a lesser degree within activist communities, discussions of how to respond to infringements of rights leads to more abstract considerations of what human rights might be, and what philosophical or moral grounds we might claim in seeking to uphold them. Such debates have been of considerable value throughout recent centuries, leading to the implementation of many structures, policies and movements that have had positive effects on the lives of people globally. These discussions also serve to remind us that just as sincere questions of epistemology often lead back to ontological foundations supporting them, so too do ethical quandaries revert back to concerns of ontology.

One drawback of this, however, is the possibility of acquiring Hamlet's penchant for neglecting possibilities for activism in favour of the infinite search for justifications. David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames address this shortcoming, exploring how the ongoing debate amongst rights theorists between communitarian and liberal values (echoing a Walkerian inside/outside relationship) not only limits the range of discussion available to such debates, but greatly problematizes efforts to apply such conceptualizations of human rights upon other cultures, such as in China. As they lament, "One of the saddest features of contemporary debates on human rights is the amount of energy expended in trying to certify the precise status and/or content of rights." (9) While their response is to explore potentials for the affirmation of rights talk which avoids such quagmires, and in

the process discover strategic similarities between the traditional Chinese Confucian values and those expressed by American John Dewey, mine is to assert that what makes the Falun Gong's acts of resistance worth attention has little to do with the equally significant issue of how they are being treated by Beijing. The question of this paper, then, is not *what* rights are, *which* rights are being abused by the CCP, or whether our "Western" notions of rights can be applied to a Chinese example, but instead to explore *how* their resistance operates.

Another way of offering an interpretation of the Falun Dafa, which ostensibly comes closer to addressing the "soft" and passive quality of their actions, would relate them to those performed and articulated by Mahatma Gandhi, whose principles and practices of passive protestation contributed to the de-colonization of India, and has served as inspiration and strategic guidance to a plethora of activists and theorists who seek to combine desire for social change with a refusal to employ violent tactics. There are many worthwhile comparisons to be drawn between Gandhi's work and the actions of the Falun Gong, recommending this as an analytical approach. Both movements are centred around a charismatic leader, both began as religiously or spiritually oriented movements that latter grew into sites of political effectiveness, both enjoyed popularity with masses of people based partially on a call to traditional cultural values in the face of imposed "modern" or "foreign" ones, both were met by the ruling government with unspeakable violence, and both maintained a commitment to peaceful articulation of their values and positions despite the continuation of such oppression. As with the case of rights talk, however, this approach seems quite misleading, for two central reasons.

First, although Gandhi's peaceful mobilization of the Indian people drew strength and support through its religious qualities, he organized the movement with specific and clearly articulated political objectives in mind, relating to the end of British rule and the resolution of religious conflicts within the nation. By contrast, one of the most interesting aspects of the Falun Gong's mobilization is its clear and persistent denial of such ostensibly political objectives, on the part of both leadership and its grassroots membership. Unlike Gandhi's passive resistance, the Falun Gong are not seeking to significantly alter Chinese governance; at most, members are asking that their group be allowed to continue practicing their health exercises and that their fellow members be free from persecution. This seemingly minor point is in fact a significant one. While locating the political in Gandhi's actions and philosophy is assisted by his openly asserted objectives, the Falun Gong's adamant denial of such objectives makes the search for the political in their actions all the more intriguing.

The second reason for rejecting this approach so easily is somewhat connected to the first, since the Gandhian project is a teleological one, while I argue throughout this paper that the Falun Dafa's is not. In claiming that Gandhi's political philosophy was informed by a teleology I am not imposing a Marxist subtext upon his work, nor am I suggesting that he subscribed to a Hegelian notion of a universe which would ultimately transform through a final synthesis into an ultimate state. Nonetheless, his political project was based on a firm understanding of a situation in India through which the ideal nature of the Indian nation had come to be alienated from itself, and that through certain progressive acts the nation could regain that original cohesion: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. The actions of the Falun Gong, meanwhile, are not motivated by the

achievement of some final accomplishment, nor even by the belief that the current situation, through effective mobilization, might be monumentally affected. Their actions are instead the performance of daily exercises; the intention is to maintain health and develop the self. An interesting discussion of this might explore how the religious backgrounds of these movements (Hinduism and Buddhism, both of which teach that the suffering of the cycle of samsara will be eventually be alleviated with the attainment of a final escape from a life of suffering, versus Daoism, in which there is no final transformation or conclusion, just continual patterns of change and harmony) (10) influence these competing approaches. The point here, however, is to illustrate that by dismissing a comparative analysis of these two movements, I am asserting the importance of the Falun Gong's non-teleological nature.

Having made some introductory comments on the methodological biases of this project, and shed initial light on what I find of interest in the Falun Gong by explaining why I find it relatively easy to dismiss two approaches which others might initially consider more relevant, I will close this introduction with a brief overview of the following chapters. Despite the consciously non-linear and pluralistic tack with which I approach this phenomenon, there is a clear direction and flow to the discussion, one that guides us past a series of related tableaux and delivers us, I argue, to some useful and significant, if not 'final,' conclusions.

Chapter Two examines the most obvious approach to understanding the political nature of the seemingly apolitical activities of the Falun Gong, as provided by a consideration of these recent protests as the latest in a long history of politically subversive religious organizations and cults, which have had enormous influence on

China's political history. Such an analysis, however, tends to be couched in the language of Human Security discourse, a conversation in which the assumptions of what is usually called "political realism" remain potent. Just as the familiar claim that "religions of resistance define themselves in opposition to the religion of the status quo, defending against the ideological domination of the latter," (11) so too does such a reading of the Falun Gong prioritize the necessity of State as master-foil. By placing the primary focus on State versus individual dynamics, and by preserving the notion that the political is synonymous with that which relates to the sovereign State, I argue that such approaches as offered by Julia Ching and David Lincoln fail to recognize the group's actions in relation to themselves (as opposed to in relation to the state), and further fall short in providing any kind of ontological recognition to the actions themselves.

To focus more carefully on the group itself and its specific nature, and to come closer to providing ontological support for viewing their "everyday resistances" as political, I examine some well known proponents of "New Social Movement theory." The third chapter will therefore focus on how the efforts of such theorists as James C. Scott, Carl Boggs, Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci, despite their significant differences, allow an understanding of the Falun Gong not merely as a reaction against a sovereign state in a crisis of legitimacy, but as a movement of political significance, in which the "weak" are able to employ "soft" tactics and everyday practices of resistance to assert themselves and safeguard their values and sources of collective identity. Such a discussion may allow one to evaluate how such ostensibly disempowered and non-radicalized communities take part in "the constant, grinding conflict over work food, autonomy, ritual—at everyday forms of resistance," (12) without any necessary

reference to its relation to the sovereign state. The two key problems with this analysis is the imposition of Marxist values and assumptions onto the reality of the Falun Gong, and the realization that the only thing that may be “new” about this type of organization and activity is our willingness to recognize it as political.

While the second chapter, with its emphasis on Human Security discourse, facilitates an understanding of the relationship between the State and the members of the Falun Gong and the historical significance of this dynamic, and the third chapter’s examination of New Social Movement theory allows a tighter focus on the group itself, neither approach enables one to assign meaningful ontological legitimacy to the actions themselves of the Falun Gong practitioners, and thus recognize them as the object of political consideration. The theories of people like Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau, however, provide such a framework, and release this analysis from certain spatial and temporal bonds. Such an approach recognizes and celebrates how the consequences of Foucauldian thought allow us to recognize the multiform and hidden ways of expressing individual autonomy within the scaffolding of discursive limitations. Foucault’s conceptualization of power/knowledge, as an operating metaphor to illuminate how the values and beliefs of modern society are constructed by the interaction of specific practices and technologies of domination, is not to be understood as a one-directional oppression. The nature of such dominations require “that there are no relations of power without resistances,” resistances which do not necessarily display organized, militant qualities, but which, “like power...is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies.”(13) The contribution of such theorists to our attempt to view the political in the daily exercises of the Falun Dafa practitioners is significant; by allowing

us to appreciate “the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, (and) thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices,” (14) they point to the central role of discursive practices of autonomy to the politics of the Falun Gong.

What the discussion in Chapter Four allows, which is not permitted by competing theoretical approaches, is a strategic and liberatory promise of situating political resistance as a constant in everyday life that can then be discussed and explored as a political issue and potential source for activist engagement. The consequences of this are unpacked with greater care in the final chapter, which will review both the usefulness of the various approaches offered by this paper, as well as the drawbacks associated with each. The fifth chapter will attend especially to the commonalities shared by these approaches, and evaluate the consequent potential for an understanding of the political which emphasizes counter-disciplinary forces, through which a constant state of hidden and everyday modes of resistance reveals political significance in daily activities. This may force a redrawing not only of political space, but also of our notions of activism, and of a relationship between disciplinary forces and the resistances to them, which may be more complementary than adversarial.

The final chapter also addresses certain problems posed by the negative consequences and abusive possibilities associated with this line of argumentation, which may be read by an unsympathetic reader as a call for oppressed communities to avoid active resistance against their abusive situations. Although such anxieties prove too powerful to be resolved by this discussion, honest engagement with them provides greater depth to the texture of the general discussion, and more importantly suggests launching points for future projects.

This discussion will present a range of analytical approaches to understanding the phenomenon of this group, and the apparent power of their daily exercises. This does not mean, however, that any one of those analyses contains greater truth value than its competitors, nor that the paper cumulatively offers a “complete” description which tells “all the stories,” since no such accomplishment is possible or desirable. Efforts throughout the history of political thought to impose essentialist and teleological explanations of situations, and to isolate and clearly identify “the political,” have consistently limited the range of available discourse, and as a result affected the possibilities for enactment of empowering responses to situations of domination. Nor do I seek to conform to the mainstream’s boogiemans image of the post-modern relativist, for whom all stories are equally valid. As this chapter has already made clear, although no animal is necessarily superior, it is very much the case that “some animals are more equal than others;” great care is demanded in consideration of the value of various interpretive stories. The navigation of this discussion therefore seeks to avoid falling into these familiar and dangerous ruts which threaten on both sides of the path.

Careful consideration of the Falun Gong reveals a phenomenon that combines passive resistance with trans-societal activism, and assertions of human security values with political empowerment through daily self-healing movement. I will argue that these varied and seemingly incompatible characteristics cumulatively point to a peaceful and “soft” expression of the political which is non-exclusionary and which is proving to be highly effective against the “hard” strength of the dominating societal forces at work in mainland China. Better understanding of how such quiet insurgency operates can lead to new discussions, in both activist and academic communities, of how counter-hegemonic

forces can be mobilized in a post-Marxist context, and on an increasingly abusive and oppressive world stage.

Endnotes

1. "Few Members of Large Sect to Face Trial, Beijing Says," *New York Times*, December 2, 1999
2. The problematic use of terms such as "Western" and "Eastern" are employed consciously, and somewhat playfully, in this discussion. The constructed nature of these identifications, and the dangers of their use, are examined later in this chapter, and remain self-conscious and ironic in their usage throughout the paper.
3. This issue is explored in great depth in Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, Hutchinson Radius: London, 1989. Pg. 3
4. There is a wide range of literature which supports such stereotypes, which tend to come in two main flavours: those which quietly assume that the Western values are more advanced or civilized (such as in Hegelian Marxist traditions, in which the late development of capitalist economies in Asian nations suggests reflects their being a few stages behind Europe on the teleological advancement towards the End of History™), and those that romanticize Asian culture as a form of critique of that which they find problematic in their own culture, a trend which resurfaces every few decades (the previous *fin de siecle*, the 1920's, the 1960's, the 1990's, and so on) and which tends to affect the general community more intensely than the academic world. As is discussed later in this chapter, what is shared in both approaches is a dependence on an artificial inside/ outside relationship, a form of bifurcation which is intrinsically normative.
5. R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/outside: International Relations as Political Theory*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1993. Pg. 4
6. For an extensive discussion of this, see Edward Said, *Orientalism*,
7. This crude discussion of human rights discourse makes no attempt to accurately represent the vast range and variety of such literature. The invocation of such discussions is formed both by such writers as John Dewey, John Rawls, Richard

Rorty, Julia Ching, and Liu Shengping, and by my on-going involvement in the human rights activist community.

8. <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/cgi-bin/amnesty/eatsoup.cgi?id=1690>
9. David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius and the Hope for Democracy in China*, Open Court: Chicago, 1999. Pg. 235
10. Both between Buddhism and Hinduism, and within the various schools composing each, there is vigorous disagreement about the nature of this transcendence; the Buddhist notion of nirvana, for example, with its emphasis on the illusionary nature of the self, contrasts with the Hindu concept of moksa, which may be connected either to a reunification with Brahman or an isolated and individual escape from suffering. What is shared by this range of understandings, however, is a notion of teleological development, resulting in a final conclusion, which is irreconcilable with Daoist thought.
11. Bruce Lincoln, *Religion, Rebellion, Revolution*, Macmillan Press: London, 1985. Pg. 275
12. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1985. Pg. xvi
13. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Pantheon: New York. 1980. Pg. 142
14. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1984. Pg. xvii

Chapter Two: Falun Gong as a Human Security Issue?

“In essence, human security means safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats. It is a condition or state of being characterized by freedom from pervasive threats to people’s rights, their safety, or even their lives. From a foreign policy perspective, human security is...an alternative way of seeing the world, taking people as its point of reference, rather than focusing exclusively on the security of territory or governments.”

Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs (1)

When asked in August of 1999 whether he thought of himself as a political dissident, Falun Gong leader Li Hongzhi replied, “I don’t want to get involved in politics. I don’t care for it.” (2) This reply at first seems paradoxical, coming as it does from a man who has been called “one of the most influential men in Asia” (3), despite the fact that he has been living in New York City since 1996. As the leader of an international organization whose passive resistance against the belligerent attentions of the government of the People’s Republic of China has become one of the leading human rights concerns of recent years, it is surprising to hear such a rejection of the overtly political role which he seems to perform. As several traditional Chinese systems of wisdom tell us, however, that which appears paradoxical often contains the profoundest truths. To understand the complexities of the relationship between the Chinese government and the Falun Gong, it may be necessary to accept such paradoxes, and in the process perhaps adapt a more flexible understanding of what is meant by “the political.”

Although a great deal of attention has been rightfully placed on the oppressive reaction of the government against the Falun Gong and its members, detailing and often decrying the range of abuse and suppression administered by the State despite growing concern from international observers, this paper is more concerned with the actual, on-

going resistance which is being performed by the group's participants. The question, then, is how the actions of this "non-political" group can be interpreted as acts of resistance; from this one can further consider how lessons and inspirations might be taken from their continuing protests, which might be of strategic importance to other forms of peaceful social movement. In this chapter I will suggest that although the Falun Gong can usefully be understood in terms of a continuity of resistance performed by religious organizations throughout Chinese history, such an analysis will be seen to support realist assumptions about the nature of politics and security which may hinder our understanding of what is actually happening with these people. Evaluating the situation of the Falun Gong may thus lead to new understandings of human security, in which the onus of ensuring security need not be placed solely in the lap of "the Sovereign" State.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the Falun Gong, describing the group's background and purpose, and exploring how it has become the centre of the strongest crack-down in Communist China this decade. This leads to a consideration of how this group's actions, and the fury with which the State has addressed them, can be partially understood both as the contemporary incarnation of a long standing tradition of politically potent religious organizations in Chinese society, as well as yet another recipient of ire as a religious group struggling to exist in an "atheistic" nation. While both these approaches yield certain handholds with which to usefully grapple with the situation, it will be argued that they both rest on a realist theoretical framework which emphasizes a tension between the needs of the State and individuals. After suggesting ways in which such assumptions assert limitations on how the complexity of the current

situation can be viewed, the chapter concludes with an exploration of how the resistance expressed by the Falun Gong might imply understandings of political action, and of security, which transcend an exclusively State-Individual dialectic.

Qigong (4) is the general term used to describe a wide range of traditional Chinese practices, the roots of which can be traced back to the earliest days of recorded Chinese civilization. Although the specifics of various qigong systems vary greatly, they share a focus on the circulation and cultivation of energetic substances, such as qi, throughout the body. Although sometimes taking the form of vigorous training to develop certain qualities of strength or invulnerability to damage, most qigong exercises are characterized by slow, gentle movements which are repeated daily to enhance the general health of the practitioner. It is in this form that qigong exercises enjoy their strongest popularity; one cannot think of an early morning Chinese green space without the presence of multitudes of people, doing their “sets.” Although the actual differences between groups are often negligible, there is a plethora of different organizations and styles for the practitioner to choose from; many of these groups belong to the National Qigong Organization, which was established by the CCP in an attempt to maintain some level of control over these bodies, while also asserting a State presence in the daily activities of “the People.” (5)

Although the Falun Gong (or Falun Dafa) (6) is primarily a loosely organized group based on the daily practice of such qigong exercises, it differs dramatically from most similar organizations. Founded in 1992 by ex-government clerk and respected martial artist Li Hongzhi, the Falun Dafa is the largest qigong based group in China to be focused on a living, charismatic leader. Li’s teachings range from a mundane mixture

of Daoist and Buddhist beliefs and values, which form the ethical spine of most qigong groups, to far less conventional convictions regarding the on-going battle which must be fought between true humans and those who have merely been cloned, as part of an alien plot to take over the use of our bodies. (7) The organization presently claims 100 million members worldwide, a figure nearly doubling the Chinese Communist membership of 60 million. (8) Such statistics are clearly contestable, however; the CCP places Falun Gong membership at closer to 2 million. The accuracy of even speaking of “membership” in such an organization is problematic, however, since the majority of participants are involved only to the extent of sharing some early morning stretches. As will be suggested below, however, such vagueness and ambiguity, which offends our common understandings of political membership, may in fact be of value to the formation of certain types of social movement.

Forced to leave the National Qigong Organization, Li moved to New York City in 1996, having been warned that the Communist Party’s tolerance for his actions was waning. (9) He continued the promotion of his group, however, primarily through the use of developing communications technologies; the role of the internet in the popularity and organization of the Falun Dafa is of considerable importance and will be discussed below. By early 1999, it had become clear that the CCP was committed to a new campaign attacking spiritual and religious groups, and that the Falun Gong was to be a focus of such pressures. When this antagonistic trend became evident in the State-run media, which featured articles targeting the group as a superstitious and reactionary group, the members of the Falun Gong reacted in a manner entirely unexpected by the seemingly omniscient People’s Government and its intelligence service: it resisted.

What followed was a series of peaceful gatherings, which continue to the present. The largest of these gatherings occurred on April 25, 1999, a week before the tenth anniversary of the Tiananmen square protests and the massacre which resulted. It involved 12 000-15 000 people, some of whom came from as far away as Zhejiang province, who quietly gathered around the government's Zhongnanhai compound in Beijing. (10) The protest was entirely peaceful and meticulously organized, and although it went unreported by the state media agencies it sent shock waves through both the government and the populous. This effect was possible despite the fact that, unlike conventional grass-roots political dissention, the protestors held no angry placards and made no speeches; participants quietly meditated, and then silently made their way home without incident. Even more interestingly, unlike similar protests in which activists tend to come from a shared, easily identified social or economic background (e.g. "the student protestors," "the striking unionists," etc.), the Falun Dafa activists included housewives and police officers, governmental officials and teenagers. (11)

The response has been the most dramatic crackdown seen in mainland China since the student uprisings a decade earlier. In July, the organization was officially outlawed, based on speedily legislated laws banning heretic cults. (12) According to the Hong Kong based Information Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China, senior Party official Li Lanqing recently reported to the Standing Committee of the Communist Party Politburo that since the April demonstration, a total of 35, 792 practitioners had been detained. (13) Although the government responded that this was merely the number of people who had "interacted" with the police in connection with

the protests, Chinese officials admit that over 150 have been formally arrested, while thousands more are being kept in “labour” and “re-education” camps, where Chinese law allows up to three years of incarceration without the laying of formal charges. (14) Several members have already been charged with sentences of up to twelve years, while others are facing the death penalty; Li Hongzhi, meanwhile, has become “China’s most wanted man.” (15)

Despite this sustained policy of aggressive repression, however, the members of the Falun Gong continue their acts of defiance, although it has now become clear what price such actions may demand. Peaceful demonstrations by Falun members, which usually involve either group performance of specific qigong exercises, or the occasional unfurling of banners asking for tolerance towards the group’s members, are broken up immediately by waiting police, (16) while Western journalists who have met with group members have been “questioned” by the Public Security Bureau and had their residence permits confiscated. (17) Supporters of the group continue to proclaim the legitimacy of their organization, however, and sustain their efforts to convince the government of their right to collective existence.

To an observer who has some understanding of Chinese political history, it may seem natural to place the current conflict between the Chinese establishment and an ostensibly non-political religious organization in terms of a long-standing tradition of subversive religious organizations which inspire dramatic political upheaval. Indeed, one important way of understanding the harsh response to the Falun Dafa is to recognize its connections to previous groups, such as the Yellow Turbans (184 B.C.E.) , the White Lotus (which started their rebellion in 1793 C.E., but continued to disrupt Northern

China until 1804), the Taipings (1850 C.E., in Southern China) and the Society of Righteous Fists, which influenced various Chinese dynasties, including the demise of the last Chinese dynasty in 1911. (18) Viewing the case of the Falun Dafa from the perspective of a religious organization, which may be threatening the internal stability and legitimacy of ruling interests, allows both insights and blind spots in our appreciation of this situation, however.

A useful approach to theorizing the Falun Dafa as unintended political actor is provided by Bruce Lincoln. His crudely elegant identification of three main categories of religious movement --religions of the status quo, religions of resistance, and religions of revolution-- are not based on the assumption that one should prioritize the relationship between political transformation and religious organizations. Instead, he bases his discussion on a belief in evaluating “revolution as a total social phenomenon which embraces not only political, economic, and military issues, but artistic, cultural, and religious ones as well.” (19) This reinforces claims made above that there is no one correct and privileged account of the Falun Gong’s resistance, but instead a variety of approaches, each of which illuminate certain aspects of the situation while simultaneously obscuring others.

Lincoln’s categorization of religious movements initially assumes that a primary distinction be drawn between a single dominant party and all other interests in a society. Such a dominant party is identified based on its socio-economic prestige and control over the means of production, considerable presence in bodies of institutional authority, and monopolization of the legitimate use of force. The control of religion is an essential aspect of such dominance, Lincoln argues, especially given that “invariably, the

dominant party disseminates a characteristic ideology through all segments of society, propounding a set of fundamental values and principles which, while expressed in terms of lofty abstraction or eternal truth, nevertheless serves to further the interests of those who hold power.” (20) The importance and stability of a religion of the dominant is strengthened by the privileged role which professionals play in the institutionalization of such bodies. The bureaucratic aspects of the religion are often run by representatives of elite classes, since disenfranchised citizens are less likely to have access to the specialized education and financial security which such work generally requires. This leads to greater reliance on elite forces for financial support (as in the cases of government sponsorship, or tax exemptions) and a higher proportion of elite involvement (since they are often more likely to have the required access to specialized education).

Lincoln presents a clear example of this in the role Confucianism played in traditional Chinese society. Confucian society was based on four broad classes of citizenship which were broken into two clear divisions: the literati (*junzi*, or “great men”), and peasants, artisans and merchants (all of which were *xiaoren*, or “small men”). All official positions were held exclusively by the literati, who were for the most part the only members of society to receive education and freedom from menial labour. Since the literati were both the main owners of land and exempt from most taxes, their influence over the economic and political aspects of Chinese society were mutually reinforcing. From the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) throughout much of Chinese history (21), Confucianism has been the recognized official religion of this literati class, and Lincoln argues that its hierarchical philosophy, based on “respect, humility, docility,

obedience, submission and subordination to elders and betters,” (22) has allowed Confucianism great success as a religion of the status quo.

In light of the current repression of the Falun Dafa, one must consider whether the religion which perpetuates dominant interests in contemporary China is some version of Maoism or Marxism. The stated opinion of the Communist Party on this is unequivocally that the Communist member “should be an atheistic fighter, using dialectical materialism to expose the illusions of theism and lead the people to gradually dispel the fog and bondage of religion.” (23) Others, however, are less certain that the societal and ideological role of Maoism is entirely non-religious. Julia Ching describes how, especially during the Cultural Revolution, citizens were forced to pay daily liturgical homage to the Great Leader Mao, even seeking answers from his “presence” regarding household concerns and daily quandaries. Thus, “Maoism became a surrogate religion offering a new faith, elucidated in the Little Red Book, Mao images, lapel buttons, posters, songs, drama, and even ‘liturgy;’ the political leader had become a god.” (24) This perspective is shared by G. Thompson Brown, who argues that “communism is...a replacement of the church as a means of grace.” (25)

What both these and other commentators imply is that despite Marxism’s atheistic claims, in its demand for unquestioned devotion from the masses, its institutional control over power (of both finances and information), and its use of ritual, imagery and praise for figures who are no longer perceived as “normal mortals,” Maoism in practice can be seen to fulfill Lincoln’s notion of a religion of the status quo. If so, then his analytic framework would seem promising in its ability to shed light on the persecution against, and resistance of, the Falun Gong. Such an interpretation

becomes less convincing, however, when one considers that the phenomenon of Maoism as a religious devotion is always exclusively relevant to the period between the mid-1960's and early 1970's. After the end of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's death, such religious enthusiasm lost its appeal (26). Thus, the relevance of extending Lincoln's analysis of religions of the status quo to include Maoism cannot help our attempts to understand the role of the Falun Gong today.

In sharp contrast to a religion which conforms to hegemonic interests and values, Lincoln identifies religions of resistance as any of a plethora of possible systems which are marginalized, overlooked or actively opposed by the dominant faith. While Lincoln believes that there can be only one religion of the status quo in any given situation, the variety of religions of resistance which can occur and thrive simultaneously is theoretically infinite; the range of such groups from the authoritarian to the anarchic, and from the orgiastic to quietistic, can be seen in countless examples from around the world. What is shared among them is a refusal of all or part of the status quo, and as a result "however innocuous the doctrines or activities of such groups may seem, this refusal constitutes at the very least an implicit threat to the interests of the dominant party—a threat that is regularly answered by their stigmatization or suppression." (27) From Chinese history, Lincoln refers to Buddhism, and especially Daoism, whose reliance on the *wu wei* principle of non-action and acceptance of the natural "Way" is in sharp contrast to the rigid hierarchies of the Confucian social model.

The Falun Gong case seems to fit the description well. Clearly, the present crackdown must be seen as the latest incident in China's continuing repression of religious groups (notably Christianity, Islam, Daoism and localized "supernatural cults")

(28) which are seen to be contrary to “Marxist values.” The Falun Gong is well suited to Lincoln’s framework for other reasons, however. He remarks that “rituals that promote group solidarity form an important part of most religions of resistance;” (29) that the only meaningful defining characteristic of the Falun Dafa is group practice of daily qigong exercises can thus suggest linkages to the resistance of the Shoshones and Utes peoples of the Rocky Mountains, and their shared performances of the Sun Dance, for example. Lincoln further examines the significant role of ritual healing in such religions, which is often significant given the lack of expensive medical resources available to populations lacking wealth and power. Again, the Falun Gong’s emphasis on the healing potential of the group’s exercises, to the point of discouraging members from accepting “mainstream” medical care (30), conforms with an identification of the group as an organization of resistance, despite the repeated insistence by group leaders and members of being entirely apolitical.

The greatest danger offered by such minority groups to the status quo, Lincoln argues, is that they may transform into his third category: religions of revolution. As has been suggested above, Chinese history has from the Tang dynasty until the downfall of its last Emperor been replete with examples of such politically subversive religious organizations. Our understanding of the ongoing conflict, as silent protestors continue to be carried away in blue and white vans by police on a weekly basis, is deepened by viewing the Falun members as potential examples of this revolutionary trend, especially since it is almost certain that the officials of the Communist Party do so.

Lincoln argues that for a religion of resistance to transform itself towards rebellion, certain factors must exist, the most important of which is that objective

conditions, such as the financial or the political, must worsen throughout that society. Also important in Lincoln's configuration is that the religion of resistance be able to articulate a claim to political legitimacy which overwhelms that which was held by the dominant party, and further that the religion of resistance be able to actively recruit new members from throughout various levels of the society. Throughout Chinese history, the assumption of politically subversive roles by formally isolated religious interests has coincided with such conditions; as we will see below, the response to such formations seems equally consistent.

The task of attracting a wide range of followers, and of mobilizing them in times of need, may be of special interest in our present discussion. In the Taiping peasant rebellion of 1850-64, which was partially inspired by Baptist preachers, (31) or among the Yellow Turbans, successful mobilization was allowed due to strong bonds of commitment and solidarity with new influxes of members. In a similar vein, the ability of the White Lotus Society, an eschatologically-oriented group of small sects which generally refrained from interaction during times of peace, to "coalesce into large and powerful revolutionary movements in times of hardship and imperial decay," (32) was essential to its effectiveness during the Eight Trigrams Rebellion of 1813. One of the most interesting characteristics of the Falun Gong in its continued acts of passive defiance has been its similar ability to attract an impressive range of members from a wide variety of backgrounds (and even nations), and further to organize this influx of supporters. Based on such analysis, one might understand Beijing's reaction to the group's protests as a response to what might easily become a religion of rebellion.

The ability of the Falun Dafa to attract members from a wide range of backgrounds, “including office workers, farmers, students and business people,” (33) is thus of great concern to the Chinese government. Even more unsettling must be the stories of people such as She Jingsheng and Wang Zhiguo, police officers who have given interviews to Western journalists discussing their devotion to the organization (34), or of high-ranking members of the Central Committee who are practicing members. Part of this appeal to those who might otherwise be associated with the dominant party may be a response to a perceived move towards Western style capitalism, which may serve to disenfranchise the “Falun Gong’s rank and file: the unemployed in their 40’s or older, the elderly, retired officials and party members.” (35) If so, the conditions may be met for two of Lincoln’s three requirements for a religion of revolution, if a growing segment of society views the trend towards Western-style economic reforms to be linked to a worsening of the general quality of life for citizens, and given the clearly existing appeal of the group to a diverse group of trans-societal participants.

This ability to reach, attract and organize massive numbers of supporters has been uniquely enhanced by the use of new communications technologies, especially the internet. With web pages in several languages providing free instruction in the Falun style of qigong, and with additional sites (such as the Cesnur page mentioned in the first endnote) devoted to the gathering of reams of information on the group’s activities and setbacks, support for and interest in both the group’s teachings and political situation has been able to mobilize worldwide. Without technology such as pagers, cell phones and the internet, the well-organized demonstrations could not have been possible, and the

continued growth of the group would have been severely challenged. Despite China's attempts to curb the subversive use of such technologies, including the recent arrest of academic Li Fujun for placing an essay supporting the medical benefits of the Falun Gong's qigong on his web page, (36) such use of communications technologies grows, and therefore from the perspective suggested by Lincoln's analysis continues to threaten the stability of the status quo.

In noting continuities between present and past forms of religiously subversive organization, it is worthwhile in conclusion to briefly note the consistency in the State's response. According to Lincoln, three general futures are possible for a religion of resistance which moves towards rebellion: either its support base will be co-opted, without necessarily endangering the values of the former status quo, it will defeat its oppressor, make a recognized claim to legitimate use of power and become the new status quo, or it will be thoroughly destroyed. The co-option path can be seen to have been forced on supporters of the White Lotus and Manchurian interests by Chu Yuanchang after his founding of the Ming dynasty. Utter destruction, meanwhile, seems to have been the fate of the leaders of the Eight Trigrams Rebellion, after the suppression of which Emperor Jiaqing "proclaimed that beyond the Confucian social and moral principles, no so-called religion exists, and outside the principles of nature and the laws of the ruler, happiness may not be sought after; happiness proceeds from complying with orthodoxy, and misfortune from following heresy." (37) That such language rings so familiar to those accustomed to the "anti-theistic" Maoist polemics of the Communist Party might well suggest that the success of the Chinese Revolution in 1949 represents an example of the third option, wherein the rebels become the new

establishment. Although the future of the Falun Gong is uncertain, it is clear from the force and violence of its crackdown that Beijing takes the threat of these qigong practitioners very seriously, and has no intention of allowing them to undermine the Communist Party's claim to legitimate monopoly on political and military control.

Viewing the Falun Gong's situation from this type of theoretical framework can be of great benefit to one's understanding of the human security issues involved. That the basic security of the persecuted members of the organization is being violated seems relatively uncontested; the reports of beating of prisoners, and the alleged deaths of as many as ten of them, (38) add to the horror with which many watch the continuing crack-down. It is equally evident that this is a type of security concern which "traditional security" analysis is unable to address, with its prioritization of the protection of State boundaries, and its reliance on State actors and military power to define the limits of relevant discourse. By examining the Falun Dafa's situation as both a religious body and a source of political resistance against the CCP, and by acknowledging the historical precedents which may inspire its further defiance as well as guide Beijing's uncompromising response, such a discussion allows us to see how human security concerns are voiced and enacted by groups of citizens, and how the self-promotion of such concerns are attacked by its adversaries.

There are serious limitations in such analysis, however, which may be rendered visible by emphasizing how human security discourse is often saddled with the remnants of traditional security assumptions. Chief among these is a reliance on States and individuals as the atomistic, primary actors in political activity. It is common to identify this tendency with the writings of Thomas Hobbes, who posited the existence of

individuals, who are forced by the anarchic nature of the ungoverned world to form societies, the highest form of which is the Sovereign State. (39) Since the State exists for the sole purpose of protecting its citizens from the ruthless nature of unfettered existence, any ends which the State or its representatives requires to accomplish that end is automatically justified. The State is thus “above” the application of moral considerations, and the main political conflicts are seen either in terms of individuals against individuals, States among States, or between States and individuals.

Although much of the talk surrounding human security rejects the “guns ‘n’ bombs” reliance on security as the preservation of borders and the avoidance of open international conflict, it has internalized this Hobbesian foundation. A variety of human security concerns are thus placed in the context of a State-individual dynamic, where the demands and concerns of one side of the equation are seen to be confronting those of the other. This, clearly, is often highly useful: it is very appropriate when considering the issue of illegal migrants to consider both the liberty and motivations of the individual immigrants, as well as the various demands on and interests of the States which are “losing” and “receiving” them. The perspective provided above on the Falun Gong similarly conveys an important story about how the rights and convictions of individual Chinese citizens are conflicting with the requirements of a State which is perceiving in their actions a challenge to the stability and legitimacy of the institutions which maintain order in that society.

There are consequences of such an approach, however, which may limit its value. One is that the ways in which we are able to think of security issues, in terms of their value, identifying the relevant actors in discussing them, and evaluating the most

worthwhile methods of their promotion, are all constrained by the realist notion that analysis must emphasize State – individual tension. The second consequence, which will be explored first, is that privileging the State in discussions of human security tends to substantiate arguments which justify abuses committed by governments, while undercutting the seriousness with which non-national organizations and movements are viewed politically. By considering the Falun Dafa in terms of these observations, new directions and possibilities may be suggested for our approaches to human security.

Within the conventional political-historical paradigm outlined above, the recent actions taken by the CCP to obliterate the Falun Gong becomes quite comprehensible. Faced with a religion of resistance, and cognizant of a historical trend of politically destabilizing religions of rebellion, Beijing can see in Li's followers a serious threat to their control of society. From their perspective, of course, this is synonymous with a threat to the security of the people of China, since the solid and secure State is all that prevents Hobbsian anarchy from been loosed upon the world. Thus, CCP representatives like Ye Xiaowen, the head of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, feel justified in claiming that "Our government is a people's government...any threat to the people and to society is a threat to the party and the government." (40) This blurring of governmental and citizen interests is echoed throughout the official responses to the crackdown; the latest polemics have claimed that the very future of the People's China is threatened by these qigong practitioners. The recent demonization of the group and its members, then, is justified since, in the words of the State-run *People's Daily*, "We must be fully prepared, with powerful countermeasures, for the bitterness and complexity of struggle against this evil force. This is a major political issue that concerns the future of

the country, the future of its people, and the future of the great endeavor of reform and opening up and of socialist modernization.” (41)

Even the critical observer must recognize that Beijing may in part be acting out of sincere concern for the well being of its citizens. Political instability often creates great misfortune for the people, and the CCP’s argument that the “cult” is responsible for the deaths of 1400 people, most elderly practitioners who had stopped taking medication in favour of qigong treatment, (42) can be viewed with sympathy. The inconsistency of Beijing’s use of justifications for the crackdown (it is an evil cult; members were stealing State secrets; it is an anachronistic throwback to China’s unenlightened past, et cetera) casts doubt on the sincerity of their intentions, however. More seriously, one must earnestly wonder whether the frank exploration of the security issues involved is truly serviced by an approach which tends not only to recognize, but also legitimate, the State’s actions as a valid side of the human security equation.

When one tries to adopt a perspective outside of the realist biases of human security discourse, the consequences of this are problematic. That the arrests of over 35,000 peaceful citizens, the “deaths in detention” of nearly ten, the widespread beatings and torture of detainees, the thousands of detainees held without trial in labour and re-education camps, the confiscation of documents from Western journalists—that all this is to be rationally acknowledged as a response to protect the human security of Chinese citizens seems at best counter-intuitive, and at worst lacking in compassion. While we have seen that the conventional approach to viewing phenomena like the Falun’s defiance in villages and cities across China and around the world, and the government’s response, can be of great relevance and use in understanding certain aspects of the

dynamics at work, over-reliance on such an approach can serve to buttress the positions of abusers, and deflect discourse from the types of concerns which originally motivated it.

Another consequence of this realist emphasis on governmental actors is a constraint on the types of activity which are seen as valuable to the promotion of human security. Since the security of its citizens is considered to be of the *raison d'être* of States, the most relevant and worthwhile solution to security concerns is that which is based on the official policies of countries and their interaction. Thus, concerned observers were relieved at the American Congress' resolution of November 18 1999, which asserted that "The Government of the People's Republic of China should stop persecuting Falun Gong practitioners and other religious believers," (43) and release all detained members. Further "official" support was provided on December 7 1999, when Bill Clinton publicly "questioned" China's continuing crackdown, and associated it with Russia's threats to destroy the city of Grozny. (44) While such international condemnation may play a significant role in pressuring Beijing to alter its policies, the immediate results are far less tangible. Both announcements were met by recriminations from Beijing, which took the form of two general themes: that America should not interfere with the internal concerns of a foreign country, and that the government's actions are justified in light of the Falun Gong's threat to internal stability. As we have seen above, both of these arguments are perfectly reasonable within the logic of realism. The result of Washington's attempts to support the persecuted people in China (leaving aside the question of America's actual motivations and interests in making these announcements) is that Sino-American diplomatic relations have been further strained,

lessening the possibility that human rights concerns can be successfully discussed between these two nations. Meanwhile, the nations of Russia and China can be seen to be squeezed more tightly into a bed which American foreign policy has forced them to share.

The point is not to deny that governments play a significant role in both threatening and jeopardizing the security of humans: it is obvious that they do. Nor is it fair to say that overt and implicit international pressures cannot have serious impacts on these issues. The concern rather is that since the way we speak of human security problems tends to privilege the role and significance of States, the political imagination with which we can evoke understandings of situations, as well as possibilities for their solutions, is constrained. The fortitude of the Falun Gong's members in their continuing ability to resist destruction by the forces of one of the world's mightiest police states, even though they themselves "are interested in traditional Chinese breathing practices and a shared belief in a mix of Buddhist and Daoist philosophy, not politics," (45) suggests how different types of group structure, ranging from the local to the global, and a fluid notion of membership which can vary from the very loose to extreme commitment, may be of value in the pursuit of human security.

The first and most obvious characteristic of the Falun Gong's membership is its ostensibly apolitical nature. This does not imply, clearly, that their actions are not politically significant, so the question must become: what is meant when one says that it is non-political? And from that: what is to be gained by viewing such groups politically? That practitioners refuse to see themselves as political actors is unsurprising in a world where the notion of political space has been so firmly connected with government and

international relations. By recognizing the importance of how the everyday, domestic activities of people influence their notions of individual and collective identity, and how attempts to interfere with such patterns of daily life activities will be met with surprising resistance from affected communities, we can develop a stronger appreciation for “the politics of everyday life.” From this emerges a strengthened potential for collective mobilization and activism, which allows for the activities of small and large non-governmental organizations to assume a larger role in the performance of, and discussions about, human security concerns.

Although supporters have consistently asked the Chinese government to end its repression of their sect, very little of the actual resistance to which Beijing is responding is truly related to States. The mobilization of participants in the large demonstrations has occurred without any governmental assistance, and what little support has been accorded to the Falun Gong by States (as seen in the American proclamations explained above) have had little to no effect on their situations. Instead, their flexible approach to self-organization, which highlights very loose local organization but which can be quickly connected to allow for huge expressions of solidarity, has been remarkably successful at ensuring both their continued existence and political clout. The role of communication technologies, especially the internet, should be stressed in this regard, since it is the directed use of these tools that such mobilizations of previously fragmented communities can so quickly occur. Finally, the trans-national quality of the Falun Gong should be reemphasized. Much of the strength of the group lies in the fact that, thanks to the above-mentioned internet use, groups have been able to form, and communicate amongst one another, in a dozen different nations. Thus support for the group’s

members can be exchanged between individuals whose self-identity, in this particular situation, is more closely related to their shared practice of the Falun style of qigong than to their national allegiance.

Although the present discussion does not allow for a thorough evaluation of these observations, the point has been established that focusing on a central tension between the interests of States and individuals obscures the potential of other types of political participant. In this example, a renewed respect for the role of non-governmental groups and organizations stems from the realization that such bodies, like the Falun Gong, allow for flexible membership, tremendous solidarity in action, and participation which dismisses national boundaries. To increase the recognition of such organizations in the active roles currently played in human security dynamics, and to consider more sincerely the strategic possibilities of such actors in our solutions to situations of profound insecurity, can cast light on those aspects of political problems which realist biases through into shadow.

The weekend of December 11-12, 1999, up to a thousand Falun Dafa members from Taiwan, Canada, Japan, Britain, France and several other countries met in Hong Kong for an international gathering. (46) Despite the potentially inflammatory timing of the conference, organizer Tony Chan insists that the gathering was oriented towards development of participants' qigong skills, and was not intended as political defiance towards the Communist leadership. Members held an outdoor practice session outside the Xinhua News Agency, the de facto CCP committee in Hong Kong, in addition to a series of meetings and workshops. Although Hong Kong is the only region of the People's Republic of China where the banning of the Falun is not in place, the likelihood

that such a public and international event would provoke further oppression of practitioners in the mainland is strong. That members were willing and able to continue organizing themselves and openly practice their activities in the face of such extreme repression is a testament to their convictions. That the meeting included citizens from so many countries, united by an identity which disregards national boundaries, is a testament to the potential for mobilization of politically significant actors who overtly deny their own political importance. That both governmental and non-governmental analysts watched this series of workshops with great care is a testament to the importance of this on-going social phenomenon to human security concerns.

In this chapter, I have presented a brief history of the Falun Gong, and examined some accessible ways by which to understand the mode of resistance it represents. By focusing on the group in terms of its historical continuity with previous Chinese “religious” organizations that came to be of considerable political significance, employing the conceptual framework describing “religions of resistance” offered by Lincoln, and noting how the struggle of the Falun Dafa provides a salient example of the current nature of human security concerns, which contrast with traditional security analysis, we have been able to develop a stronger understanding of how the Falun Gong operates as a powerful site of resistance to the Chinese State. As we have also seen, however, such analysis results in a reinsertion of realist values and preoccupations into our discourse. By adopting such an analysis, therefore, one neuters the possibility of viewing the Falun Gong as a group in and of itself, which does not rely on a relationship to the sovereign State to justify its identity, or of approaching it in terms of the significance of the qigong exercises themselves, as silent acts of everyday resistance.

The next chapter, then, will unpack with greater care how the Falun Gong might be understood, not as being in a unique relation with the CCP, but as an example of a New Social Movement. Such an analysis will reveal how certain distinctive qualities of the Falun Gong can be understood to be consistent with those displayed by such movements around the world; it will simultaneously, however, illustrate how such literature is marked by the perseverance of Marxist ideals in a body of theory which claims to have shed its class-oriented preoccupations. In so doing, we may be able to recognize similarities in approaches, strategies and concerns between the Falun Dafa and their global counterparts, and thus lend stronger credence to the suggestion that respect for East/West distinctions should not serve to under-rate the value of the Falun Gong's lessons to those of us who live outside the Great Wall of China.

Endnotes

1. Lloyd Axworthy, "Human Security: Safety for People in a Changing World," 1999
2. "Eye of the Storm," *New York Times Magazine*, August 8, 1999

Note: All quotations and information from news media and periodical sources, unless otherwise noted, are from the Cesnur (Centre for Studies on New Religions) webpage, at: www.cesnur.org/testi/falun_updates.htm

This source, which is updated daily, is a fine example of how the strategic use of communications technologies can be employed by social and political movements to organize and share information.

3. Ibid.
4. Although there are a number of systems used in romanizing the Chinese language, the two most common are the Wade-Giles system and the pinyin system, which has been the official form of romanization for the People's Republic of China since 1958. I have elected to use the pinyin system throughout this paper (with the obvious exception of direct quotations). Hence, for example, the Wade-Giles "C'hi Kung" becomes "Qigong," and so on.
5. Massimo Introvigne, "Falun Gong 101"
6. Falun Gong and Falun Dafa are used interchangeably as the organization's names. The term Falun refers to a "wheel" of energy, or qi, which is located in the lower abdomen, and is associated with the common Chinese notion of the dantian. "Gong" can be translated as "effort," while "dafa" can mean holy law.
7. "Interview with Li Hongzhi," *Time Magazine Asia*, May 10, 1999
8. "Adherents of Banned China Sect Ask for Help," *Fox News*, October 28, 1999
9. "Eye of the Storm," *New York Times Magazine*, August 8, 1999
10. "Falun Gong Members ask for Tolerance," *Associated Press*, October 28, 1999
11. "While Defending Crackdown, China Admits Appeal of Sect," *New York Times*, November 5, 1999
12. "Full Text of the Legislative Resolution Banning Cults," October 30, 1999
13. "Beijing Says 35 000 Members of Outlawed Sect have had 'Run-Ins' with Police," *New York Times*, December 3, 1999
14. "Few Members of Large Sect to Face Trial, Beijing Says," *New York Times*, December 2, 1999
15. "China Says Seattle Scraps Falun Gong Endorsement," *Reuters*, December 2, 1999
16. "More Falun Gong Members Detained," *Associated Press*, December 5, 1999

17. "While Defending Crackdown, China Admits Appeal of Sect," *New York Times*, November 5, 1999
18. Charles O. Hucker. *China's Imperial Past: An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture*, Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1975
19. Bruce Lincoln. *Religion, Rebellion, Revolution*, Macmillan Press: London, 1985. Pg. 282. Unfortunately, my choice of Lincoln as a historical source was a poor one, as has been pointed out to me by my committee. I thus officially distance myself from the accuracy (or lack thereof) of all information cited by him.
20. Ibid. Pg. 268
21. In fact, Confucianism has at various times been supplanted in importance by rival religions, such as Daoism and Buddhism, or refigured through adoption by other schools of thought, such as Legalism's alteration of Confucianism during the Han dynasty.
22. Lincoln. Pg. 270
23. Donald E. MacInnis. *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice*, Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 1989. Pg. 427
24. Julia Ching. *Probing China's Soul*, Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1990. Pg. 130
25. G. Thompson Brown. *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*, John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1983. Pg. 194
26. Lincoln, pg. 273
27. The mass appeal of such religious devotion towards the Chinese leadership seemed to regain strength in the early 1990's, but this reflected a desire for a renewal of income redistribution policies in the face of harsh economic times, not a ritualized deification of Party leadership.
28. For a detailed explanation of this, see: Luo, Zhufeng. *Religion Under Socialism in China*, M.E. Shapre, Inc.: Armonk, New York, 1991
29. Lincoln, pg. 275
30. Massimo Introvigne. "Falun Gong 101"
31. Cristtanelli Grottanelli, in Lincoln. Pg. 31-32
32. Ibid. pg. 297

33. "While Defending Crackdown, China Admits Appeal of Sect," *New York Times*, November 5, 1999
34. "Falun Gong Protests for Third Day," *The Washington Post*, October 28, 1999
35. "Falun Gong Reminds China of Past," *Associated Press*, November 1, 1999
36. "China Puts Falun Gong Members in Work Camp Group," *Reuters*, November 19, 1999
37. Lincoln, pg. 282
38. "Adherents of Banned China Sect Ask for Help," *Fox News*, October 28, 1999
39. Thomas Hobbes, C.B. MacPherson ed. *Leviathan*, Penguin Classics: London, 1985
40. "China Says Falun Gong will Vanish—An Official said that Members of the Group had not been able to Adapt to the Nation's Fast-Developing Society," *The Washington Post*, November 5, 1999
41. "China Says its Future Depends of Routing Banned Spiritual Movement," *New York Times*, November 6, 1999
42. "China Says Falun Gong will Vanish—An Official said that Members of the Group had not been able to Adapt to the Nation's Fast-Developing Society," *The Washington Post*, November 5, 1999
43. "China Regrets Congress' Resolution on Falun Gong," *Reuters*, November 19, 1999
44. "China Tells U.S. to Stay out of Falun Gong Crackdown," *Kyodo News Service*, December 7, 1999
45. "Hong Kong to Host International Falun Gong Meeting," *Kyodo News Service*, December 7, 1999
46. "Falun Gong Members Ask for Tolerance," *Associated Press*, October 28, 1999

Chapter Three: Falun Gong as a “New” Social Movement?

“This space in the garage is what the Department has allowed the colored men—it is underground, there are no windows permitting sky, and the sick light is all the more enervating for it—but the mechanics have done their best to make it their own. For example: a close inspection of Chancere’s campaign posters, which are taped to every other cement column despite regulations against campaign literature within a hundred yards of Headquarters, reveals myriad tiny insurrections....No one notices them but they are there, near-invisible, and count for something.”

The Intuitionist (1)

When considering the written, visual and verbal reports through which we in Canada come to learn about the Falun Gong’s activities and the P.R.C.’s responses to them, one is quickly struck by the amorphous and nebulous nature of the group itself. The controversial issue of the size of the membership (Li Hongzhi claims 100 million, while the government uses the figure of 2 million) (2) highlights this porous and contingent quality of participants’ connection to the group—clearly, membership in this context cannot be identified as easily as that of a card-carrying union member, or of someone who is a visible minority. This raises several interesting questions about how such a mass affiliation can be viewed in academic discourse as a cohesive group, and what strengths or weaknesses such a provisional quality of commitment might lend to the phenomenon of the organization.

The previous chapter focused on the Falun Gong as the latest incarnation of a long-running Chinese tradition of politically disruptive religious organizations, and discussed how such an approach conforms to an analytical framework offered by Human Security concerns. This analysis proved inadequate to interpret several elements of the Falun Gong’s story, however, so it is necessary to borrow from additional discursive modes to address some of the phenomenological excesses which remain

unacknowledged. This chapter explores how a wide body of social and political thought, which I refer to as New Social Movement theory, might explain aspects of the Falun Gong's situation, such as the unique nature of their resistance, hidden in the guise of daily actions, and the contingent nature of membership mentioned above, which more traditional analysis cannot.

By New Social Movement theory, I refer to a developing theoretical discussion that is interested in the international rise over the last few decades of types of mass politicized mobilization which seem incongruent with the neo-Marxist social movements that received the balance of academic attention until recently. In this chapter I argue that the on-going passive resistance of the Falun Gong is, at least ostensibly, a clear example of the type of “new” social movement which these writers are responding to, and accordingly this literature provides several handholds to grapple with what's happening across China, and in fact in Falun Gong groups around the world—including across the Straight in Vancouver. (3) Writers such as James C. Scott, whose discussion of hidden, everyday resistances allows a recognition of the political significance in these movements' actions, and Alberto Melucci, who provides a clear framework for identifying such movements, allow us to focus attention on the Falun Gong themselves, not merely as symptoms of State illegitimacy.

To this interpretive usefulness, however, there is a simultaneous counter-move, through which the actual phenomenon of their resistance provides a silent, yet significant critique of the literature, most obviously in its refutation of most authors' unstated loyalty to class oriented ideologies and neo-Marxist analytical frameworks, and in their reliance on Western movements and values. Through this discussion, we will be

able to extend our understanding of the Falun Gong as a unique form of organization, whose value and ontological basis need not be defined in relation to a sovereign State. It will be shown that New Social Movement theory can inform the way we approach an interpretation of the Falun Dafa's actions, in ways which necessitate a stretching of conventional understandings of political action, such that their simple qigong exercises begin to appear related to the Ghost Dance of south-western native North American tribes, as movements of remarkable political power.

One useful way of approaching the recent literature concerning new social movement theory is to view it as a response to writers such as Barrington Moore Jr., who challenged Marxist orthodoxy (while implicitly buttressing it) by questioning "why people so often put up with being the victims of their societies and why at other times they become very angry and try with passion and forcefulness to do something about their situation." (4) Moore's analysis focused on worker's issues in twentieth century Germany, applying a mix of traditional Marxist and more contemporary socialist theory to evaluate why workers would sometimes openly protest their situations, while at other times they would not. Although Moore's theoretical discussions sought to include various forms and sites of resistance, thus allowing him to make far-reaching conclusions about the nature of injustice generally, his theoretical and empirical reference points secured his project to a bias towards class-oriented activism and overt socialist revolt.

Amidst the flurry of response to Moore's analysis, a consistent theme was that, by overemphasizing the importance of openly politicized or militant revolt and institutional revolution, Moore was disregarding the importance of quietly persistent

forms of resistance to coercion, which by its nature severely limits a group's capability of armed revolt. One such writer, James C. Scott, explores in detail how these hidden resistances operate in the small Malaysian village of 'Sedaka.' He describes how, through the "use of implicit understandings and informal networks," village members maintain a popular culture based on "everyday forms of peasant resistance," (5) which is oriented towards self-help principles and is consistent with the geographically scattered and ostensibly disorganized nature of peasant societies. This is based on the continual performance of hidden practices, ranging from the strategic use of village gossip and pilfering to consistent foot dragging and the sabotaging of farm machinery (which is, of course, the property of the land owners), all of which illustrate how oppressed groups of people can, as Eric Hobsbawm says, "work their system to their minimum disadvantage," (6) and in so doing assert themselves against the discipline of dominant state and economic apparatuses without directly challenging those oppressors in an open fashion.

As Scott recognizes, traditional analysts would generally dismiss such prosaic struggles as non-political. In relating the mainstream view of such resistance, he relates the positions of Eugene Genovese and Gerald Mullin, who articulate a view of political resistance that emphasizes organized, intentional practices which are consciously related to a revolutionary project. If we accept such a conceptualization, neither the farmers of Sedaka nor the qigong practitioners in Tiananmen Square seem to be involved in anything political; for traditional Marxists, their activities might at best be viewed as "token resistance," which are seen to be "ultimately trivial or inconsequential, while only the former (*organized, intentional and revolutionary*) can be said to constitute real

resistance.” (7, *italicized comments mine*) While the Falun Gong has displayed remarkable organizational aptitude on many occasions, the repeated denials by practitioners of any political motivation for their activities, as well as the apparent absence of any revolutionary project directing the group’s exercises, would clearly delegate it to a space “outside” that on which the political can play.

One point that is at stake, then, in Scott’s attempt to recognize the political in the everyday, non-confrontational actions of oppressed peasantry, is an opportunity to free our notions of effective resistance from imposed limitations which prioritize formal, organized revolutionary activity, which is generally manipulated and formed by “outsiders,” (8) to instead recognize the quiet strategies of daily life, and of the wisdom expressed in hidden resistances. His point in challenging these traditional views, however, is not to deny the importance of intention in the recognition of resistance, but instead to note that “the problem lies in what is a misleading, sterile, and sociologically naïve insistence upon distinguishing ‘self-indulgent,’ individual acts, on the one hand, from presumably ‘principled,’ selfless, collective actions on the other.” (9) Intention is an essential aspect of resistance for Scott, but in the case of disenfranchised communities that intention may “nearly always (be) survival and persistence.” (10)

This formulation intersects in interesting ways with the Falun Dafa. Certainly, an essential motivation for the “non-activist” practitioners who perform their art each morning in Beijing, knowing that they will be taken by police, is a desire to ensure the survival of their form of qigong practice. When protestors do speak out to explain what they hope the protests to accomplish (a surprisingly infrequent occurrence), they ask only that the group be allowed to continue its practices, without being subjected to

discrimination. In this sense, then, the impetus for their revolt is a self-centred desire to ensure the survival of a group which is an expression of their way of life. This clearly represents a less severe assault on their well being than the appropriation of food and other essential resources from Malaysian peasants. It is essential in interpreting this Chinese phenomenon, however, to understand that doing morning qigong exercises is a significant part not only of a practitioner's day, but also their sense of physical and spiritual well-being, their participation in the community, and their connection to their traditional culture. Examples abound of how resistance can spontaneously form when the lifestyle and values of a community are threatened—Naomi Klein recently noted that by making public raves illegal, the City of Toronto “took an apolitical party scene and turned it into a political movement.” (11)

This desire to maintain a certain way of life and continuity with traditional values is of special importance for the Falun Gong. In the previous chapter I referred to how the protests might be understood as an assertion of traditional Chinese ideals (such as those of the indigenous Daoist religion, or of the benefits of daily qigong exercises) against the commercialization and enforced atheism associated with the CCP. Scott provides greater insight into this, via his argument that hidden modes of peasant resistance, such as foot-dragging or gossip, can also be viewed as an attempt to communicate dissatisfaction with a system which does not provide any avenue for their feedback. If the landowners impose a new system of crop rotation, the peasants who actually work the fields possess no method of providing critical input into that decision, even though their familiarity with the land and crops may provide valuable insights. In such a situation, the only available avenue for expression, and the only way to influence

the landowners' policies, is to employ the passive, hidden tactics which may inconvenience the owners so much as to alter their decisions. Similarly, the people of the P.R.C. can be seen to possess no formal, legitimate method of voicing critical opinions of the cultural policies of the CCP; in this context, their mute protestations can be seen to share a great deal with the sabotage of farm machinery by peasant farmers.

This notion that these forms of resistance are a response to, and are unintentionally controlled by, the institutions and technologies of repression is of great importance to Scott, who insists that "the parameters of resistance are also set, in part, by the institutions of repression." (12) Although the Foucauldian consequences of this assertion will be unpacked more carefully in the following chapter, and returned to in the final chapter, it is worthwhile to note here how Scott's analysis reveals social movement theory's willingness to acknowledge the pivotal role that extreme forms of domination play in the formation of resistant practices. (13) Through this, the Falun Dafa's routines resemble the Ghost Dance, an ostensibly passive, non-political expression of individual bodies, which the native people of the south-western United States continued to practice despite its brutal suppression by the American government. The Ghost Dance parallels its contemporary Chinese counterpart not only in its peaceful perseverance as a non-discursive expression of autonomy, in spite of violent disciplinary response, but also in that part of the power of this expression was as a silent rejection of a dominating and alien culture. The Ghost Dance was a reaction to the colonization of its people; it cannot be understood except in relation to those who sought to destroy it. The same may well be said of the determination of the Chinese people to continue following Li Hongzhi's qigong system.

As Scott points out, however, the value and importance of such everyday resistance operates not merely on a level of contest for immediate gains or personal gratification, but more importantly as “a struggle over the appropriation of symbols, a struggle over how the past and present will be understood and labeled, a struggle to assess blame, a contentious effort to give partisan meaning to local history.” (14). Just as the public foot dragging of a peasant has more significance in its symbolic impact than in its actual influence on how much rice was thrashed that day, so too does Beijing’s response to the Falun Gong indicate a symbolic significance of thousands of silent individuals performing qigong in Tiananmen Square which is unrelated to the actual, physical effects of the practices. Theorist Alberto Melucci recognizes this weighting of the symbolic value of passive resistance as an identifying characteristic of new social movements. Noting how the actual form of the resistance, whether it be gossiping among peasants, performing qigong in city parks, or the self-conscious internal organization of women’s movements has become as important as the actual overt results of such resistance, Melucci draws on Marshal McLuhan to suggest that new social movements exist not so much to bring about immediate societal transformation, as to operate as a “sign” or “message” to society via the form it takes.

In seeking to express that which is unique to contemporary movements, Melucci emphasizes four characteristics which he, and many of the theorists participating in the discussion of new social movements, feels to indicate a shift from earlier forms of collective action. The identificational contrast being established is between the contemporary movements and their nineteenth century counterparts, which Melucci explains were “preoccupied with struggles over the production and distribution of

material goods and resources.” (15) By making this common distinction, several concerns arise regarding what status, if any, social movements possessed before Marxist thought established a political reason to discuss them. Reading thinkers like Melucci, Scott, Carl Boggs and Alain Touraine feeds a growing anxiety that their conversation has failed to shed the Marxist preoccupations and values whose absence is meant to partially identify what is “new” about these movements. How this affects such theory’s compatibility with the Falun Gong will be returned to later in the chapter. Melucci also reflects the dominant interests of this literature by looking at exclusively Western examples, such as the German Green party or the American Women’s rights movement; this echoes Boggs’ examination of Eurosocialism, American New Populism and the German Green party. The reader should also keep this in mind, as it will be dealt with later in the chapter.

Despite these misgivings, Melucci’s assertion of the four characteristics of new social movements provides insight into both that which may be unique about such movements, and more importantly into the reality of the Falun Gong. The first way in which Melucci distinguishes recent movements from their nineteenth century counterparts relates to how “they challenge the administrative logic of complex systems primarily on symbolic grounds.” (16) Although this point has already been mentioned in the observation of how the quiet qigong exercises of the Falun Gong operate as “sign, ” this point also recognizes the role of information generation and new communications technologies in these movements’ activities. This can easily be seen in the development of the women’s and environmental activist communities over the past few decades, through technology’s ability to allow otherwise alienated and scattered individuals with

minority views or attitudes to communicate with each other, while also distributing information concerning their positions to larger audiences.

Although a first glance at the Falun Gong membership reveals a loosely organized group of people who share morning exercises, the role of information technologies has been essential to their ability to resist attempts by Beijing to destroy them. For example, the remarkable organization of the larger public demonstrations was only possible due to the widespread use of cell phones and pagers, technologies which allowed the demonstrations to form quickly, quietly, and without the confusion and miscommunication which might otherwise have led to violence. In addition, the Falun Gong's surprising popularity, as well as its strategically necessary ability to generate support from overseas, is due to its use of the internet, a relatively recent tool to mainland Chinese. By posting free information on the group's qigong exercises and their benefits, providing information on new demonstrations as well as the detailing of governmental abuses, and the integration of Falun Gong members around the globe, this recent communications technology has been pivotal in the group's ability to evade the destructive clutches of its Goliath while simultaneously generating even greater international public support. It is not surprising, then, that when Beijing announced its selective banning of web sites in March 2000, porn sites were happily overlooked while all sites related to the Falun Dafa were unconditionally prohibited. (17)

Melucci's second characteristic of new social movements relates to how its membership views participation in the organization as being of greater benefit than the merely instrumental attaining of specific political ends, for "participation within movements is considered a goal in itself because, paradoxically, actors self-consciously

practice in the present the future social changes they seek.” (18) This is well demonstrated in the women’s movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s (and on into the present); by placing special emphasis on internal organization of groups so as to avoid the reassertion of patriarchal patterns of power, and by celebrating the community formed within the group itself, focus was often shifted from external change to ensuring that the internal realities of the group corresponded to the participants’ values.

This signification of participation is an absolutely essential point in understanding the Falun Gong, whose 100 million strong membership would share their leader’s insistence on the non-political nature of their involvement. Participation in the Falun Gong is based on the experienced health and social benefits of daily practice, as well as a response against Communist atheism and contemporary commercialization, choosing instead a deeper appreciation for the values of traditional Chinese culture. These 100 million people do not belong because they want to become political dissidents. We have observed, however, that when their organization, and thus their daily life practices, are threatened, they are capable of remarkable solidarity and self-organization.

Melucci’s third observation on new social movements recognizes the fluid relationship that occurs between the latent and visible aspects of the movement. It is important to notice that Melucci’s observation of how “these ‘submerged’ networks, noted for their stress on individual needs, collective identity and part-time membership, constitute the laboratories in which new experiences are invented,” (19) places emphasis on the private and ‘hidden’ quality of such activism. Just as the demonstrations held in Victoria, in the summer of 1999, against the coalition bombing of Kosovo brought out a

variety of supporters who were not “full-time,” or public, peace activists, so too does the strength of new movements like the Falun Gong rise from the fluid and hidden nature of its membership. A government worker or economically comfortable housewife would not be recognized as a political dissident in their everyday lives, but their flexible membership in the movement allows them to join in solidarity when such action appears necessary.

Obviously, this fluid and hidden nature of activism not only conveys great strength to such movements, but also magnifies the difficulty faced by coercive mechanisms seeking to control or eliminate it. This is of less significance in the case of the German Green Party, where both Melucci and Boggs place great emphasis on how private, daily practices (such as recycling) form an integral aspect of support for the “public” manifestation of the movement, but throughout Chinese history this quality of provisional participation has proven decisive. Just as the Taiping Revolution (see Chapter 2) was as successful as it was because of the surprising amount of otherwise hidden support it was able to mobilize, so too does much of the strength of Li Hongzhi’s followers come from how their often private exercise of the qigong movements predisposes them to lend support for its public preservation.

The final defining characteristic that may be shared by new social movements notes how contemporary activism is “acutely aware of the planetary dimension of life in complex societies.” (20) Obviously Melucci is referring to more contemporary recognitions of the interdependence of the world system, as evidenced in the recent development of globally minded environmental and anti-nuclear movements. There is however a valuable correlation between this fourth characteristic of new social

movements and Li's suppressed qigong group, since those notions of complex global interdependence and the significance of local action on larger patterns of interaction are primary to the Daoist norms which help form the normative frame of their practices and values. As I have already suggested, one possible story describing the appeal of the Falun Gong would emphasize the yearning of those people for a return to the values and belief systems which have been the foundation of Chinese culture for millennia, in the face of the growing commercialism and Hegelian atheism of the CCP, which continues to decry such traditions as retrograde superstition.

That the case of the Falun Gong shows that this emphasis on the global importance of local action is far less "new" than Melucci assumes points to a consistent problem with the balance of new social movement theory—as I have already suggested, it may well be that the only thing new about these forms of political mobilization is our willingness to notice and examine them. Although Scott (like Melucci, Moore, Boggs and Touraine) insists on framing his discussion almost exclusively in relation to class related conflict, it becomes evident while reading his work that the hidden resistances he discusses have nothing to do with either this period in history or class consciousness. Unless one insists on a strictly Marxist/Hegelian understanding of the development of modes of production, it is clear that such techniques as gossip and foot dragging, if to be viewed as political forms of resistance, have always been such. This rejection of the novelty of such resistance leads to the suspicion that the types of mobilization and organization celebrated by the theorists discussed in this chapter are not that new at all. The point then may not be about the world's phenomena but about our academic

discourse; perhaps our theoretical imaginations, so long constrained by Marxist norms, are finally recognizing the political in places where it has always been.

Clearly, this anxiety about the questionable “newness” of these movements is married to a discomfort with the persistently Marxist preoccupations it represents. Scott is interested in “the larger issues of resistance, *class struggle* and ideological domination...,” (21) while Boggs argues that “the novelty of the current movements lies...in the *historical convergence* of economic conditions, social forces and political expressions,” (22, *italics mine*) and so on. While such analysis obviously carries a great deal of moral and intellectual weight, there is a marked division between such theory and the reality of the Falun Gong. Any explanation of the Falun Gong which seeks to impose class oriented problematics automatically alienates itself from the phenomenon of their resistance, since their concerns have nothing to do with class struggles, economic development or the modes of production. The non- (and *not* post-) Marxist quality of the group can be acknowledged in the trans-societal nature of its membership; that people of the very highest and very lowest economic levels of Chinese society join together to perform their exercises, and express their dissent, undermines efforts to place their situation within a class oriented interpretation. More troubling to a theorist who might seek to situate the Falun Dafa in such an analysis would be the fact that it is the People’s government that the qigong practitioners are resisting; it is hard to reconcile a Marxist explanation of the Falun Gong with their persistent struggle against a Marxist State.

By noting some of the ways in which an emerging academic discussion of ostensibly post-Marxist forms of collective action provides analytical tools for our

understanding of the on-going passive resistance of the Falun Dafa, I have tried to emphasize my own fascination with hidden techniques of everyday resistance which seem to allow the overcoming of the strong by the weak. By consciously altering our focus, so as to recognize the political in the everyday resistances of Malaysian peasants, German environmentalists or Chinese internal exercises, we may gain the ability to imagine new forms of political activism, based on fluid membership and peaceful mobilization, which can provide new tools in the persistent efforts of oppressed peoples to assert their dignity and personal liberty.

This chapter, then, has explored a theoretical approach which, by refusing conventional understandings of political mobilization and space, and by emphasizing types of action and organization which are hidden, ‘soft’ and situated in the self-interest of everyday practices, permits us to understand the Falun Gong’s resistance as a form of political expression, despite lack of socially transformative goals or teleological intentions. The interpretive value of such literature is undercut, however, by an emphasis of class issues to which the Falun Dafa fails to conform, as well as a persistent focus on ‘Western’ case studies and an assertion of novelty which are extremely problematic. More seriously, although the discussion in this chapter has allowed us to grant ontological significance to the non-exclusionary organization of the Falun Dafa and its members, it fails to extend that theoretical focus to the subversive actions of the qigong exercises themselves.

Chapter Four will try to deal with this phenomenological excess by exploring how theories of everyday resistance and counter-discipline, as provided by Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, provide insight into how resistance can

be viewed, not merely as an expression of class consciousness, nor as a specific response to a certain place and time, but instead as a constant by-product of disciplinary structures, to which temporal and spatial exclusions fail to apply.

Endnotes

1. Colson Whitehead. *The Intuitionist*, Anchor Books: New York, 1999. Pg. 18
2. Massimo Introvigne. *Falun Gong 101*, Centre for Studies of New Religions homepage: www.cesnur.org
3. Although Falun Gong groups practice regularly in Vancouver (as well as other cities with large Chinese communities around North America), members in these diasporic communities have not been “radicalized” in the same way that their Mainland counterparts have. They do, however, represent international support for the group, work to raise consciousness concerning the abuses occurring in the P.R.C., and often provide financial support through seminar fees and so on. The apparent necessity of clearly dominating forces to procure resistance is considered later in this chapter, and is explored in some depth in Chapter Four.
4. Barrington Moore Jr. *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, New York, 1978. Pg. Xiii
5. James C. Scott *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1985. Pg. Xvi
6. In *Ibid.* xv
7. *Ibid.* pg. 292
8. This is especially the case in socialist peasant uprisings, where the stimulus, financing and direction for revolutionary activities is often provided by actors who exist outside of the culture and economic reality of the “revolutionaries.”
9. Scott, pg. 295
10. *Ibid.* pg. 301

11. Naomi Klein, "How to radicalize a generation," *The Globe and Mail*, May 10, 2000. Pg. A15
12. Scott, pg. 299
13. As Chapter Four makes clear, a Foucauldian analysis would emphasize this as a necessary aspect of all resistance, regardless of scale, and thus differ from the less "universal" theorizations of Scott.
14. Scott, pg. Xvii
15. Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. Hutchinson Radius: London, 1989. Pg. 5
16. Ibid. pg. 5
17. Miro Cernetig, "For the internet age, China builds 'Great Firewall,'" *The Globe and Mail*, March 11, 2000. Pg. A1
18. Melucci, pg. 68
19. Ibid. pg. 93
20. Ibid. pg. 6
21. Scott, pg. Xvii
22. Carl Boggs, *Social Movements and Political Power: Emerging Forms of Radicalism in the West*, Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1986. Pg. 11

Chapter Four: Falun Gong as Everyday Resistance?

“The defeat of the hard by the soft,
 The defeat of the strong by the weak—
 This is known to all under heaven,
 Yet no one is able to practice it.”

Daodejing, Chapter 78 (1)

So far in this discussion, we have viewed, from varying perspectives, the phenomenon of the Falun Gong’s persistent performance of its qigong exercises, even on the perilous ground of Tiananmen Square, despite the antagonistic and oppressive attentions of the CCP. Throughout the course of this paper, the core assertion is that there is something intensely political in their activities, but it has become apparent that the ability to evaluate the quality and location of that political nature cannot be sufficiently examined from the point of view of conventional social and political discourse, which often equates the political with that related to the governing or preservation of the sovereign State, or the elucidation of the principles and organization of the ideal community. (2)

While the two interpretative frameworks explored in Chapters Two and Three have been helpful in understanding the Falun Gong’s situation in many respects, the complexity of this phenomenon stubbornly demands still more attention. Although the approaches already explored have provided insight into how Human Security issues are being expressed in the conflictual relationship between the organization and an oppressive State, and further how the group might be understood as a social movement of political significance in a post- (if not necessarily non-) Marxist capacity, these explanations fail to acknowledge the significance of the unique nature of the defiance itself.

This chapter seeks to address this significant element of the Falun Dafa's story by drawing on theories of everyday resistance to explore the non-discursive practices which form the content of members' daily experience as Falun Gong supporters, and by my assertion as political activists as well. I focus on the work of Michel de Certeau, who draws on Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu in an exploration of how political resistance can be viewed in the *bricolage* of daily life, in which "many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking etc.) are tactical in character." (3) By outlining how de Certeau extends Michel Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power to emphasize the plethora of unnamed practices which counteract dominating structures, and how he utilizes Pierre Bourdieu's exploration of the generation of disciplinary forces and the relationship between structure, practice and situation, I will discuss how de Certeau lays the theoretical framework for viewing politically enabling practices in mundane actions.

Although his project suffers from the familiar tendency of social theorists to romanticize the suffering of dominated people by recasting their suppression as quietly subversive, I will argue that he nevertheless provides significant insight into the recognition of a type of tactical intelligence which avoids co-option and domination by oppressive social forces. By applying this analysis to how the Falun Dafa's daily, health-oriented performance of qigong exercises has come to be, in the nervous words of the CCP, "a major political issue that concerns the future of the country, the future of its people, and the future of the great endeavor of reform..." (4), greater sense can be made out of the phenomenon and Beijing's response to it, beyond that which conventional theories of the political are able to provide.

French critical theorist Michel de Certeau dedicates his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, to the ordinary man, “a common hero, an ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets.” (5) This introductory ode to the significance of common individuals (6), who in their anonymous and continuous masses herald new possibilities for the mapping of the shifting contours of political space, is an obvious reference to Sigmund Freud’s introduction to *Civilization and its Discontents*. It also, however, emphasizes de Certeau’s distance from Freudian, and by extension Enlightenment, thought. While Freud’s understanding of the “ordinary man” challenges certain traditional limitations on speaking of the masses by applying his psychoanalytic method to understanding the goals and proclivities of common people, he ultimately remains faithful to Enlightenment moralism and its assertion of united masses sharing a common destiny. By placing the common man as a representative of the abstract universal, then, “the ordinary man functions here in the same way as the God of former times.” (7)

De Certeau, while acknowledging the continuities with such earlier social and political thought, stands in contrast with Freud’s tendency to allow the medicalisation and professionalism of social theory to construct an understanding of the ordinary which reasserts principles of totalization. His opening dedication instead reflects a desire to examine how the everyday, the mundane and unremarkable, quietly asserts itself as a force of resistance against the disciplinary forces which the professionalization of the social sciences served to strengthen. He is thus interested neither in the articulation of a necessarily shared destiny of ordinary men, nor in a lament over how societal forces serve to discipline and control the masses. He instead seeks to explore how such

disciplinary forces allow (and perhaps necessitate), through everyday practices which are multiform and constantly shifting, the possibility of fragmented and momentary “victories of the ‘weak’ over the ‘strong’ (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or an imposed order, etc.)....” (8)

I have two reasons for beginning my discussion of de Certeau and his theoretical usefulness in approaching the Falun Gong by noting the content and sub-text of his opening dedication. First, for the same reason that de Certeau chose to highlight this rejection of the Enlightenment values hidden within the social sciences, through his choice of dedication—to highlight the significance of the “common person” and the mundane activities which we perform. This may lead to newly conceived possibilities for political resistance, through which a theoretical framework might be extended which would echo Lao Tzu’s celebration of “the defeat of the strong by the weak.” The relevance of this theoretical potential for our understanding of Chinese qigong associations is clear. By focusing on the members themselves, regardless of age, education or income, the personal expression of autonomy asserted by Falun Gong members through the silence of their exercises may be granted ontological significance and political relevance.

Secondly, it is relevant to begin in this way to emphasize the conceptual shift between de Certeau and superficially comparable thought which also searches for political significance in the activities of the “common man.” As will be seen, de Certeau’s argument is dependant on viewing disciplinary structures and procedures in a way which is inconsistent with dominant modernist assumptions and common understandings of the relationship between theory, discipline and science. Such a

rejection of conventional limitations is necessary to illuminate those aspects of the Falun Gong which modernist theories have failed to address.

De Certeau's project begins with the observation that, in the previous century, the societal position traditionally assigned to disempowered minority interests has spread out to include individuals who would traditionally (9) be considered the powerful, those in whose favour dominating forces operate. In a society in which a growing percentage of citizens are cast as consumers, set in a culture which they no longer help form or shape, the marginality of individuals extends to include nearly everyone. When one lives in a consumer culture which few actually help create, the silent and unrecognized process of consumption forms a society where "a marginal group has now become the silent majority." (10) Thus, bodies of theory devoted to the promotion of minority interests come to be of considerable importance to a widened audience, as the balance of people become recipients of dominating forces which benefit no identifiable majority group.

This observation is provided greater weight when we reflect on the Falun Gong's widely varied membership, which ranges from unemployed factory workers (11) to cadre members. It has become increasingly difficult for Beijing to mobilize popular support for its tirade against the Falun Gong, precisely because "the enemy" becomes the majority of the Chinese people. Among many of the non-activist Mainland Chinese who I have discussed this project with, there is a shared ambivalence towards the government's campaign against the group. It seems that this is largely fueled by a shared uncertainty about whose interests are served by the obliteration of a peaceful group to which their friends and neighbours belong.

De Certeau's insight into how the majority has become a minority is not the basis for fatalistic acceptance of such domination, however, but the springboard for his exploration of how "the tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices." (12) What is at stake in this is not only the recognition of an avenue of articulating and expressing the political in a space where it could not previously be seen or heard, such as in the practices of cooking or morning qigong exercises. It also suggests a re-mapping of disciplinary forces which emphasizes "anti-discipline" over authoritative controls, focusing the theoretical eye on the "empty" spaces in the picture rather than on the objects which seem to dominate the scene. In this, de Certeau's project is dependent on Foucault, and the moments when he appears most at odds with Foucault are those when he most faithfully explores the consequences of Foucault's theoretical methods.

De Certeau's reading of Foucault emphasizes the latter genealogist's exploration of the relationship between procedures and discourse, and how such discourse influences the assignment of power/knowledge. Central to de Certeau's argument is a distinction drawn between strategies, which are cogent and coherent, and thus an aspect of discourse, and tactics, which are unspoken and less solid, and therefore more malleable and fragmented. Tactics thus understood roost in the variety of procedures which constitute social interaction and organization, although the articulated strategies co-residing there draw more attention. Foucault's project explores how the minutiae of such procedures, such as the specifics of how early mental hospitals, public schools and penitentiaries were organized and operated, helped form the disciplinary structures which contributed to the formation of the "knowledge" practices of the proceeding

century; in so doing he seeks to articulate “a ‘technology of power’ which would be at the origin of both criminal law (the punishment of human beings) and the human sciences (the knowledge of human beings). . . .” (13) In so doing Foucault articulates a view of a contemporary world dominated by certain recognizable discourses of power/knowledge (14), which owe both their genesis and their continued existence to the specific procedures and practices of various institutions and influential societal structures.

While Foucault himself recognized that no one set of procedures is necessarily dominant in any given society, and further that the existence of dominating forces demands the spontaneous generation of forces of resistance, (15) de Certeau attacks what he perceives to be a tendency to “reduce the functioning of society to a dominant type of procedures.” (16) Since the forces which Foucault elaborates have now become articulated, they have become strategies, and no longer silently tactical. Thus, as with the control of the demons of legend, once their identities and characters are voiced (in this case, through Foucault’s own work), such dominant social practices cease to be as powerful. By contrast, the literal and theoretical silence of the Falun Gong’s qigong exercises is transformed from mute liability to tactical advantage. Modernity’s refusal to acknowledge the political in their peaceful demonstrations and daily routines thus accords an advantage to those who are ostensibly powerless.

In fact, there are at least three points leveled by de Certeau here, which become somewhat conflated in his argument. First, that it is incorrect to suggest that any one series of practices is fixed and authoritative in any social dynamic; while seemingly hegemonic practices (such as the institutionalization of panoptic forces of mutual

observation or the construction of notions of “sanity” through the medicalization of “insanity”) play a significant part in the organization of space, language and knowledge, counter practices exist in equally minute spaces (which might include cooking, reading, and internal Chinese exercises). Secondly, while privileging the impact and value of tactics, he argues that the dominating structures and technologies which Foucault excavates are weakened into the position of strategies, by the very fact that they become visible through theorist’s observations. Thus, when “the apparatuses of control become an object of clarification and thus part of the language of the Enlightenment, (*this may be*) proof that they ceased to determine discursive institutions.” (17, *italicized comments mine*) And thirdly, de Certeau suggests that while Foucault’s analysis of the specific mechanisms and technologies of power are valuable in developing a deeper understanding of disciplinary discourses, there is additional value in evaluating the political significance of everyday functions which cannot be seen to contribute to dominant enactments of power/knowledge. Thus, “it is that which happens beneath technology and disturbs its operation which interests us here;” (18) what becomes interesting to de Certeau after hearing Foucault’s stories is not his main characters and central narrative, but the subverted plot lines and silenced characters which are glimpsed in the background. Thus, while there is a clear difference between the disciplinary forces at play in a prison and at a public performance of qigong exercises, both are of interest to de Certeau; although de Certeau fails to recognize it, I believe the same can be said of Foucault.

Although these three arguments sometimes appear hostile in their presentation, there is nothing in de Certeau’s comments on Foucault which is incompatible with the

genealogist/archeologist's own thought (and later work; see endnote 15, and below). It is instead the case that de Certeau's project is a logical extension of Foucault's (just as Foucault's "groundbreaking" work was predicated on those before him); Foucault, by establishing a methodology and distinguishing an understanding of political space which emphasized disciplinary procedures through which discursive technologies produce power/knowledge, turned over a (relatively) big new rock—de Certeau is one of many scrambling to see what has been unearthed. He is fascinated by the potential offered by the recognition of spaces for resistance by common individuals in their mundane life activities, a re-imagining of activism which is permitted through the exploration of a plethora of hidden and overtly non-political processes. Despite his criticisms of the early Foucauldian project, his assertion that "beneath what one might call the 'monotheistic' privilege that panoptic apparatuses have won for themselves, a 'polytheism' of scattered practices survives, dominated but not erased by the triumphal success of one of their number," (19) is one grown from the seeds offered in *Discipline and Punish*, and is strongly compatible with Foucault's later work.

Foucault provides considerable insight into his appreciation of the constant and necessary presence of such everyday resistances in a 1977 interview, during which he emphasized the non-dualistic quality of power/knowledge, and the disciplinary technologies through which they operate. Central to Foucault's conception of power/knowledge is the understanding that such domination is not a unidirectional force, "a binary structure with 'dominators' on one side and 'dominated' on the other, but rather a multiform production of *relations* of domination which are partially susceptible of integration into overall strategies." (20, *italics mine*) When one views power in such a

way, various consequences arise, not least of which is the possibility that exclusion from such power relations becomes impossible. The conceit of removing oneself from the unseemly business of dominations becomes hopeless, since “power is co-extensive with the social body; there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of its network.” (21) This does not imply a fatalistic acceptance of omnipresent and unbearable oppression, however (although many choose to read Foucault in this way). Since the nature of this network of power relations is multi-form and multi-directional, the constant presence of disciplinary pressures necessitates the equal role of continuous resistance; hence, “there can be no relations of powers without resistances.” (22)

This emphasis on the constant process and presence of resistance, viewed not as a polemical and normative tool but as an unfocused and complementary partner of the power/knowledge network, is one that a Falun Gong member might recognize as a synergetic taiji relationship, in which every situation can be understood to have a yang (i.e. ‘domination’) and yin (i.e. ‘resistance’) aspect, each of which is reliant on the other’s presence. (23) Through such an interpretative lens, the daily performance of Chinese exercises can be easily discerned as being of political significance, as a form of resistance which is “...(existing) in the same place as power, (and which) like power...is multiple and can be integrated into global strategies.” (24)

To call such resistance political, however, is to understand politics in a different way than modernist thought easily allows. As Colin Gordon points out, by recognizing the presence of resistance Foucault is not valorizing or romanticizing it, just as he “consistently refuses to assume the standpoint of one speaking for and in the name of the oppressed.” (25) To paste normative or revolutionary dictums upon such Foucauldian

resistances is nonsensical, since in his theory “the line between resistance and non-resistance is an unreal one.” (26) The point is not to incite the masses to open revolt, or even to glamorize the revolutionary nature of the types of daily activities which de Certeau explores or the Falun Gong typify, but instead that “the existence of those who seem not to rebel is a warren of minute, individual, autonomous tactics and strategies which counter and inflect the visible facts of overall domination, and whose purposes and calculations, desires and choices resist any simple division of the political and the apolitical.” (27)

This problematization of the political, through the observance of resistance in everyday activities, married to a refusal to valorize such activities with a neo-Marxist type of fervor, mirrors de Certeau’s project, and harmonizes well with the Falun Gong’s complex reality. By undermining traditional political/apolitical bifurcations, and locating a response to societal controls and hidden violences in the equally hidden practices of daily life, the routines of the Falun Dafa can be viewed in a manner not permitted by any of the approaches offered earlier in this paper. There is still a great deal about this fit which chafes the wearer, however, and much that remains unaddressed by this explanation, not least of which is the Foucauldian assertion that “There are no good subjects of resistance.” (28) I find this uncomfortably disrespectful of the uniqueness which I have accorded this particular group, and I will discuss possible responses to this in the final chapter.

Although Foucauldian analysis provides the conceptual and methodological basis of de Certeau’s work, such theory only allows a recognition of the importance and characteristics of the patterns of domination and the everyday, non-discursive acts

through which practices of autonomy are enacted. It does not, however, provide the means by which to assign ontological reality to the actions themselves, so as to allow strategic consideration of those practices within the rubric of the social sciences. To accomplish this de Certeau explores Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, in which he unpacks an understanding of theory "which seeks to explain the adequation of practices to structures through their genesis." (29) This contrasts, though perhaps not as strongly as de Certeau believes, with Foucault's interest in what forms of power/knowledge such practices create (as opposed to how those practices are themselves created). In a work which playfully blurs the disciplinary distinctions between ethnology and sociology, Bourdieu focuses his attention not on the accepted subject matter of either discipline, but rather the "black" spaces which lap at the edges of both studies—an otherness which seduces the interest of such theorists not out of a desire to extinguish it but to celebrate the value in its vagueness. Through this he explores the interdependent relationship between structure, situation and practice that predicates a conception of tactics that enable quiet and fragmented resistance by a "majority turned minority" against the seemingly hegemonic discipline of oppressive technologies.

Of the triad of structures, situations and practices, the three types of data, which Bourdieu identifies as integral to sociological study, only the later two are observable, and can thus be assigned any type of comfortable ontological substance. Structures, however, are constructed models which can only be inferred through statistical study—this severely limits the claims to objectivity of such constructs, and brings into doubt the degree to which societal practices can be understood in relation to these structures. This

leaves Bourdieu's theory the challenge of "find(ing) something that can adjust practice to structures and yet also explain the gaps between them." (30) To solve this Bourdieu postulates the acquisition of knowledge as the necessary mediator between structures, which organize this knowledge—while those same structures are internalized through the process of learning—and the practices and "dispositions" which are produced by such learning, which are simultaneously externalized through the *habitus*, or the exteriorization of achievements. Relating to both structure and practice, situations manifest the structure of a given environment (by, in a sense, embodying them) while also corresponding to practices, which express the experience of engaging with that particular situation.

The importance of such an origin story, which locates the genesis of all three points in Bourdieu's societal triangle in the process of acquiring knowledge, is that by examining the formation of the practices and structures which Foucault has shown to inflict disciplinary control onto a submissive society, de Certeau is able to assign an ontological recognition to hidden tactics (as a type of practice, learned as innocently as anyone has been taught to cook, consume, or exercise physically, and to some extent internalizing societal structures while simultaneously subverting their injustices), while also theorizing such tactics' relationship to the discursive structures which they quietly subvert. Viewing everyday practices such as the Falun Dafa's as politically subversive becomes possible, then, when those mundane activities, viewed as practices which are revealed in certain situations, are placed within an interdependent relationship with the structures which serve to suppress them. Thus, spaces can be formed in those structures where the intelligence of *bricolage*, the unnamed tactics implicit in "making do" with

what one has despite the limitations imposed by a (overtly or covertly) repressive system, allow quiet freedoms and silent autonomies despite the impositions of disciplinary constraints.

This emphasis on how structure and situation relate to practices in the expression of hidden subversions reflects how the Falun Gong's ostensibly innocent exercises seem transformed by the situation in which they occur and the structures in which they participate. It seems disingenuous to observe that the political resistance expressed when members perform their exercises in Beijing seems absent when taken out of the context of that time, place, and set of disciplinary technologies (just as sitting at the front of a bus becomes mundane if you are not a black woman of the 1950's in the southern United States, and so on). Bourdieu's point is far more significant, however, since he is reinforcing an emphasis on the situational and provisional nature of the political, in a way which seriously affronts the fixed and exclusionary qualities of conventional theorizations of political space. By thus opening the discursive field on which a non-exclusionary politics can perform, he awards ontological currency to the silent protests and internal qigong exercises which, in the context of contemporary China, becomes the expression of autonomy and dignity and, for Beijing, the object of sincere fear.

It is unclear, though, how de Certeau believes himself to escape the obvious difficulty of positioning the "acquisition of knowledge" as formative in this process, given Foucault's emphasis on the generation of knowledge as being an effect of specific procedures and technologies. From this perspective, de Certeau's attempt to harmonize Foucault's appreciation of the consequences of procedures and Bourdieu's theory of how they are created seems to be somewhat of a non-starter. It is certain that neither de

Certeau nor Bourdieu intended a facile, linear story of the development of societal forces, in which the acquiring of knowledge is to be presented as some sort of teleological building block. The assertion, however, that the idea that adoption of knowledge is the genesis of the forces which compose society is to be compatible with Foucault's elaborate mappings of how knowledge, and its flip-side, power, are constructed through historically-specific societal practices, is highly problematic. While this inconsistency undermines the coherence of the theoretical framework on which he seeks to announce a resistance of the everyday, it does not necessarily affect the cogence of that project. As Foucault might argue, seeking to establish or privilege any sort of genesis to a phenomenon (such as tactics, or practices) is both unuseful and inappropriate. The point is not to justify the ontological creation of a certain phenomenon, but rather to observe, in its smallest details, how it operates, and in this particular case to appreciate what possibilities are offered to the hapless consumer to express a degree of autonomy while caught in a Foucauldian web of disciplinary constraints.

A less evident, but perhaps more troubling, concern with de Certeau's project, is one which threatens much of social and political theory. When one seeks to empower the disenfranchised (31) by recasting their situation as being less helpless than originally appears, one risks romanticizing their suffering, while simultaneously providing a rationale for not acting personally to change that situation of domination. Those political prisoners may be stuck in jail, but in their courage they are more free than you or I; that community may live in extreme poverty, but through sharing their love and wisdom they live better than we do. While such observations often contain profound truth, they can

also be unintentionally used to justify, and perhaps even dismiss, injustices which otherwise might be faced and altered; as a result the desire to change those situations is co-opted, ensuring the continued stability of the dominant discourse.

While de Certeau's discussion of how the weak use the advantages of the strong in a subversive process of anti-discipline should be evaluated in light of this danger, however, it is not as co-optive and damaging as the examples given above. When de Certeau describes the resistances located in everyday life by saying that "far from being a local, and thus classifiable, revolt, it is a common and silent, almost sheeplike subversion," (32) he is not dismissing the value and occasional necessity of more specific and bull-like responses to injustice. He is instead celebrating and evaluating the on-going ways in which resistance is expressed as a spontaneous response to mechanisms of power which increasingly seem to serve no one. De Certeau's project, then, is best seen not as an acceptance of the current suppression of the majority of people (or, from the Foucauldian perspective, of *all* people), but instead as a celebration of how the consequences of Foucauldian thought allow us to recognize multiform and hidden ways of expressing individual autonomy within the scaffolding of discursive limitations. Further, it reveals political movement in the non-political spaces of the kitchen, or the park. By thus expanding our notions of political resistance, de Certeau enables us to view the actions of the Falun Gong as a unique form of expression which is deserving of academic and activist attentions, not merely as another example of how non-democratic forms of government assault the rights of their citizens, but rather as a lesson in how counter-disciplinary forces can be enacted on the grass-roots level.

De Certeau writes in a world where the lessons of the past discourage us from the path of bloody revolution, through which few seem to gain more than is lost, while at the same time knowledge of crass injustices saturates each newspaper report. By establishing a theoretical ground on which acts of resistance are not only possible but common, and where political value can be identified in the mundane intelligence which accompanies everyday life, de Certeau enables us to view both our own situations and those of others with a renewed conviction in the potential of cooks, readers and consumers to counter the discursive limitations of repressive situations. Through such appreciation for and heightened sensitivity to the strategic value of daily routines and practices, the bravery of Falun Gong practitioners, who continue to meet and exercise each morning in Tiananmen Square despite the knowledge that they will, within moments, be thrown into the awaiting little blue police vans, can be valued and studied.

Of the various analytical vectors from which we have approached the Falun Gong, that suggested by de Certeau in his Foucauldian study of the hidden resistances of everyday life has seemed most successful in doing justice to the phenomenon of Li Hongzhi's association. By blurring the modernist binary political/non-political distinction, and exploring the strategic intelligence of *bricolage* in the performance of mundane activities, we are able to understand the resistance of the Falun Gong not merely as a reaction to the State, nor only as an example of a New Social Movement, but also as a type of passive expression of autonomy that is inherent in any power relationship, regardless of geography, ideology or era.

In the fifth and final chapter of this paper, conclusions are drawn about that which is collectively revealed, and that which is still left inaccessible, by the analyses

presented here, with attention to both their values and drawbacks, as well as their consistencies and possible points of common ground. Although the methodological strategy of this paper has imposed clear divisions between competing approaches, the lines between these approaches will be shown to be far more blurry. By addressing the shortcomings and possible dangers of this study of the Falun Gong as well as what it has taught us, not only about the Falun Dafa but also about worldwide possibilities for non-discursive, non-violent, non-exclusionary expressions of autonomy and liberty, the conclusion will place this paper's reflections in a context that will hopefully serve as a starting point for continued conversations and explorations.

Endnotes

1. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (pinyin "Daodejing") , translated by Victor H. Mair, Bantam: New York, 1990. Pg. 5
2. Clearly, the vast range of political literature cannot be accurately summed in a sentence, but a reader who is familiar with the field should recognize the intent.
3. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1984. Pg. xix
4. Erik Eckholm, "China Says its Future Depends on Routing Banned Spiritual Movement," New York Times, November 6, 1999

5. De Certeau, page unlisted
6. The use of normatively loaded terms such “common man,” “ordinary people” and so on are used self-consciously in this paper, reflecting the language into which de Certeau has been translated. While a full exploration of the intentions behind, and consequences of, such language falls outside the limits of this discussion, it should be noted that the discussion of the “common man” should not be viewed as gender specific, although it may be argued that the classist elitism inferred by such phrases may not be entirely innocent.
7. Ibid. pg. 4
8. Ibid. pg. xix
9. It should be evident that the views and conceptions attributed throughout this paper as being “traditional” can not be accurately connected to any one particular perspective or dominant philosophical approach; such generalizations are instead intended to establish a general distinction between the view being discussed and that to which it is contrasted.
10. Ibid. pg. xvii
11. This widespread presence of laid-off factory workers, a growing and potentially virulent demographic in the contemporary People’s China, in the group’s membership is of obvious concern to the CCP.
12. Ibid. pg. xvii
13. Ibid. pg. 47
14. Of course Foucault would not suggest that earlier societies, or those which were not developed out of the specific practices and circumstances which he choose to examine, were in any way exempt from the basic discursive dynamics he reveals. However, despite the totalizing generalizations of his enthusiastic followers, Foucault’s emphasis on a specific time and set of circumstances is an important aspect of his overall project.
15. Since de Certeau’s text was originally published in 1974, it is not clear to me whether he would have been more satisfied regarding these matters by Foucault’s later work, or indeed to what degree those later projects were influenced by de Certeau’s criticism.
16. Ibid. pg. 48
17. Ibid. pg. 49

18. Ibid. pg. 200
19. Ibid. pg. 48
20. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Pantheon: New York. 1980. Pg. 142
21. Ibid. pg. 142
22. Ibid. pg. 142
23. For a clear discussion of the synergetic nature of the taiji relationship and how it applies to Chinese culture and science, see Kaptchuk, Ted. *The Web that has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine*, Congdon & Weed: New York, 1983
24. Foucault, pg. 142
25. Ibid. pg. 256
26. Ibid. pg. 257
27. Ibid. pg. 257
28. Ibid. pg. 257
29. de Certeau. pg. 56
30. Ibid. pg. 57
31. Use of rhetoric is intentional.
32. Ibid. pg. 200

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Segueways into New Conversations

Qigong, the slow moving form of healing exercise which Falun Gong members practice, is an important element of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), as a form of exercise which is seen to be of substantial benefit to general health and well-being, as well as for the treatment of more pernicious conditions. TCM differs dramatically from Western medical science, not merely in its forms of remedy, but more substantially in its underlying assumptions about the body, causation and epistemology. While Western medicine, crudely speaking, views the body as a connected series of discrete parts (systems, organs, cells), and illness as the effect of clearly defined pathogenic causes which must then be eradicated, TCM views health and illness in patterns of harmony and disharmony manifested in the body. While the archetypal Western doctor, when diagnosing a patient, will seek out *the cause* of that malady, the archetypal Chinese doctor will observe complex patterns, and then prescribe treatment which will moderate the disharmony which is revealed to the patient as sickness. (1)

In its discussion of the Falun Gong as a form of political resistance, this paper has worked under methodological assumptions which might be viewed as analogous to those employed by the TCM healer (although this is not to imply that there is anything “non-Western” about the discussion, nor that this paper is in any way prescriptive). Rather than seeking a clear causal interpretation of the Falun Gong, I have explored a series of perspectives, not to find the better reading nor to offer a disconnected review of various literatures, but to do service to the complex reality of the phenomenon by

considering perspectives which, while not necessarily complimentary, can still offer simultaneous descriptive legitimacy.

As such, this discussion can be seen as a neo-Kantian project. No phenomenon can be merely “described,” since an entirely value neutral description is impossible. Instead, when we seek to understand a phenomenon we choose (either consciously or not) to view it through certain categories, each of which bring certain issues, qualities and consequences into focus. On a “scientific” level, (2) this may seem relatively innocuous; when asked to “describe” a tree, the ecologist, the biochemist, the logger and the poet will draw profoundly different pictures, although all their responses can be seen to have distinct value. Within a social realm, however, the categories that are used to interpret the phenomenon influence the phenomenon itself, while at the same time affecting the ways in which individuals respond to that situation. Just as viewing “the tree” either through the categories offered by a logger or an ecologist will have a powerful impact on how we act in relation to that tree, so too do the ways in which we choose to understand the Falun Gong influence how ‘we’ and ‘they’ respond to each other politically.

With an eye to better understanding how such interpretive frameworks affect the political expression of the Falun Gong’s autonomous performance of resistance, this final chapter will evaluate what has been offered by the three central interpretive ‘categories’ presented in this paper, focusing both on what type of picture is presented of the Falun Dafa by each story, as well as the equally important question of what is left concealed, or at least unaddressed. While the approaches considered in this paper have allowed their own insights and possibilities for autonomous action, however, the actual

phenomenon of the Falun Dafa still refuses containment by the analytical frameworks I have offered. This shortcoming of the available theory is magnified when one considers that the majority of literature informing this discussion about politics comes from fields other than political science—mostly anthropology, sociology, religion, and social history. I take this not as a condemnation of my choice of project or source material, however, but as an indication of the need to transgress traditional disciplinary boundaries to better engage with the world of flux and complexity which we seek to understand and act upon. With this in mind, this paper will conclude with a consideration of the political significance of this project. By viewing the political in the everyday actions of people who are self-interested and seeking survival (either in terms of material necessities, or of lifestyle, culture, values and identity), the floor is opened to subsequent discussions of political self-assertion and exciting potentials for new forms of activism.

In the second chapter, the Falun Gong was viewed from a historical perspective, as the latest expression of a consistent tradition in Chinese culture of ostensibly religious or spiritual organizations that become sources of political instability. Like the Yellow Turbans, the White Lotus, the Taipings and the Society of Righteous Fists, the Falun Gong can be understood as an expression of popular dissatisfaction with a system of governance that appears illegitimate to large segments of the population. By evoking culturally specific values which connect members with the religious and historical traditions of their culture, while simultaneously establishing a contrast with the perceived “foreignness” of institutional power (either literally, as with the case of the British and French missionary involvement in Chinese affairs to which the Righteous

Fists were responding, or more obliquely, as with the current economic transformations to which the Falun Dafa might be seen as a response), such movements can be seen as a uniquely Chinese articulation of group identity and political dissent. If we choose to view the Falun Gong in this way, certain observations become possible; that this picture is one that appears compatible with the biases and expectations of conventional policy making may explain the popularity of such an approach.

Viewing the qigong group's activities from this perspective tends to emphasize a dynamic between the interests of the State and groups within its borders, and thus lends itself well to contemporary articulations of Human Security issues. The silent protestations of the loosely affiliated group can be seen as an expression of public unrest not only against the CCP's long standing tradition of religious suppression, but in response to the current economic shifts which are leaving masses of Chinese unemployed. Mainstream media's coverage of the situation has strongly emphasized this approach, with analysis that explores "the struggle between the sect and the Communist Party;" (3) that the actions of Falun Gong members can only be represented in terms of this relationship is assumed. As has been shown, this reliance on realist assumptions, asserting an emphasis on the Sovereign State into discussions of the political, strongly influences not only our ability to understand this phenomenon, but also the ways in which we respond to it.

The example provided in Chapter Two of the popular response to President Clinton's strict rebuke towards Beijing's treatment of the Falun Gong, despite its inadequacy in affecting any kind of change in China's repressive policies, brings to the fore how adapting a Human Security oriented reading of the situation directs and limits

potential responses. When one applies the neo-realist categories of Human Security discourse, then, actions on behalf of other governments (representing their respective States) are assumed to be of great worth. This is obviously of great value in situations where international intervention and influence are of use in ending patterns of injustice or specific atrocities. Unfortunately, a plethora of recent examples remind us that the effects of such interventions, while sometimes as invaluable as much needed food shipments, can just as easily be famine-inducing sanctions, and the bombing of civilian targets. By framing the actions of the Falun Gong as fundamentally relational to the policies and legitimacy of the State, the reading presented in the second chapter thus provides theoretical groundwork encouraging responses to repression that either emerge from other States, or from groups which must primarily act in relation to a State.

Viewing the Falun Dafa through the lens provided by New Social Movement theories, as was done in Chapter Three, extends the political field further. Through the work of writers like Melucci, Touraine and Moore, the analysis of common features shared by social movements recently emerging around the globe (or, according to much of the literature, in Europe and North America) bears much in common with certain features of the Falun Gong which go unnoticed by more traditional, security oriented discourse. As I have explained, this body of analysis examines how the radical struggles for political and social change that have been most prevalent in 'the West' over the last several decades can be seen to be distinct from the preoccupation with class transformation that guided most radical movements during the century before. By offering a description of the characteristics and motivations of such movements, a framework is presented by this literature that facilitates a viewing of the 'hidden

practices' through which Falun Dafa members perform their resistances, while also emphasizing the group's internal organization and sense of group identity. In so doing, political significance is placed on the group's existence and activities, without excessive dependence on a relationship to the State to justify its political character.

Accepting this framework, one receives a picture of the Falun Gong that emphasizes the group and its practices as something that can be understood outside the constraints of a particular geography, history or form of governance. It allows us to place the ontological focus of our analysis on the group and its practices, and focus on the characteristics, presented by Melucci, which the group shares with ostensibly dissimilar popular movements (from American women's organizations to German Green activists). Viewing the Falun Dafa as a "new" social movement shifts our focus from the external to the internal: moving from a story of how Chinese organizations subvert governmental authority in the face of overwhelming repression to a story about the practices of radical, non-Marxist populist movements and the values accorded by merely belonging. In so doing, strategically valuable lessons can be shared between the Chinese group and its counterparts globally—about forms of internal organization, the use of passive resistance against the force of overwhelming discipline, tactical uses of continually developing communications technologies, and so on (as discussed in detail in Chapter Three). More importantly, the inclusive nature of the group and its forms of resistance demands that our conceptions of political activists move beyond those who are commonly pictured in history books and newspaper articles, to include the quiet, non-violent and often non-discursive participants for whom membership itself is an expression of autonomy.

While the critical discussion in that chapter emphasized the problematic and insistent reassertion of neo-Marxist concerns, assumptions and vocabulary into the analysis of a supposedly post-Marxist global phenomenon, it is more important in these concluding remarks to note the shortcomings of the social movement 'lens' to bring into focus the political nature of the qigong exercises themselves. While this analysis empowers our ability to locate the political in the group and its fluid forms of membership and participation, it simultaneously limits the possibility of placing the actions themselves in the analytical foreground. The consequence of this is that while viewing the Falun Gong as a social movement encourages support for and interest in the potentials for autonomous movements which can be politically significant regardless of their relation to or recognition by State apparatuses, it limits involvement in political activism to those who choose to align themselves with such groups. The fluidity of participation in the Falun Gong, however, such that old men who join in ubiquitous morning exercises can be considered dangerous enemies of the people of China, demands the application of yet another analytical lens, one that focuses on the political nature of the daily performance of everyday activities.

Chapter Four investigated the potential of such an approach, exploring what is offered by viewing the Falun Dafa as the type of counter-discipline articulated by Foucault and de Certeau. This chapter argued that, just as Foucauldian genealogies of disciplinary systems emphasize neither the individuals involved nor the particular composition of ruling parties, but instead the particular and minute workings of disciplinary technologies through which power/knowledge is expressed, so too does an evaluation of resistances to such coercive patterns depend on recognition of mundane

expressions of autonomy. In the same way that disciplinary forces can be seen to operate in the specific workings of hospitals and prisons, then, expressions of resistance can be viewed in cooking, shopping and the daily performance of morning exercises.

Applying this category to our interpretive gaze, the Falun Gong presents a unique opportunity to force to our attention how routine and habitual activities can be viewed as politically remarkable. This is permitted when ontological political focus is placed on the performance of such mundane activities, viewed as the sites at which counter-disciplinary practices occur. Fundamental to a Foucauldian conception of power/knowledge is the notion that multi-faceted and pervasive disciplinary forces simultaneously generate equally persistent and localized resistances. This reveals aspects of the Falun Gong's situation which previous attempts left invisible, and confronts us with the *bricolage* inherent in health enhancing exercises, which have evoked such a violent response from the CCP.

While this last approach allows a greater level of complexity in our understanding of the group and the political import of its non-discursive practices, by demystifying the confusing significance of the form that their seemingly non-political expressions take, it still cannot be viewed as an adequate or complete political interpretation of this phenomenon. The explanation offered by de Certeau's celebration of the political practices of everyday life is limited in its potential to mobilize popular response to oppression, and makes it difficult to prioritize any particular form of political activism over another. If slicing potatoes is as political as marching in public demonstrations, it is difficult to see why anyone should leave their kitchen, regardless of their desire to affect social change. More seriously, this reading of the phenomenon

taking part in parks and squares across China, in its move to identify a constant process of resistance through scattered practices, serves at the same time to justify the ubiquitous presence of their disciplinary counterparts. While this may offer theoretical value when appreciating the dynamic interplay of forces through which power/knowledge is continually formed and reformed, through the lens of immediate human suffering this acceptance of oppressive societal mechanisms can have destructive results. The consequences of this approach may be empowering in its inclusive recognition of how all people contribute to the subversive strategies constantly enacted during daily life, but for people who are recipients of especially harsh and threatening conditions the consequences may be less comforting.

Having briefly reviewed what is revealed and obscured by each of the three interpretive approaches offered by this paper, it is necessary to note the tenuous and arbitrary nature of the distinctions I have made. Presenting such theorists as Moore and Foucault, or Bourdieu and Touraine, in distinct chapters is worthwhile for clarity's sake, but does not represent the blurry and porous nature of the boundaries separating them. While the bifurcation of, for example, theories of new social movements and the resistances of everyday practices is clearly defensible, for reasons this paper has made clear, a more honest engagement must recognize their convergences as well. Although a comprehensive examination of such blurring together of interests and approaches would require its own chapter, glancing at one such example is worthwhile.

This can be clearly seen in Moore's discussion of hidden resistances among Malaysian peasantry, for example, with its recognition of the political nature of quietly subversive daily activities, such as gossiping and foot-dragging. Although his neo-

Marxist motivation for such observations, in trying to distinguish class oriented mobilization in situations where overt and radicalized organization is impossible, appears incompatible with the latter work of Foucault on which my discussion depends, Moore's consideration of how the political can be viewed in such mundane actions echoes the arguments presented in Chapter Four. This compatibility clearly assists my search for the political nature of the Falun Gong's activities, since it allows for analysis of their qigong exercises based on their function as political expression, even though the practitioners may not be conscious of this dimension. To note that the theory of Moore and Foucault is similar, however, does not make them interchangeable. While both allow for recognition of such hidden "weapons of the weak," Moore's emphasis on the implications of such practices for class transformation contrasts with Foucault's denial of historical materialism as a theoretical foundation. More importantly, it contrasts with the phenomenon of the Falun Gong, since the daily performance of their qigong exercises has little to do with class transformation or the reclaiming of the modes of production. Thus, while useful compatibilities can be noted in the arguments presented throughout this paper, care must always be taken not to ignore the underlying assumptions and values that distinguish them.

Although this paper has made clear the inability of any one theoretical approach to fully or adequately interpret the phenomenon of the Falun Gong, one might receive the impression that the frameworks presented here could collectively achieve such a purpose. Although it is true that viewing this particular case of resistance through the three lenses selected provides a clear view of many aspects of the situation, however, even as a collective they fail to provide for a complete picture. I will conclude this paper

with consideration of the phenomenological excesses which our theories have failed to account for, and from this recount the political consequences of the stories I have chosen to present.

That such excesses exist, despite our theoretical sincerity, should not be surprising. My discussion began with the recognition that no explanation, or set of explanations, could ever be sufficient to contain any particular phenomenon. Given that something as seemingly simple as a tree could be interpreted in an endless variety of ways (as source of lumber, poetic inspiration, shade, home to small insects, life form, source of this thesis paper, etc.), the challenge of providing an exhaustive explanation of the Falun Gong appears impossible to meet. While the explanations offered above allow us to view the group's relation to both Chinese history and the present day Chinese state, the group as a source of study in terms of its own organization and membership, and the unlikely significance of the morning exercises they perform, other explanations remain unvoiced.

The specifically religious/spiritual nature of resistance within China, for example, is not well understood. While the theorists represented in this discussion have drawn from a wide variety of examples (ranging from the German Green party to the shopping patterns of consumers), little is said about how religious convictions propel and direct political activism. When this issue is addressed, the role of religion is either cast in a neo-Marxist problematic of how religion is an indicator of "earlier" levels of class development while at the same time a site of class cohesion, or else as just another aspect of group identity, such that religious conviction is equivalent to national or family identity. The role of religion in China, especially under the atheism of the CCP, is far

more complex, and a 'complete' unveiling of the political consequences of the Falun Dafa would have to engage with this.

Similarly, the readings presented here emphasize the autonomous nature of this phenomenon, and therefore understate the role of charismatic leader Li Hongzhi. While discounting his leadership from analysis is convenient for one (such as myself) who is biased towards the liberating possibilities of non-exclusionary understandings of political activism, it fails to acknowledge the powerful presence he asserts over his followers, despite his geographical distance. Although it seems improbable that everyone across China who practices his style of qigong is a devoted follower of the man (one of the arguments forwarded by Beijing), neither is it correct to suggest that the on-going protests carried out by the membership exist independently of his influence (as might be implied by the arguments presented in this paper). Such potential chapters as "Falun Gong as Spiritual Fortitude?" or "Falun Gong as Cult of Personality?" would thus serve to further respond to those aspects of the situation which the present chapters fail to address.

The point, however, is not to accumulate as many explanations as possible, so as to eventually 'patch together' a reasonably complete interpretation of the phenomenon; as I have explained, such a project is doomed to failure. The intent of this paper has instead been to address the methodological difficulties of attempting a political reading of such an ostensibly non-political situation, and in so doing draw lessons from that situation which support my personal interest in political expressions of autonomy and hidden forms of resistance. In conclusion, I will review this notion of the political as it is

presented in this paper, with an eye to what are the consequences, and for whom, for this project.

The political consequences of adopting the type of analysis forwarded in my discussion of Human Security issues have been made clear. While it allows for governmental and non-governmental responses to injustices perpetrated by recognizable forces of oppression (usually the State), permits the articulation of principles that can be used to support members of oppressed communities, and encourages the identification of historically consistent conflicts which lead to clearer understandings of present-day dynamics, it limits the scope of political action to those cases that are clearly identifiable variations of the 'State versus non-state actors' dynamic.

This refusal to view the politics of a loosely organized movement's internal structure, and the politically significant role it plays in operating as a 'sign' to society generally, is rectified by social movement theorists. By valuing the quiet resistances of such movements, far more actors are included in the political sphere, and political agency is accorded to individuals who would otherwise be left 'outside' that realm. The inclusivity of this approach tends to exclude others, however, since the power formerly assigned to State actors and those who act on their behalf are diminished as the political significance of 'ordinary people' is expanded. Foucauldian appreciations of the constant and pervasive presence of individual resistance against disciplinary controls through scattered practices and mundane activities have even more radical consequences. By locating everyday life as a site of political assertion, everyone becomes activists; the obvious difficulty with this extreme inclusivity being that organizing such resistances

becomes impossible, which can be seen to weaken the resolve and impact of those who value resistance as a conscious form of transformative justice.

The consequences of these latter two approaches to our study of politics are similar and compatible. They pose a challenge to both activists and academics to develop new strategies and new literatures, exploring the myriad of possibilities afforded by viewing the political in places that conventional security analysis would never look. Continued focus on the qualities of recent social movements and the silent *bricolage* of everyday life may serve as inspiration and instruction to other oppressed groups worldwide, whose most basic principles of membership and notions of effective activism will be disrupted by the lessons of a 100 million strong group whose central form of disobedience consists of slow motion exercises. This consequence to activists is mirrored in that towards scholarship, as literatures must seek to move focus away from the realist preoccupations of policy analysis, to become more accepting towards forms of representation, and for existing discussions of loosely organized movements and minority communities to watch and evaluate these renewed activist efforts to incorporate the Falun Gong's lessons.

As we continue to observe the development of this story, it is easy to become obsessed with the tragedies and abuses which dominate its reporting: an eleven year old boy, Qu Yuyan, who was forced from his school for doing qigong exercises; a thirty eight year old woman, Yuan Yuchun, who was shocked in the face with electric batons. (4) But the clear assaults on the security of these people are interwoven with a struggle for the expression of group identity and personal dignity, which has much to teach us about how notions of autonomy and resistance can be projected upon a canvas of

suffering and coercive societal control. Perhaps, if one watches carefully enough, the slow and graceful motions of the Falun Gong practitioners can be seen to be gestures of great political power.

Endnotes

1. For a comprehensive discussion of this, see Kaptchuk (Chapter Four, endnote 23).
2. Obviously, even the differing “interpretations” of the tree will have political consequences which are significant (consider the ways in which “the logger” and “the ecologist” will act based on their competing “readings” of the tree). The distinction I draw between “scientific” and “political” aspects of a neo-Kantian analysis is merely intended to emphasize the political consequences of all such interpretive approaches.
3. “Falun Gong Reminds China of its Past,” *Associated Press*, November 1, 1999
4. “Falun Gong Members Ask for Tolerance,” *Associated Press*, October 28, 1999

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