**Falun Gong, the Diaspora and Chinese Identity:
Fieldwork among the Practitioners in Ottawa**

by

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ABSTRACT

This research project sets out to study Falun Gong as a diaspora community, with particular interest in the theorization of diaspora identity and debates on the qualities of diaspora communities. Falun Gong first expanded rapidly during the Chinese national “qigong boom” movement in 1992 and it then clashed with the state in 1999. The Chinese government forbade their citizens from practicing it, and launched a nationwide anti-Falun Gong campaign. Overseas Falun Gong practitioners have re-established its headquarters in New York to keep their practices and beliefs alive. Not only have they successfully reconstituted their organizations “in exile,” the anti-Chinese communist activities carried out by the practitioners appear to be one of the largest and persistent oppositional movements to the Chinese Communist Party. Based on six months of fieldwork with the Falun Gong practitioners in Ottawa, my ethnographic data suggests that the analytical framework for the Falun Gong immigrants cannot be delinked from Falun Gong’s historical and contemporary relations with the homeland (China) and the hostland (Canada). To understand a diaspora, one must first contextualize its historical specificity and current situations with the homeland and the host societies.

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AND SO IT BEGINS...

In July of 2009, I visited an old friend from back home, Taiwan, who now lives in New York. While we were planning my trip to New York, I told my old friend that I was looking for an “ideal subject” for my future thesis research project that would combine my previous research interest in Chinese migration studies with my new concern in human rights issues. My old friend told me that she would introduce me to Lisa, a Falun Gong practitioner. I asked my friend, what is Falun Gong? “I’m not sure,” she replied, “I just know they are fighting against the Chinese government because Falun Gong is illegal in China.” After a quick internet research I discovered that Falun Gong was founded in 1992 and spread rapidly throughout China. In 1999, the Chinese government officially outlawed Falun Gong, and launched a nationwide anti-Falun Gong campaign. Ever since the crackdown, the controversies over people’s right to practice the Falun Gong’s exercises are often highly disputed. I said to myself “I might have found the perfect topic for my research paper!”

Fieldwork in New York

I met Lisa once. My meeting with her was the first time I had heard of a Falun Gong experience. Lisa told me that she had been sick. There had been no signs of improvement after years of medical treatment. It was not until she began to practice Falun Gong’s exercises that her health began to improve, and furthermore, she said she had found “[her] purpose in this world.” In order to give back to Falun Gong, “the faith that saved my life” as she referred to it, Lisa volunteers at the New Tang Dynasty Television (新唐人电视台)—a television broadcaster based in New York City—as well as the newspaper *The Epoch Times* (大纪元) and the Sound of Hope (希望之声) radio

station. All of these resources are founded by, and affiliated with, Falun Gong practitioners. Lisa also talked about the human rights issues in China which partly involves, but is not limited to, the harvesting of organs of the imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners. She suggested if I need more information I should visit the Global Service Center for Quitting the Chinese Communist Party (GSCQCCO 全球退党服务中心) in Flushing, a neighbourhood in Queens which is known to have one of the largest ethnic Chinese immigrant populations in North America. I am not particularly religious, but never having heard of any story this mystical from a first person account, I was intrigued and full of questions about Falun Gong's controversies. I was also eager to find a field site opportunity. So I traveled to Flushing.

On a hot, sticky July day I wandered the crowded and noisy Main Street of Flushing for an hour until I was lightheaded. Chinese signs were all over the place, while different Chinese dialects (e.g. Cantonese and Mandarin) flew in the air. For a moment I thought I was somewhere in Asia. I was lost. When I asked a man for the direction to the GSCQCCO, he waved and told me in an unfriendly tone, "I don't know." I often asked directions on the crowded streets of New York City and I rarely received this type of reaction. I supposed since "Falun Gong" is so controversial, I shouldn't have approached a stranger. I called my old friend for help. While she was searching for the address, I caught sight of a middle aged woman who was handing out flyers. "Never mind," I told my friend and I hung up. I walked toward the woman and took a flyer. Once I read the title, "九评共产党" [Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party],¹ without a doubt, I

¹ It was first published on *The Epoch Times* as an editorial series in November of 2004, which presented an in-depth condemnation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with historical records and personal testimony. The Falun Gong practitioners are often referring to this series as the best way to understand the "true nature of the CCP."

knew I had found what I was looking for. I approached her in Chinese: “Can you show me where the GSCQCCO is?” The lady smiled. “Our office is on the second floor.” She pointed to a building behind her. “Go inside, somebody will help you.” Perhaps she saw that I was perspiring all over my face. “The air conditioning is on in there,” she joked.

The office was divided into three spaces. An open area filled with desks and filing cabinets in front with two smaller offices at the back; it was no bigger than 800 square feet. There were piles of flyers, books, magazines, DVDs, documents, and button pins all over the place. There were two women sitting at the front desk chatting and maybe more people were in the back offices; I couldn’t see. I walked in and introduced myself as a student from Canada who is interested in the Falun Gong issues. One of the women from the desk got up to leave; she had to go somewhere else to pick up some newspapers (*The Epoch Times*). Wendy, the second woman, was a young lady who liked to giggle. As I stood talking with her, we had a few good laughs. Quickly we identified with one another by the similar Mandarin accent.² Both of us were from Taiwan. When I told her that I planned to write a thesis about Falun Gong, Wendy was excited.

“You’ve chosen the best topic! There are so many things you can write about Falun Gong. The Chinese Communist Party claimed that they could wipe us out within three months. It has been ten years and we are only growing stronger. Falun Gong is the Chinese government’s worst nightmare.” Really? I had thought Free Tibet or the Taiwan independence movement were the bigger headache for the Chinese government. I nodded

² Mandarin is the official language in both China and Taiwan and the pronunciations are affected by its local dialects. In general, the accents between Taiwanese Mandarin and Chinese Mandarin are noticeable, like American English speakers and the British accent. Despite there being perhaps more than one hundred Chinese dialects, there are only two Chinese written systems: Traditional Chinese (繁體字) and Simplified Chinese (简体字). The traditional characters had been simplified and taught in China since the Cultural Revolution is now standard in China and Singapore. Traditional Chinese is currently used in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. The Simplified Chinese characters will be used throughout this thesis.

in silence to show some manners. Wendy turned around and shouted towards one of the smaller offices. “Jim, come out and help. She is a master student who wants to write a thesis about Falun Gong.” A man shouted from the back, “I’ll be out in a moment.”

“So what happened to Falun Gong?” I asked Wendy. She told me how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) tortures and kills Falun Gong practitioners for their organs. “The CCP’s crimes,” as she referred to them, “are unbelievably horrifying. Do you know why a doctor would kill anyone for their organs? Aren’t doctors supposed to save people?” Wendy answered her own question as she said, “It’s because the CCP is all about violence and dehumanization, and they even tried to expand their crimes here, in Flushing! Once I was verbally attacked by some Chinese people when I stood in front of the Falun Gong’s booth,” she said emphatically.

At this point, the man at the back, Jim, came out of the office with a DVD disc (NTDTV 2008) and placed it in a laptop. It was a ten minute footage of some Chinese people who confronted Falun Gong practitioners when they were marching down Flushing’s Main Street in May of 2008. The non-Falun Gong Chinese crowd shouted loudly in Chinese “消灭法轮功” [Eliminate Falun Gong] and then turned violent. Some people pushed practitioners, while others tore and threw the Falun Gong’s signs around. A few Chinese men yelled “法轮功把脸丢尽了，你是中国人吗？” [Falun Gong makes China lose face. Are you Chinese?] “卖国贼” [Traitors]. The New York City Police Department showed up and separated them into two groups with barricades—Falun Gong Chinese *versus* pro-Communist Chinese. All of a sudden a man held up a Chinese flag, red with five gold stars. The pro-Communist crowd cheered and shouted “法轮功不是人” [Falun Gong is not human].

I paused. It was hard to believe that this was happening in New York, one of the most liberal states in one of the most democratic nations in the world (Later on I reminded myself that this is actually what democracy is about—everyone is entitled to different opinions). Jim handed me the DVD and told me to keep it for the project. Wendy said, “You should write about CCP’s crimes and how Falun Gong is being harmed. Tell people the truth!”

I ended up spending the rest of the day at the GSCQCCO gaining information and enjoying conversations with Wendy and Jim, while taking advantage of their air conditioning. I learned that, like Wendy, Jim was also sick with various symptoms and doctors could not identify the causes. Just when they were about to give up, they found Falun Gong, and both were cured within a short period of time. Throughout my fieldwork I would find that this to be a common theme. I asked Wendy and Jim if I could return here to do my fieldwork next year. They agreed.

It was getting late. Wendy offered to take me to the train station. I walked out of the office with many documents and information brochures and a feeling of great excitement. Wendy’s kindness and enthusiasm had influenced my emotions. Not only was I excited about finding the field site for my thesis, I also felt a sense of mission—a sense that I am about to conduct a very meaningful project—still unaware of how complicated things could get.

Overview of Falun Gong

The term Falun Gong³ (法轮功) can be used interchangeably with Falun Dafa (法轮大法). According to its official web site, Falun Gong translates as the “Practice of the

³ Some scholars use different spelling, Falungong or FLG for short.

Law Wheel” or “Law Wheel Qigong,” and Falun Dafa translates as the “Great Way of the Law Wheel.”⁴ The Chinese term, *gong* (功), is the same in Falun *Gong* and *kung-fu* (a type of Chinese martial arts that is well-known in the West) means method, skill or exercise. Literally, Falun Gong means bodily movements. The term “law” in Buddhism refers to doctrines rather than to rules (Ching 2006). In this sense, Falun Dafa indicates the doctrinal aspect of Falun Gong. The definition of Falun Gong provided by the practitioners⁵ is “an advanced practice of Buddhist self-cultivation,”⁶ and, this kind of practice is associated with “a discipline in which assimilation to the highest qualities of the universe—Zhen, Shan, Ren (Truthfulness, Compassion, Forbearance)—is the foundation of practice” (ibid).

Before the crackdown, the founder, Li Hongzhi (practitioners usually refer him as Master Li) claimed to have more than one hundred million followers—seventy million in China and thirty million elsewhere (Ching 2006). Yet the Chinese government claimed that Falun Gong had only 2.1 million followers by the time the crackdown was executed in 1999 (Frank 2004; Tong 2002a). Despite having been banned by the Chinese state more than a decade ago, Falun Gong continues to expand outside China’s soil. Overseas practitioners have re-established its headquarters in New York. Not only have they successfully reconstituted their organizations “in exile,” the anti-Chinese communist activities carried out by the practitioners appear to be one of the best-organized and persistent oppositional movements to the Chinese Communist Party, both in China and abroad (Palmer 2007).

⁴ See <http://www.falundafa.org/eng/faqs.html>

⁵ See <http://www.falundafa.org/eng/home.html>

⁶ In Nancy Chen’s definition, cultivation is a training of one’s mind and body to refine the self, which “lies at the heart of most indigenous Chinese body practices” (2003:7).

Ever since the crackdown, the Chinese state's anti-Falun Gong campaign, and the Falun Gong's anti-Chinese Communist campaign have been locked down in a "propaganda war" (Kavan 2008; Ownby 2008b; Zhao 2003). Both parties have taken two differing extreme stands, and in doing so, try to prove that the other party is "evil." Falun Gong practitioners have attempted to gain sympathy for their causes, while also demonizing the other party by stating that their freedom of religion and freedom of speech—namely universal human rights (Ownby 2008b)—have been jeopardized because the Chinese Communist Party is rooted in “邪灵” [evil spirit]. They accuse the CCP of torture and of trafficking the organs of imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners in China. On the other end of the spectrum, the Chinese government has linked Falun Gong to the “international cult movement” and to China's own history of religiously inspired peasant rebellion (Ownby 2008b). The government attempts to prove that Falun Gong is a superstitious and dangerous “邪教” [evil cult], moreover, that Falun Gong's “political agenda” and the “harmful effects of Falun Gong's teachings” are a threat to the public safety (Ching 2006).

Depending on whom you ask, Falun Gong can be understood to stand for many different meanings. For instance, scholars and the mainstream media in the West have referred Falun Gong to as a religious group or a Chinese spiritual movement, although neither the Falun Gong, nor the Chinese government, consider it a religion (Ching 2006; Ownby 2005; Porter 2003). Li Hongzhi (2003) remarks that Falun Gong is not a religious faith, nor is it philosophy; it is “the most wondrous and highest science.” Some western journalists brand Falun Gong with a human rights theme, comparing the anti-Falun Gong campaign to China's broader struggles of democracy and freedom. For example, Ian

Johnson from the *Asian Wall Street Journal* has won a Pulitzer Prize for his documentary film about the Chinese state oppression against Falun Gong practitioners (Ownby 2008b). Danny Schechter is a journalist who interviewed the leader of Falun Gong. A major theme of his book, *Falun Gong's Challenge to China: Spiritual Practice or "Evil Cult"?* (2001) is a discussion of Falun Gong's struggles with the freedom of religion/belief and the freedom of speech. Almost everyone who studies Falun Gong, including historians, political scientists, politicians, anthropologists, sociologists and journalists, all agree that it is a type of physical/spiritual practice. This type of physical/spiritual connection is referred to by the Chinese people as *qigong* (see Chapter One for further details).

The birth of Falun Gong began at a time when qigong was very popular in China. Between 100 and 200 million people by that time were engaged in the "qigong boom" movement (Ownby 2008b; Palmer 2007). When the government banned Falun Gong, many qigong branches were almost dissipated in China (Palmer 2007). The movement of Falun Gong is profoundly connected to the status of qigong in the Chinese modern history (Ownby 2008b; Palmer 2007). The story of Falun Gong's rise and fall is deeply involved in Chinese political and religious state of affairs (Ching 2006; Zhao 2003).

Fieldwork in Ottawa

Several months later after my initial contact with the Falun Gong practitioners in New York, I met a few practitioners at a book launch event on Parliament Hill: *Bloody Harvest: The Killing of Falun Gong for Their Organs* by David Matas and David Kilgour (2009). I was amazed to see Falun Gong's strong affiliation with members of the Canadian Parliament, as many Members of Parliament were there to show their support. After the event I stayed for a few hours talking to Falun Gong practitioners. I learned that

they hold weekly sessions in Ottawa. I thought this would be an opportunity to do fieldwork “at home,” despite the fact that “home” is an ambiguous term, and not easily defined (Clifford 1997b), especially for an immigrant like me. Mainly for financial reasons, I did not return to New York, but Ottawa turned out to be an ideal location to examine the topic reflexively. To be more precise, the social phenomenon has become very real and impacted my life.

From April to July 2010, I attended Falun Gong’s exercise and study sessions almost every second week, and took part in a variety of activities that were performed in Ottawa. Some practitioners met daily in front of the Chinese embassy in groups of two to five. They took turns protesting peacefully against the Chinese government. Usually one or two practitioners would also hand out pamphlets in Chinatown. At times practitioners meet on Parliament Hill to practice Falun Gong’s exercises. When celebrating special occasions (e.g. May 13 is the Falun Dafa Day) practitioners from near-by cities will gather together in a large group on Parliament Hill.

Regardless of weather conditions, practitioners meet on a school campus courtyard every Sunday at 9:00 a.m. to practice Falun Gong together. During rainy or harsh winter conditions they will practice inside the building. Falun Gong practitioners do not have a temple or a place of worship. The school provides adequate space. The campus is usually quiet on Sunday mornings. Falun Gong’s exercise music plays gently in the background. The ambient-style of music is characterized by the integration of Chinese traditional musical instruments (e.g. 古筝 *Guzheng* and 琵琶 *Pipa*) and the exercise instruction for the practitioners to follow. People who arrive late join the group silently, without any greeting. When beginners show up and ask for help, a senior

practitioner would take them to the side for a tutorial. The exercise session goes on for about an hour, then, everybody moves into a classroom. Once the practitioners find places to sit, they open to a chapter of *Zhuan Falun* and read out loud together. Falun Gong practitioners refer to this session as “fa study”—it means the study of Falun Dafa doctrine. Written by the founder, *Zhuan Falun*⁷ is considered the central and most comprehensive account on the teachings of Falun Gong. It was an edited transcription of Li’s collective lectures between 1992 and 1994 (Ownby 2008b).

During the reading session, the Chinese practitioners begin to read the first paragraph in Chinese, followed by the non-Chinese practitioners reading the next paragraph in English. Some Chinese practitioners will join both the Chinese and English groups. It usually takes about one hour to finish reading one chapter all together. Afterwards, a bilingual (English and Chinese) practitioner leads the discussion session by asking around if anyone wants to reflect on their experience, whether it is about a practical issue or a doctrinal concern of Falun Gong. They also discuss work assignments, if there is any upcoming event. When someone speaks in Chinese, the discussion leader translates the contents to English, and vice versa. The experience-sharing discussion usually continues until 12:00 p.m. then the study session concludes with a meditation session of roughly ten to fifteen minutes.

Research Reality

Building trust with any research participant is a complicated process, especially with people who have experienced various forms of attacks. Since the crackdown on Falun Gong in 1999, Falun Gong sources claimed that there were more than 3,000

⁷ The English version of *Zhuan Falun* (转法轮) is called *Turning the Law Wheel* (2003). *Zhuan Falun* was first published in 1994, and the Chinese practitioners translated it to English in 2000. In this thesis I will use their version of translation for this text in order to avoid misinterpretation.

practitioners died in custody, and hundreds of thousands have been arrested, detained, and tortured. In North America, practitioners claimed they were denied access to social communities by non-Falun Gong Chinese (see Chapter Three). Some Falun Gong practitioners said they were harassed by Chinese spies.⁸ Most of the publicized Falun Gong practitioners might never set foot in China again because of their anti-Chinese Communist activism (see Chapter Two).

Perhaps because “Falun Gong” is too politically sensitive, family and friends have expressed concerns about my safety. They worry that my project with Falun Gong would irritate the Chinese government. I had to explain repeatedly it is my profession to remain “objective”⁹ and I seriously doubt a powerful force such as the Chinese state would pay any attention to a master’s thesis. Yet my experience is not exclusive. As Noah Porter states: “For writing this thesis [*Falun Gong in the United States: An Ethnographic Study*], I have been told I will almost certainly end up on China’s blacklist, and therefore be barred from entering the country for life” (2003:3). Adam Frank (2004:248) notes that one graduate student he knew, at a U.S. university, was strongly advised by a dissertation committee member not to get involved with Falun Gong if she plans to conduct fieldwork in China for her future dissertation topic.

Likewise, David Ownby writes about his concerns and the frustrating situation he encountered (2008b:132, emphasis in original):

⁸ See, for example, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2006/2/16/70007.html> (accessed August 11, 2011) for the English-language version and <http://www.minghui.org/mh/articles/2006/2/14/120797.html> (accessed August 11, 2011) for the Chinese-language version.

⁹ The concept of “objectivity” or “value-free” scientific knowledge has been challenged by many anthropologists who have called into question all claims of neutrality. For example, the debate between Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) and Roy D’Andrade (1995) on “scientific” versus “moral” models has generated many interesting and important aspects of anthropology. Given researchers’ own unavoidable social engagement with limited resources, the best I can do is to offer elaborations of my own subjective biases. This point will be discussed further in the conclusion section.

I readily admit that the thought of not being able to return to China worried me.¹⁰ After two rather high-profile talks... I received a series of what appeared to be virus-laden e-mail messages... all of which had been routed through the Chinese embassy in Ottawa (after the Amsterdam conference) and the Chinese embassy in Paris (after the Princeton talk). This was a relatively minor skirmish in the cyberwars which have been part of the conflict between Falun Gong and the Chinese state, but I was incensed (crashing an academic's computer is *nasty*) and contacted colleagues at the China desk of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ottawa, who subsequently referred me to the Canadian Security Intelligence Services. When the agent visited me, I was surprised to learn that, although CSIS could do nothing for me, it was glad to take my story because it had rapped the Chinese embassy's knuckles repeatedly on Falun Gong-related matters, reminding the Chinese that they were, after all, in Canada and subject to Canadian law.

Despite Ownby's disdain for the Chinese Government's act, he had to maintain a neutral ground, which meant distancing himself from Falun Gong in order to remain neutral towards his work (2008b:131):

As one of the few credible academic authorities on Falun Gong [...]. I rebuffed repeated invitations to speak at Falun Gong-organized events. I explained patiently on each occasion to my Falun Gong friends that, although I shared their point of view that the Chinese government's campaign against them was immoral and unjust, repeated public statements to that effect on my part would reduce rather than enhance the value of my work, permitting the Chinese state to paint me as a stooge of Falun Gong. Most practitioners understood this, but as media fatigue set in and it became harder for Falun Gong to get its message into print or onto the airwaves, practitioners became understandably increasingly desperate, and the invitations continued. The only solution seemed to be to distance myself from practitioners and their activities.

Heather Kavan also remarks that there were pressures coming from the local Falun Gong practitioners in New Zealand. Kavan received several phone calls from a

¹⁰ Later on Ownby (2008b:263) notes that he had no trouble returning to China.

practitioner demanding that she removes one of her articles from the Internet. Kavan was quoted in a press release on new religious movements where she cited Falun Gong as one of several examples that would fit the FBI's definition of a potentially violent religion.

The practitioners were offended:

I received a phone call warning me that I would be deluged by a hundred callers from a Falun Gong email list. Several emotionally-charged phone calls followed, in which the callers demanded the press release be removed from the Internet. A member contacted me at home and relayed accusations that I was being paid large amounts of money by the Chinese government, and repeatedly said that the situation was "extremely dangerous" [...]. The response was understandable, in the sense that during the time I shared with Falun Gong I never disagreed with them, yet now I was speaking in an academic voice (Kavan 2008:16).

Perhaps it is because I entered this field of study years after these scholars, and things have changed, which could explain why I never received any threats from the Chinese government or Falun Gong practitioners. My pressures were from elsewhere.

I once bumped into a friend from China at a Falun Gong's demonstration. Having known this friend had condemned Falun Gong before, I purposely walked away from the Falun Gong crowd, attempting to separate "us" from the Falun Gong practitioners. My friend was surprised to see me there and could not understand why I had chosen Falun Gong as a research topic. In his disapproval, he even hinted that my affiliation with Falun Gong stemmed from my being a Taiwan Independence supporter. The situation was so awkward I had to leave early. I was faced with a difficult decision, when I discovered that friends of mine would be demonstrating on the opposing side of a Falun Gong demonstration. Instead of having to face them, I decided not to go. Furthermore, during literature research, I found almost all Chinese official sources contradicted what Falun Gong practitioners had told me. It is even more confusing when my view and

understanding were challenged by the practitioners. Many experiences I had encountered “outside” of the field were too overwhelming, and “inside” the field it seemed to me that some practitioners were bothered by my engagement in participant observation. I have thus discovered that the “reality” I experienced is quite complicated and contradictory. The feelings of ambiguity and insecurity are at times difficult to cope with. As a result, I stopped fieldwork for four months.

My involvement with Falun Gong is far from “going native.” I tried to join the exercise session a couple of times; Falun Gong’s exercises do not interest me. As a casual yoga practitioner for five years, I found Falun Gong tends to concentrate more on the flow of movements and the breathing system, whereas yoga focuses on creating balance in the body through developing both strength and flexibility. I usually stood aside and watched the practitioners during the exercise session. I read *Zhuan Falun* with the practitioners and never spoke up during the discussion session. When practitioners meditated, I sat quietly and tried not to disturb. One of the organizational characteristics of Falun Gong is being decentralized (Tong 2002a). While Falun Gong’s minimal organizational structure is an interesting aspect to study, it also creates challenges for the fieldworker. Because practitioners have no obligation to join any activity and they are free to come and go at any point, I have not met each practitioner, let alone talked to all practitioners in Ottawa.

During the four month break when I was examining my own role in this fieldwork, I realized that I started with this project from documents and media reports provided by Falun Gong, which often show the representation of a passive and victimized group that needs to be “saved.” When I discovered they have their own strategies to take control

over their own destinies, my egoist's desire of "helping the oppressed" seemed ridiculous. Once I problematized my own position I could finally drop my preconception and let the "subalterns speak" (Spivak 1988). Eventually I managed to regain my balance and I returned to the field.

Research Design

This research project sets out to study Falun Gong as a diaspora community, with particular interest in the theorization of diaspora identity and debates on the "nature" of diaspora communities. In the last two decades, the term "diaspora" has been increasingly used by anthropologists, literary theorists and cultural critics to study the forces and phenomena that constitute transnational movements, including the movements of capital, the introduction of alien cultures, the formation of plural societies, dual loyalties of populations and multiple affiliations of transnational corporations (Ma 2003:7). It is often used as a catch-all phrase to speak of all movements; however, critics have argued that the loose usage of "diaspora" does not critically reflect diverse patterns of human migration and settlement, particularly with the experience of displacement or dispersal (Brazier and Mannur 2003). Scholars have been calling for a widely accepted theoretical framework for diaspora studies. I believe that Falun Gong presents an interesting case study because their complex relation to the "homeland" (China) contrasts with their ongoing struggles against the Chinese state.

Two assumptions influenced my construction of the research questions: 1) I agree with William Safran (1991, 2005) and Khachig Tölölyan (1991, 2007), in that the diaspora discourse reflects a sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes a homeland (see Chapter Two). Diaspora is characterized by a sense of living in

one place while desiring for another. Hence the formation of the overseas Falun Gong practitioners' identity has been shaped and formed by the profound sense of longing for "homeland." 2) James Clifford (1997a) presents the argument of "de-territorialization" (see Chapter Two) to challenge the view that diaspora communities can involve loyalty to more than one nation-state; thus diaspora identity with double (or even plural) political or geographical entities does not need to be binary, divided between their current location and the place of their origins.

In China, Falun Gong's existence has been threatened by the state. In the Western world, Falun Gong appears to be one of the best-organized and persistent oppositional movements to the Chinese state (Palmer 2007). Developing from the above-mentioned two assumptions, the key research questions are: 1) How are geopolitical boundaries defined in relation to the Chinese Falun Gong diaspora? 2) What is in this transnational space between Falun Gong's confrontational bonds to the "homeland" that in turn have shaped their diasporic identity? 3) How and why are Falun Gong diasporas involved in intra-state conflicts while living in host countries?

By examining these issues I seek to identify the connection (or disconnection) between China and the Falun Gong community in Ottawa. I aim to understand more about the dialectics between locality-nationality-globality and homeland-diaspora-hostland. At the same time, this project will contribute to the wider Chinese diaspora studies through insights gained from overseas Falun Gong practitioners. Since the accelerated rise of capitalism and modernity in China began at the end of the twentieth century, the academic interests in Chinese diaspora have been predominantly on the market-orientated analysis (Chow 1993; Chun 2001, 2007). Such formulations of

discourse often emphasize the economic motivation for the Chinese migration (for example, see Cohen 2008, Ong 1999 and Tu 1991 in Chapter Two). Falun Gong diaspora's reality and experience can, therefore, address the gap in the literature regarding the role of Chinese diaspora and different types of transnational involvement, such as the identification with the homeland and the complex socio-political connections.

In addressing an under-explored question about Chinese diasporas' political involvement, this thesis focuses on Falun Gong practitioners' migration stories and their social activism, rather than the interest of Falun Gong's politics. The objective of this thesis does not aim to demonstrate the geopolitical or ideological distance between the "West" and the "East." In their migration stories, the emphasis is not on how they had arrived in the West, but rather, the main focus is what it means to be a diaspora and what is the state of their diasporic consciousness. The purpose is to show, when examining a transnational phenomenon that transcends cultural boundaries, there are some possible ways to move the discussion beyond market, territory and ethnicity.

Methodological Approach

The historical data in this study relies primarily on scholarly works (which will be explained in Chapter One). Two approaches are used to examine Falun Gong's current controversial issues outside of China. The first situates Falun Gong in diaspora studies. The second approach is to make comparisons between my ethnographic data and other scholarly accounts. The method for data collection is through ethnographic research, the core of which is based on "semi-life" history interviews with ten Chinese practitioners. I used the term "semi-" because the interviews were designed only to focus on their second half of life—whether it is to define their lives after encountering Falun Gong or after

moving to Canada. In a way, many practitioners said Falun Gong has given them a second life, and indeed many immigrants feel they started a new life in a second home.

Using data from first-person interviews, I aim to understand the influence of transnational experiences on identities of overseas Falun Gong practitioners—how do they make sense of their multiple identities (i.e. being a Falun Gong practitioner and a Chinese immigrant) who face challenges from the Chinese state. I only interviewed practitioners who were born and raised in China, considering that first generation's first-hand experience in China may generate a better understanding of their diasporic situation in Canada. Ten interviews were conducted during January-May 2011, ranging from three to seven hours with each individual. The interviews were usually carried out in a coffee shop or in a quiet room on the school campus after the Sunday practice session. Follow-up questions were communicated through emails. In the beginning of each interview I showed them the list of guiding questions (see APPENDIX) and asked for consent for voice recording.

After the first interview, which was structured with many open-ended questions, I was unsatisfied with the result. During the second interview I found the best way to learn was to let my informants talk and I would just listen. I occasionally drew them back to interview protocol or shared some of my stories to point out the different experiences we have (as immigrants) in order to generate the discussion. Because it was the practitioners who filled each puzzle of their life stories, after half of them brought up the difficulties when dealing with some non-Falun Gong Chinese immigrants, I decided to include a section of Falun Gong's interaction with non-Falun Gong Chinese, altering my original plan to write about practitioners' relationships within the organization.

All interviews were conducted in Mandarin and the translation work is done by myself. After the interview data was transcribed and translated into the written format in English, I emailed each informant their parts and asked for comments and confirmations. Still, I take full responsibility if any meaning became lost in translation. Because the majority of the interviewees are actively involved with Falun Gong's public events, their safety and confidentiality are my main concerns. All names are pseudonyms and interviewees' personal background information (e.g. hometown and employment) are not discussed. Occasionally interviewee's pseudonyms are not mentioned to avoid attribution.

There are, of course, problems related to the size and sample representativeness, especially because Falun Gong continuously struggles to reject the ideologically-driven debate on having a "political agenda" to threaten China's social and economic stability. When any incident or issue was discussed during interviews, I always checked secondary sources (i.e. scholarly works and news from third party media) for verification. Throughout this thesis, I will indicate whether or not the data has been verified. To avoid politically sensitive content, the reference of secondary sources that indicate the names of parties (e.g. politicians, organizations and interviewees) involved in Falun Gong's current controversial issues is not provided.

Still in the Field

Two days before Christmas of 2010, approximately two thousand people attended an evening show presented by the Shen Yun Performing Arts at the National Art Center in Ottawa; I was one of them. The show was two hours long with twenty episodes featuring traditional Chinese dance and song. I am already familiar with the storylines of ancient Chinese folklores and myths; my interest was with the audience. An older

Chinese couple, roughly in their 70s, were wiping their faces as they cried quietly. I think it was in that moment, seated in the middle of that dark auditorium, that I fully realized the differences and similarities between the Falun Gong practitioners and myself.

I think it is time to “come clean” about my positionality (see Freilich 1970). Growing up in Taiwan in the 1980s, I was inevitably influenced by the Chinese Nationalist Party’s “anti-communist” propaganda. Taiwan, also known as *Formosa* (in Portuguese), the official name is the Republic of China (ROC), has a complicated history with the People’s Republic of China (PRC). When Japan lost in World War II, General Douglas MacArthur authorized the Chinese National Party (more commonly known as *Kuomintang*, KMT for short) to accept Taiwan from the Japanese. The leader of the KMT, General Chiang Kai-shek, declared Taiwan to be a province of the ROC. In 1949, after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) defeated the KMT, the Communists took over and China became PRC. The KMT’s military administration and 1 to 2 million mainland Chinese were forced to flee to Taiwan.

Taiwan, like many societies, consists of many different ethnic groups. As Fredrik Barth (1969) argues, ethnicity is historically constructed and ethnic borders are negotiated through relations with others (Simon 2005). According to Scott Simon (2005:12-13), Austronesian aborigines have lived in Taiwan for 12,000 to 15,000 years, and make up approximately 2% of the population today. The Holo-speaking and Hakka-speaking immigrants from Fujian and Guangdong Provinces, China, began moving to Taiwan in the seventeenth century; together they make up 85% of the population. Holo-speaking and Hakka-speaking people, as the majority ethnic group in Taiwan, are commonly referred to as “Native Taiwanese” in order to distinguish them from later

arrivals. One to two million Chinese who followed the KMT to Taiwan during the 1940s and their descendants are referred to as “Mainlanders,” who now make up 13% of the population. The Chinese newcomers spoke Mandarin and various other Chinese dialects, whereas the “Native Taiwanese” people spoke only Taiwanese languages and Japanese (Simon 2005).

The KMT government launched numerous social programs, such as Chinese calligraphy, traditional Chinese folk art and Chinese opera to nationalizing Taiwanese aborigines and “Native Taiwanese” people as citizens of a Chinese nation, and to decolonizing the influence from the formal colonize, Japan. In school we learned that the CCP is exploiting “our” sisters and brothers in the *zuguo* (literally means ancestral land) and they are waiting for us to “return” to rescue them. The Chinese term *zuguo* (祖国) refers to the territory of China due to the popular belief that the origin of all Chinese people must share the same geographic (and by implication, racial and cultural) origin. For many Taiwanese aborigines and “Native Taiwanese” people (including myself), *zuguo* is understood in a more abstract sense, rather than a natural phenomenon.

After my family immigrated to Toronto in 1993, debates about “Chinese-ness” versus “Taiwan-ness,” long suppressed under the KMT’s rule, slowly became a concern in the mainstream of Taiwanese life (Simon 2005). The demand for “indigenization” forced the focus from Chinese culture to Taiwanese society. This shift, along with the protests for democracy, became a major political trope in Taiwan. The discourse of “indigenization” lays emphasis on the “Taiwanese subjectivity” to view Taiwan as an independent and self-evolving social and cultural entity, rather than an adjunct of China (Simon 2005). As a result, it provoked the Taiwan independence movement—or a

separatist movement—as understood by many Chinese. I was more interested in the issue of Canadian immigration than Taiwan’s sovereignty until 2005 after I returned to Taiwan for a job opportunity; upon my return I became more aware of Taiwan’s ambiguous “national” identity. However, the more Chinese immigrants I met in Canada, the further I recognized our false conceptions about Communism in China. That being said, it does not imply that I support the unification of Taiwan with China, nor am I taking a stand on the Taiwan independence movement. For someone who has family in Taiwan and friends in China, like many people, we simply hope there will be a win-win peaceful solution. In fact, the friend who hinted that I was a Taiwan separatist might be surprised to know that the phrase “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” does not always apply. To elaborate, Falun Gong practitioners do not necessarily support Taiwan’s independence movement. Like many Chinese people, many practitioners also believe in a “completed” Chinese nation—just not under the CCP’s rule.

I realized in order to understand Falun Gong practitioners’ perspectives I must first recognize our different ways of perception. We are, after all, all Chinese-speaking people and immigrants to Canada, so why are ancient Chinese stories having more impacts on them than on me? When the Cultural Revolution occurred (1966-1976), I was not yet born. In 1989 when the students protested in Tiananmen Square, I was too young to understand what democracy was. I might never know what it feels like to live without the freedom to protest on the street, or I might never understand the suffering and changing that China has been going through. However, I can share some Chinese-Canadian stories.

The story I tell of Chinese Falun Gong diaspora should be distinguished from the popular genres of other Chinese migrations. The story of poor Chinese people who came to Canada working at three or four low paying labourer jobs, and the lucky ones would save up enough money to open restaurants or laundries is a common memory that runs in many Chinese-Canadian families, but does not necessarily describe recent immigrants' migration experiences. The story of rich Chinese people who came to Canada to receive higher education and investing in businesses and properties, is only partially true for the Chinese Falun Gong diaspora.

According to Peter Li (2010) the rise in the number of well-educated Chinese migrants can be explained by Canada's increasing demand for skilled immigrants, and China's rising supply of university graduates. Many Chinese Falun Gong practitioners in Ottawa fit well into this category of immigration. However, contrary to many Chinese migration literatures which often lay the emphasis on the economic analysis (see Chapter Two), for the Chinese Falun Gong practitioners, their emigration decision is not always motivated by economic reasons. During the interviews, each practitioner was asked to discuss their reasons for wanting to leave China. Eight out of ten interviewees had already emigrated or studied abroad before the crackdown on Falun Gong. They did not leave China because of Falun Gong. Their stories usually begin with anger and frustration with the living condition in China and the political system with the Chinese government. These factors are fairly predictable and common to many, if not most Chinese migrants (Ownby 2008b). Robin Cohen states that, "all diasporic communities settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories, acknowledge that 'the old country'—a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore—always has some claim on their

loyalty and emotions” (1997:ix). Chinese Falun Gong immigrants and non-Falun Gong immigrants, whether or not they struggle with the Chinese government, all shared a link with their past migration history.

Chapter Outline

What is Falun Gong? It has been defined as a socio-religious reform movement (by scholars in Chinese history), as a dangerous cult (by the Chinese state), as a bunch of traitors (by many Chinese in China and abroad), as an anti-Chinese Communist Party group (by scholars in political science and sociology), or as human rights activists (by Western journalism and international human rights’ organizations). Some practitioners said that Falun Gong is a religion, but it cannot be defined under the common Western terminology of “religion,” since Falun Gong does not require member initiation and has no temples, membership fees or formal rituals. Other practitioners said it is the “absolute truth” that they would hold it as long as they could, even if that meant losing their lives. Falun Gong can be understood as many differing ideologies. The first chapter is an introduction to Falun Gong’s background for readers to decide how they would define Falun Gong.

Chapter One starts with a brief introduction of qigong, the origin of Falun Gong is one of many qigong branches that emerged during the national qigong movement in post-Mao China (Palmer 2007; Ownby 2008b). Falun Gong first expanded rapidly during the Chinese national “qigong boom” movement in 1992 and it then clashed with the state in 1999. What happened between these seven years? The historical account of Falun Gong explores its complicated and problematic relationship with the Chinese state. In the conflict between Falun Gong and the Chinese state, both sides of characterizations of the

conflict will be presented along with scholarly criticism. The aim is to present a balanced analysis from differing perspectives.

Once we identified Falun Gong's role in the broader political and social contexts of modern Chinese history, we can therefore understand why Nancy Chen (2003), David Palmer (2007) and Yuezhi Zhao (2003) argue modernization as the root causes of Falun Gong's rise and fall; furthermore, they point out that the Falun Gong controversy is, in fact, a social struggle that is connected to the rapid economic change during China's reform era, which has only developed in the last thirty years. The latter sections of Chapter One shift the focus from Falun Gong's intra-China conflicts to the Falun Gong movement outside of China where I will demonstrate scholars' fieldwork research among overseas practitioners (Frank 2004; Kavan 2008; Ownby 2008b; Porter 2003), including my own ethnographic data in Ottawa. Two important issues will be discussed. First, how Falun Gong's organizational structure has evolved within the political climate (Tong 2002a). Second, after the crackdown many overseas Falun Gong practitioners constantly urge international communities to intervene on behalf of their ongoing suppression in China (Ownby 2008b). Whether one views the anti-Chinese Communist campaign as successful or not, there is little doubt that Falun Gong's controversies continue to travel across geopolitical boundaries, to define their current diaspora situations.

This research project sets out to study Falun Gong as a diaspora, to examine the nature of interactions between diaspora, the homeland and the host society. In this thesis *Chinese Falun Gong practitioners* refers to Chinese immigrants in North America who practice Falun Gong and study Falun Dafa, and who identify with the movement to stop the prosecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China. Even though I categorize my

research participants under the term *Chinese Falun Gong diaspora*, my intention is not to establish them as a more diasporic, exile group than other Chinese immigrants. Rather, in this study, I hold a flexible view about the definition of diaspora. Instead, the emphasis is on their diasporic consciousness and spaces. Chapter Two, then, focuses on the key theories relating to diaspora.

In the beginning of the Chapter Two I first provide literature reviews on diaspora studies and Chinese diaspora studies in order to understand what diaspora means and its evolving definitions. A comparative analytical approach will be presented to examine three concepts—transnationalism, diaspora and hybridity—to address their differences in methods and frameworks. I will then discuss how they intertwine with some Chinese Falun Gong practitioners' stories. After we look at how scholars analyze Chinese diaspora' relations to Chinese modernity (Chow 1993, 1998; Chun 2001, 2007; Ong 1999; Tu 1991), I will offer an analysis on how Falun Gong fits within diaspora studies in an attempt to point out that the conceptual challenge for this research project is to find a balance between homeland-diaspora-hostland relations.

Since 1999 many practitioners around the world have gone public in order to raise awareness about Falun Gong's persecution in China. These activities include lobbying, passing out of flyers, protesting in front of Chinese consulates, as well as participating in show, parades and demonstrations. Falun Gong has thus become one of the obvious Chinese groups to mobilize external political activism outside China. Chapter Three, then, focuses on overseas Falun Gong practitioners' collective tales, which I label them the *Falun Gong's anti-Communist narratives*.

The first part of this chapter seeks to expand more fully on the Falun Gong's anti-Chinese Communist campaign where we will be looking at the overseas practitioners' responses to the suppression. A comparative analysis between my interview materials and several scholarly accounts (Ching 2006; Frank 2004; Keith and Lin 2007; Ownby 2008a, 2008b; Tong 2002a, 2009; Zhao 2003) will be presented to examine if my data is compatible with others. Through these accounts we can tell how both parties have taken an increasingly militant stand against each other, which also provides a more complete picture on the conflict between Falun Gong and the Chinese state in order to illustrate Falun Gong's current controversial situations in Canada.

In order to answer the key research questions, the latter part of Chapter Three will return to the theoretical discussion to examine Falun Gong diaspora's identities. My hypotheses and ethnographic research findings will be discussed to reflect on the debates over diaspora studies where I will attempt to offer some critical questions when theorizing the concept of diaspora. Based on my understanding of the Falun Gong's anti-Communist sentiments, my fieldwork experience suggests a diaspora identity is a matter of *identifying* (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) and it is also about *strategic choices* (Hall 2003). The theoretical discussion of homeland-diaspora-hostland dialectic from Chapter Two helps to frame the following argument: "homeland" is a necessary part of the diaspora process of identification, yet a homeland does not necessarily produce a diaspora. Falun Gong diaspora indeed exists, it has a history, a migration process and it is produced between diasporic consciousness of being different and diasporic spaces of resistance, through both positive and negative experiences (Clifford 1997a; Hall 2003; Safran 2005).

Finally, it is important to note that Falun Gong practitioners all refused the label of political entity. To them, Falun Gong is merely “telling the truth” [讲真相]. Their desire and persistence to “save” their “people” back home were inspired by the Falun Gong’s ethics of “doing good for others” [做好人] and “gods are watching” [举头三尺有神明]. Whether or not we agree with Falun Gong’s beliefs, we cannot discredit their activism. They are people who work tirelessly and voluntarily to keep promoting what they see as the cause of their suffering. I hope this thesis presents a fair account of their migration stories as lived and as experienced in diaspora spaces.

These are their stories.....

CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to Falun Gong

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the Falun Gong's historical background and its controversial issues from divergent perspectives. Scholars who study Falun Gong may have differing views on what is the subject, but they all agree that Falun Gong is one of many qigong branches that emerged during the national qigong movement in post-Mao China (Ching 2006; Frank 2004; Madsen 2000; Kavan 2008; Palmer 2007; Ownby 2008b; Penny 2003; Porter 2003; Rahn 2002; Shepherd 2005; Tong 2002a; Zhao 2003). In order to place Falun Gong within the broader context of modern Chinese history, I first trace the origin of Falun Gong by presenting a brief introduction of qigong, followed by its historical account in order to explore Falun Gong's confrontational relationship with the Chinese state.

The latter part of this chapter examines Falun Gong's current social situations from a critical point of view, which begins with James Tong's (2009) research as he attempts to explain how the Chinese state seeks to suppress the Falun Gong practitioners in China. The next section presents scholarly debates on why the Chinese government banned Falun Gong, in which I will explore many of Falun Gong's controversial issues inside China, such as, the massive demonstrations by the practitioners, as well as the leader's charismatic leadership. The last part of this chapter examines Falun Gong's controversies outside China. In this section I will focus on overseas Falun Gong practitioners. After a description of who the Falun Gong practitioners are, and their backgrounds in North America, this section also presents ethnographic research from New Zealand (Kavan 2008) and North America (Frank 2004; Ownby 2008b; Porter 2003). Along these lines, I will also discuss my own ethnographic data from Ottawa.

Chapter One is by no means an easy one to write mainly because of the problems surrounding source credibility. As historian David Ownby describes: “I find myself before a mountain of evidence produced by the Chinese state (much of it extremely repetitive), and a mountain of evidence (equally repetitive) produced by Falun Gong. Both mountains of evidence are full of names, pictures, and various other ‘fact’” (2008b:162). Political scientist James Tong describes a similar situation in a subtler way: “Disinterested analysts are constrained by the necessity to rely on the government and the Falungong, the only main data sources for much of the subject matter of the present study” (2009:31). Sociologist David Palmer (2007:307-315) points out that much of the information on Falun Gong is propaganda by either the Chinese authorities or by Falun Gong sources, and in-depth scholarship on the Falun Gong issues remains under-explored. He notes that the story presented by the Chinese media, to a large degree, is influenced significantly under the Chinese state, which reflects the government’s views on the story. He posits (Palmer 2007:311):

The Chinese media possess a considerable but highly ambiguous power, as mediators between the official and popular worlds. On the one hand they are state propaganda organs in an environment in which the circulation of information is, in theory, strictly controlled. In this context the information they diffuse is perceived as being, if not ‘objectively’ correct, at least ‘politically’ correct, and in line with the Party’s will.

The sources produced by the Falun Gong are also disputable. Palmer points out that one of the difficulties with relying on Falun Gong sources is that “in some cases the versions presented in Falungong sources have changed with time” (2007:310). Palmer writes: “Only when the Falungong issue will have receded farther into the past, and future generations of historians will have access to sources that are still classified as highly

sensitive, will it be possible to reconstruct the full story” (ibid). In the end I decided to rely primarily on scholarly works, especially the historical account of Falun Gong; instead of “evidence” produced by the Chinese state and Falun Gong.

Qigong in Modern Chinese History

Qigong (气功) refers to a traditional Chinese cultivation practice that involves a set of physical movements and mental disciplines. It has always been closely linked to Taoist forms of breathing and internal transformation (Chen 2003; Ots 1994). The Chinese character of *qi* (气) can translate as “energy,” as the Taoist tradition believes there are life forces that flow through all things in the universe. Anthropologist Thomas Ots had conducted fieldwork research with two qigong groups in China during the 1980s. He offers a cross-cultural analysis (Ots 1994:120, emphasis in original):

The concept *qi* bears some resemblance to the ancient Greek concept *pneuma* as well as to the Indian *prana*: the air we inhale becomes [a] life-giving force, a cosmic breath. In common styles of *qigong* exercises, the adept relies on the mind’s will power (*yi*) to guide his *qi* through his body via certain routes, the *jingluo* conduits. These “endeavors of *qi*” (a most literal translation of *qigong*) may or may not be accompanied by certain external movements.

Over the centuries, qigong as a type of Taoist practice, was confined to Taoist monasteries or passed on only as family traditions (Ots 1994). Although this kind of bodily cultivation technique was widely practiced in China, the term “qigong” is relatively new throughout Chinese history. According to Palmer (2007:30-42), it was in 1947 when a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) member, Liu Guizhen, had an ulcer. After 102 days of practice Liu was cured and his other ailments improved. He proposed this ‘miracle’ under the name “qigong” to higher authorities. These kind of bodily cultivation techniques thus passed from the popular domain to the official and legitimate domain of

health policy. At the end of the 1940s, after decades of civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese National Party (KMT), the health system in China was ruined. There were only 12,000 medically-trained doctors and 400,000 traditional doctors. The new CCP government tried to integrate traditional doctors into state-controlled modern health institutions as the government recognized the benefits of qigong as the low cost of traditional healing. By the end of the 1950s, seventy qigong units were founded including clinics and sanatoria.

However, during the ten years of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), any qigong-related activity was officially banned. Qigong was attacked as “corrupt feudal leftovers,” “the garbage of history,” “idealism,” and “absurd stories” (Ownby 2008b:55). Accordingly, any qigong-related practices were suppressed, traditions were destroyed, and schools were closed (Ots 1994). Liu Guizhen was expelled from the party and was sent to a farm for reeducation (Ownby 2008b).

During the late 1970s several credible scientists in China illustrated that *qi* can be measured by scientific instruments (Ownby 2005). Qigong’s status was changed once again. With the support from the Chinese government it was estimated that between 300 to 3,600 different forms of qigong were established during the eighties (Ots 1994). In 1986 the national state-sponsored association founded the China Qigong Scientific Research Society (CQSRS 中国气功科学研究会), which would have the role of controlling qigong’s political direction (Palmer 2007). With the high-level political support—“arguably more than any other non-governmental social or religious group or movement in socialist China—which made possible the explosion of *qigong* in the post-Mao period as the largest expression of mass religiosity in urban China, and indeed one

of the most significant cultural phenomena of that period” (Palmer 2007:282). Palmer estimates when the qigong movement had reached its peak in the late 1980s, between 100 and 200 million people—which means 8 percent of the Chinese population and over 20 percent of its urban inhabitants—were practicing qigong, “making it the most widespread form of popular religiosity in post-Mao urban China” (Palmer 2007:6). “Qigong fever,” as Ots (1994) and Palmer (2007) refer to it as, is understood in Chinese term as 气功热 (*qigong re* where *re* means heat or fever). Ownby (2005) calls it the “qigong boom” and also suggests qigong boom was probably “the first genuine mass movement in the history of the People’s Republic—in the sense that it was directed more by participants in the movement than by party or government authorities” (Ownby 2008b:56).

To explain the rise and expansion of the modern qigong, Palmer (2007) notes that qigong was touted as a cheap and powerful healing technology. In China, qigong was the so-called “人体科学” [somatic science] that “could lead to revolutionary discoveries of ways to harness the powers of the human mind, and as a secularized training system that contained the key to the mysteries of traditional Chinese wisdom without the dross of religion or superstition” (Palmer 2007:5). Ownby (2005:202) also points out in modern China there is a tendency to perceive science as “a magic formula, the key to a brighter tomorrow” because the Chinese interpreted the rise of the West to world dominance in the nineteenth century and the declined Chinese status as the result of the development of western science and technology.

Aside from the interest in promoting “Chinese science,” the national phenomenon of the “qigong boom” can also be examined within the context of China’s shift to market medicine. Medical anthropologist Nancy Chen (2003) has conducted fieldwork projects

with various qigong groups in China since the 1980s. Chen shows that qigong is the more convenient and affordable way of achieving better health than prescription drugs. As Ownby also explains (2008b:232), “the notion of finding health, happiness, and power through moral practice and corporal technologies spoke something deeply embedded in Chinese popular religious culture.” The national qigong movement truly emerged in the 1980s, and almost dismantled in 1999 after the crackdown on Falun Gong (Chen 2003; Palmer 2007).

The Rise and Fall of Falun Gong

Falun Gong was established in 1992 in the middle of the national “qigong boom” movement. Founded by a former soldier and state clerk, Li Hongzhi (李洪志), who was born in 1951 or 1952 in Gongzhuling, Jilin Province. He then moved to the larger city Changchun in 1955 where he grew up and went to school (Ownby 2008b). According to Li’s biography he was taught by several Taoist masters and learned the Buddhist disciplines as early as the age of four. Gradually he developed a system that later became known as Falun Buddha Law, and combined it with qigong (Penny 2003). Li began his teaching as a qigong master in May 1992.

According to Ownby’s account (2008b:85-87), between October 1992 and March 1993, Li gave a total of six lecture series in Beijing, the center of the qigong world. At the Oriental Health Fair in December 1992, Li and his group scored major successes. As one of the organizers of the health fair remarked, Falun Gong had “received the most praise [of any qigong school] at the fair, and achieved very good therapeutic results” (Ownby 2008b:86, brackets in original). The health fair made Li’s name in the broader qigong world. Within a short period of time, Li gained popularity as a miracle worker.

For example, there were “journalists reporting that cripples had thrown away their crutches and risen from their wheelchairs” (Ownby 2008b:86). From June 1992 to March 1993 Li taught seminars in many major cities of China, which were sponsored by the CQSRS (Palmer 2007) and his association—Falun Dafa Research Society—had gained official recognition within CQSRS in 1993 (Frank 2004). Ownby (2008b:87) estimates between May 1992 and December 1994, there were more than 60,000 people who attended Li’s lectures and workshops. In 1995 Li began his international teaching tour in France, Germany and Sweden (Palmer 2007) and later in Southeast Asia, Australia and North America (Ownby 2008b).

Ownby remarks that “in the light of the eventual conflict between Falun Gong and the Chinese state, that Li does *not* appear to have been particularly controversial during this 1992-1995 period” (2008b:88, emphasis in original). Falun Gong was one of the most popular qigong movements in China, and Li was also granted several prizes for his teachings (Ownby 2008b). Like many qigong masters, Li published a number of qigong-related books, audio-cassettes and videotapes. Among those, *Zhuan Falun* is considered the central and most comprehensive account on the teachings of Falun Gong (Ownby 2008b). The *Beijing Youth Daily* has reviewed *Zhuan Falun* as one of the top-ten books in Beijing (Schechter 2001) and it was on bestseller lists in the spring of 1996 (Ownby 2008b). But this acceptance of Falun Gong did not last very long.

On June 17 of 1996, the national newspaper *Guangming Daily* (光明日报) published an article condemning *Zhuan Falun* as a “pseudo-scientific book propagating feudal superstitions” and further asked publishers to refuse to publish the “pseudo-scientific books of swindlers” (Palmer 2007:249). Following this, some twenty major

newspapers also published articles criticizing Falun Gong. On July 24 of 1996, the Central Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party (中共中央宣传部) banned all the publication of Falun Gong-related books. Thousands of Falun Gong followers wrote letters to newspaper editors and the CQSRS to complain against all accusations. On August 28, 1996, Li Hongzhi gave a sermon to encourage the activism to defend Falun Gong (in Palmer 2007:250, emphasis in original):

From the *Guangming Daily* incident until now, each *Dafa* disciple has played a role: some have persisted in their cultivation; to defend the reputation of *Dafa* they have written to the higher authorities and do not tolerate this irresponsible article. But others, in this difficult conjuncture, didn't practice inner cultivation, but spread dissension, making things even more complicated. Others, fearing that their reputation or their personal interest would be affected, abandoned practice, and still others, indifferent to the peace of *Dafa*, spread baseless rumours, aggravating the factors destabilizing *Dafa*. [...]. Is this affair not a test for the spiritual nature of the *Dafa* disciples?

In September 1996, Li filed for official withdrawal from the CQSRS out of the fear of future conflicts with the changing attitude of Chinese authorities toward qigong (Ownby 2008b:88). Or, as Frank argues (2004:235), "either as a result of fallout from a Party crackdown on 'pseudoscience' or because of petty jealousy." After Li sold enormous numbers of copies of his publications he was able to offer his seminars free of charge, which was a significant difference from many other qigong schools (Ownby 2005). In 1997, Li disbanded the Falun Dafa Research Society after he applied to several government cultural and religious organizations (e.g. the National Minority Affairs Commission and the China Buddhist Federation) and all applications were rejected (Ownby 2008b). Li went to Houston on a tourist visa and gave several seminars in the

United States. In February 1998, Li and his family obtained American Green Cards, and settled in Flushing, New York (Shepherd 2005).

While Li continued to expand the teachings of Falun Gong abroad, inside China the practitioners also continued to work. On April 11, 1999, He Zuoxiu, a physics professor and member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences from a university in Tianjin published an article, "Why I am Opposed to Qigong Practice by Teenagers." In an attempt to challenge Falun Gong's scientific claims, he criticized the recruitment of children in primary school playgrounds by Falun Gong practitioners, and argued that Falun Gong-style of meditation could cause psychiatric illness (Palmer 2007). He also appeared on Beijing Television citing the story of his student practitioner who had negative side effects after practicing Falun Gong (Schechter 2001). Practitioners considered this article highly offensive. They gathered to protest in meditation posture around the university administrative building. The number of protesters grew every day. On April 23, three hundred anti-riot police were sent to the campus in Tianjin to expel 6,000 Falun Gong demonstrators; some protesters were beaten and 45 were arrested (Palmer 2007).

On April 24, 1999 Falun Gong practitioners headed to the Ministry of Public Security in Beijing to demand justice. By the dawn of April 25, the number had grown to between 10,000~15,000 practitioners who sat or read quietly on the sidewalk of Zhongnanhai—the CCP headquarters and the central government compound in Beijing—not far from Tiananmen Square (Schechter 2001; Palmer 2007). This was the first time Falun Gong appeared on international media coverage (Ching 2006; Ownby 2008a). The demonstrators presented a letter seeking for the release of imprisoned practitioners and

allowing “a legal and non-hostile environment for practicing Falun Gong in China” (Schechter 2001:69-70). According to many accounts, Premier Zhu Rongji emerged from headquarters and asked representatives to come inside (Ownby 2008a). All that is known is that after Falun Gong representatives had met with the Deputy Director of the Petitions Office inside the building and presented their demands, they came out and told the protesters that “the authorities had promised that the State Council would handle the requests, that they could appeal at local complaints offices, and that the prisoners in Tianjin would be released; so they could now go home” (Palmer 2007:269). The demonstration dismantled.

Unfortunately, the April 25 incident was not the end solution for the Chinese government and Falun Gong; rather, it was a bitter beginning. The CCP’s Chairman Jiang Zemin who was also the President of the PRC wrote a letter to the CCP’s top leaders expressing his concern with Falun Gong’s mobilization capacity, calling it the largest collective action since the student movement in Tiananmen Square of 1989 (Tong 2002b). According to Palmer (2007:272) the letter states: “If the CCP cannot defeat Falungong, it will be the biggest joke on Earth.” By July 20 nearly 5,600 Falun Gong practitioners were detained (Ownby 2008b).

At 3:00 p.m. on Thursday, July 22 of 1999, all television and radio stations in China disrupted their regular programming to announce the official ban of the Falun Gong as “the most serious political incident since June 4” ¹¹ (Tong 2009:78). For example, one of the major national newspapers, the *People’s Daily* (人民日报) published a long article entitled “The Truth about Li Hongzhi” (Ownby 2008b) and its online

¹¹ June 4 refers to the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, which is more well-known as the June Fourth Incident (六四事件) in Chinese.

English version of the *People's Daily Online* (人民网) also published the article, "China Bans Falun Gong" on the same day:

China today banned the Research Society of Falun Dafa and the Falun Gong organization under its control after deeming them to be illegal.

In its decision on this matter issued today, the Ministry of Civil Affairs said that according to investigations, the Research Society of Falun Dafa had not been registered according to law and had been engaged in illegal activities, advocating superstition and spreading fallacies, hoodwinking people, inciting and creating disturbances, and jeopardizing social stability.

The decision said that therefore, in accordance with the Regulations on the Registration and Management of Mass Organizations, the Research Society of Falun Dafa and the Falun Gong organization under its control a[r]e held to be illegal and are therefore banned (People's Daily Online 1999).

Following the policy announcements, there was a nationwide anti-Falun Gong campaign. According to Tong's research (2009:78), during the four weeks after the official ban, the *People's Daily* published 780 stories as well as commentaries; the state *Xinhua News Agency* (新华通讯社) produced 1,650 releases and 290 articles, and the China Central Television Corporation (CCTV 中国中央电视台) aired 1,722 news that totally more than 100 hours of programming on the Falun gong. On top of the many programs aired by the Central People's Broadcasting Station (CPBS 中央人民广播电台), 120 anti-Falun Gong books were published by the nation's printing presses within nine months. Thus, Tong remarks, "the anti-Falungong campaign was arguably the most forceful media assault on a domestic challenger in post-Mao China" (2009:78). Meanwhile, the "Falun Gong crisis" also exploded within the CCP as 300,000 members renounced their association with Falun Gong (Ownby 2008b). For instance, according to Tong's account (2009:42), when the party committees launched education campaigns to

“detoxicate” party member, in Shandong Province alone, 77.8% CCP members admitted that they had practiced Falun Gong.

On November 4 of 1999, three high-level of government agencies—the National People’s Congress (全国人民代表大会), the Supreme People’s Court (最高人民法院) and the Supreme People’s Procuratorate (最高人民检察院)—officially declared that Falun Gong was an “evil cult” under Chinese law (Tong 2009). Chinese authorities also likened Falun Gong to such notorious cults as Aum Shinrikyō in Japan¹² and the Branch Davidians in the United States (Ownby 2007). As the leader of an “evil cult,” Li Hongzhi was charged with spreading malicious teachings, manipulating members, and collecting illegal funds (Ching 2006; Ownby 2008b).

Li encouraged his practitioners to defend Falun Gong in the face of the media assault (Palmer 2007). However, he usually denied any involvement with the activism himself. For example, three days before the April 25th Zhongnanhai massive demonstration in 1999, Li arrived in Beijing on a flight from New York and left for Hong Kong on April 24. He later told a press that “I was changing flights at Beijing on my way to Australia at the time, and I left Beijing without knowing anything about what was going on there” (Palmer 2007:268). After the national crackdown on Falun Gong, Li went into hiding for months fearing that Chinese police might kidnap him (Frank 2004). Chinese officials made a request to the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) for cooperation in arresting Li and returning him to China; INTERPOL refused China’s request (Ching 2006; Ownby 2008a). Li continued to communicate with

¹² Aum Shinrikyō (真理教) is known to carry out terrorist attacks against Japanese civilians. For example, on March 1995, Aum members released sarin (chemical weapon) on five trains in the Tokyo subway system. 12 people were killed and more than 5,000 people were injured (French 1999).

his followers through Falun Gong's websites, but did not resurface in the public eye until 2001 (Frank 2004).

The Anti-Falun Gong Campaign

James Tong (2002a, 2002b, 2009) has written a number of works about Falun Gong's politics, financing and its organizational structure. His recent publication, *Revenge of the Forbidden City: The Suppression of the Falungong in China, 1999-2005* (2009), to my knowledge, is the only scholarly account that records and analyses systematically the Chinese regime's techniques against Falun Gong with rich empirical data. In Tong's view, the official crackdown (July 22, 1999) did not take place immediately; rather, the almost three-month delayed response to the April 25th Falun Gong's massive demonstration in Beijing was a result of "the need for time to collect intelligence and to build a case against the Falungong" (2002a:819). Ownby agrees with Tong when he suggests that Tong's analysis "would tend to confirm that the 300 Falun Gong demonstrations between 1996 and 1999 had passed largely unnoticed at the highest levels, even if in retrospect they were characterized as an imminent threat to state security" (Ownby 2008b:174-175).

According to Tong (2009:32-51), from April 25 to July 22, the Chinese officials from the central to the local government levels were busy gathering intelligence, both at home and abroad, for the preparation of the crackdown on Falun Gong. Police in Beijing were ordered to make a list of the protesters who had participated in the Zhongnanhai demonstration. At the same time, party and state bureaucracies at all administrative levels and public security agencies were also mobilized to engage in the anti-Falun Gong campaign. The movement was executed in many aspects of the Chinese society,

including the media apparatus, police force, military, education system, and workplaces. For instance, sociologist Richard Madsen's article reveals the "propaganda war" had reached Chinese scholarship (Madsen 2000:247):

Researchers at universities and academies of social science were called together for day-long meetings and told to organize exposés of Falun Gong. (I saw a document presented by the public security bureau at one such institution outlining Falun Gong's flaws and instructing the researchers to use their knowledge to fill in the details. So much for objective scholarship.)

On June 10 Jiang authorized the establishment of the 610 Office to suppress Falun Gong (Palmer 2007; Ownby 2008a). The 610 Office, named after the inaugural date, was established to serve as a permanent organization to manage the "Falun Gong problem." As Tong explains the purpose of this office: "Headed by Luo Gan, the office was entrusted with the task to study, investigate and to come up with a unified approach in terms of specific steps, methods, and measures to resolve the 'Falungong' problem. It was authorized to deal with central and local, party and state agencies, which were called upon to act in close coordination with that office" (2009:36). A few sets of law enforcement tasks were also implemented to enforce the ban (Tong 2009:52):

(1) the arrest and prosecution of Falungong leaders, (2) dissolving registered and unregistered Falun gong organizations, (3) confiscating and destroying Falungong publications and accessories, (4) establishing a community and residence surveillance network to monitor practitioners, and (5) preventing Falungong from staging protests, petitioning in Beijing, and engaging in sabotage.

As a result, all Falun Gong properties and publications were confiscated. The Chinese government claimed that Falun Gong had 39 main stations, 1,900 guidance stations and 28,263 practice sites in China—all of them shut down within a week after the crackdown and many of its' leaders, if not detained, went into hiding or exile (Tong 2002a, 2009).

Practitioners who remained in China were under surveillance, as Tong writes: “A community-based intelligence network monitored former Falungong practitioners to ensure that they would not misbehave at their residence or work place, using local informants and special agents” (2009:77).

In addition to law enforcement operations in banning the Falun Gong, the Chinese state has launched education and conversion programs with the aim to “redeeming” practitioners. According to Tong (2009:103):

In a process similar to triage, practitioners were sorted into (1) common practitioners who would be subjected only to public education and study session, (2) more hardened practitioners who required personalized indoctrination, and (3) the most committed practitioners destined for labor reform and special rehabilitation programs.

Tong (2009:128) argues that much of the conversion programs relied on Mao-style techniques of indoctrination and thought reform. These techniques involved forcing practitioners to attend Marxism and materialism study sessions and watch anti-Falun Gong television programs. The “hard-core” practitioners were sentenced to labour reform institutions where they were segregated from other inmates, put under 24-hour surveillance, and subjected to a daily routine of indoctrination and physical labour. In Tong’s view, the regime created the education and conversion programs in an effort to “help” practitioners to renounce their beliefs and transform their thoughts. In his words:

[Giving] that the institutional capacity of law enforcement in China could not detain, indict, convict, and incarcerate all the 2.3 million Falungong practitioners. In addition to the capacity of penal institutions, it would also be illegal to lock them up for indefinite periods, beyond what is stipulated in the pertinent statutes. The goal of the anti-Falungong campaign was thus not only to rid of the regime of a congregation that staged open defiance of the state, but also to win the hearts and minds of the practitioners (Tong 2009:128).

Whether these techniques should be considered as hard- or soft-sell, many Falun Gong practitioners do not buy into this “redemption.” According to Tong, four years after the official ban, “a double-digit percentage of Falun-gong inmates in labor education still chose not to renounce their ties with the Falungong by the end of 2003” (2009:220). According the Falun Gong source, *Minghui*,¹³ up until February 2011, 64,920 cases are classified for physical torture and psychological abuse by law enforcement agents. Different methods of punishment include, sexual assaults, drug injections, electric shocks, beatings, psychological torment, termination of employment and student status, and institutionalization in psychiatric hospitals. *Minghui*¹⁴ also reports 3,428 practitioners died as a result of torture in custody from July 1999 to March 2011.

Before the crackdown, the Chinese government reported that Falun Gong had 70 million followers all over China, but the number was reduced to 2.1 million by the time the crackdown was executed in 1999 (Frank 2004; Tong 2002a). In 1997, Li Hongzhi claimed to have 100 million followers, including 20 million regular practitioners. In later years, Falun Gong’s sources continue to source the same numbers (Palmer 2007). However, Palmer and Ownby question the number. As Ownby explains: “Li Hongzhi often claims 100 million followers, but the millions are (or, rather, were) in China, and Falun Gong, like other most new religious movements in North America, seems to have made few inroads as an international mass movement” (2008b:134). Palmer (2007:259-260) argues that the claim of 100 million practitioners is grossly exaggerated.

¹³ See <http://library.minghui.org/categoryb/2,420,,1.htm> (accessed August 25, 2011) for the Chinese-language version and <http://library.minghui.org/categoryb/2,421,,1.htm> (accessed August 25, 2011) for the English-language version.

¹⁴ See <http://library.minghui.org/categoryb/32,95,,1.htm> (accessed August 25, 2011) for the Chinese-language version, and <http://library.minghui.org/categoryb/32,344,,1.htm> (accessed August 25, 2011) for the English-language version.

Falun Gong's Controversies

Whether it was 2 million or 100 million, Falun Gong's mobilization capacity is definitely remarkable. Madsen questions this mobilization as he asks: "Why has the Chinese government mobilized vast resources to crush the Falun Gong?" (2002:245). He answers his own question as he writes: "The answer has less to do with the strangeness of its doctrines than with the effectiveness of its organization" (ibid). This view is shared by Tong as he explains, "Even by the regime's conservative enumeration, it was one of the largest non-government organizations in the history of the People's Republic. From the regime's vantage point, *falun gong's* ability to mobilize collective action to defend its own interests is more threatening than its size" (2002a:636). Prior to the April 25th Zhongnanhai demonstration, the *People's Daily* claimed that Falun Gong had mounted 307 protest demonstrations (Tong 2002a). Accordingly, Palmer labels Falun Gong as a "militant qigong group," as he notes that Falun Gong's increasingly militant attitude (from 1996 onwards) toward media and government led to heightened tensions. He argues as follows (Palmer 2007:295, emphasis in original):

The non-violence of Falungong militancy accentuated the dichotomy between the two protagonists. Its symbolic power was all the more disruptive: The Zhongnanhai demonstration, where thousands of adepts quietly surrounded the heart of the Party for a whole day, evoked images of a siege or of strangling. Through this act Falungong projected the image of a powerful alternative order, capable of mobilizing the masses, and *which was not afraid* of the CCP.

Julia Ching also points out that many Communist Party members were followers of Falun Gong, to quote her (2006:49): "The party itself, after all, has only fifty-five to sixty million members, and fears infiltration, as many Falun Gong members were also party members." Furthermore, Ching (2006) explores the historical examples of peasant

rebellion under the dynasties. For example, a secret Taoist society, the Yellow Turbans Rebellion (黄巾之乱) fought against the Han Dynasty in the second century and Taiping Rebellion (太平天国) in the mid-nineteenth century. It was led by a Chinese man, who had converted to Christianity. The Taiping movement almost brought down the Qing Dynasty. Because of this near collapse of the Dynasty, the Chinese states have always been concerned with secret religious societies.

A critic of Falun Gong, Patsy Rahn (2002) uses the example of Yi Guan Dao (一贯道), a Taoist/Buddhist heritage religious group active in China in the first half of the twentieth century, as evidence of Falun Gong's position as a peasant rebellion group. When the CCP came to power they initiated a campaign against the "counter-revolutionary forces of superstition," the leader of Yi Guan Dao was forced to flee to Taiwan, and the practitioners had to practice in hiding. Until 1987, Yi Guan Dao continued to spread in Taiwan, many Southeast Asian countries and since the 1980s it was "once again as one of the active sects in China" (Rahn 2002:45). Rahn writes the "long-term campaign against the Yi Guan Dao may be the most recent modern-day forerunner and possible model for the Falun Gong campaign" (ibid) to point out Falun Gong is resembled to a rebel movement. Viewed in this perspective, Rahn argues that the suppression of Falun Gong can be seen as "appropriate, necessary and acceptable" (2002:46) because the Chinese government wants to protect its people and its country's stability. According to Rahn, the CCP sees the conflict with the Falun Gong as one "between the people and their enemies" for several reasons, as she elaborates (2002:46):

- 1) the government believes Li's teachings endanger people, mainly due to the teachings regarding medicine; 2) the government believes Li's teachings were gaining enough adherents across China and specifically within the CCP to be a

potential rival ideologically; 3) because Li moved to the US and has, according to the government's view, linked up with those in the West who wish to see the fall of the CCP. The conflict between the government and the FLG is, therefore, seen as being between "the people and their enemies" and according to the crisis management style of the CCP, it is appropriate, acceptable and necessary to utilize ruthless and radical responses.

The argument based on the concept of relativism is also advocated strongly by anthropologist John Young (2002). Young refers to the case of Falun Gong to exemplify an argument that the criticism of China's human rights record is unfair treatment because the condemnation is based on the western standards. In Young's view, the Chinese state has already tolerated Falun Gong. To quote him (2002:31):

The Chinese government for several years afforded the notorious Falun Gong movement a large measure of freedom, even though it fits the classic definition of a militant cult that gives little freedom of thought to its members, similar to the Branch Davidians, or Jim Jones' People's Temple [...]. The Chinese government began a systematic crackdown on public demonstrations in July of 1999, only after 20,000 Falun Gong members held an anti-government demonstration in Tiananmen Square.

In other words, Young accepts the Chinese government's allegations of Falun Gong. Not only does he argue that the suppression campaign against Falun Gong is not controversial, he also feels it is predicable. Young argues that critics of China's human rights record only focus on a narrow context in contrast to Chinese officials who often invoke a broader context of human rights with cultural differences—which is, he claims, to what anthropologists do—but the difference is, many Western anthropologists nowadays confuse cultural relativism with moral relativism. As he writes (Young 2002:28):

As anthropologists we are often preoccupied with our own circumscribed studies of local communities. [...]. Many Western anthropologists who have recently, and as a matter of conscience, become concerned with globalization have

abandoned the concept of culture as an organizing principle, perhaps in part because they confuse cultural relativism with moral relativism, and perhaps because it is fashionable to denounce their forebears.

Young argues the crackdown on Falun Gong should be understood within the Chinese cultural and historical contexts. Culturally, the “core of Chinese culture Confucian values emphasize obligations owed to other people rather than rights possessed by individuals” (2002:30). Historically, “[d]uring the Cultural Revolution even a small group known to oppose the government, either in public or not in public, would have been immediately suppressed well before organizing such a massive demonstration” (2002:31). My understanding of Young’s criticism of Falun Gong is that practitioners should not challenge authority; rather, they should accept the fact that their activism is doomed to suppression and persecution.

While I agree with Young that critics of China should be more culturally and historically sensitive, and be aware that their condemnations are based on their own ethnocentric standards (which marks everyone’s critical stands, including that of Young). I argue that Young’s method of argumentation, mainly his use of cultural relativism to justify state oppression, can be turned around and applied to his own argument which is based on confusion between cultural relativism and moral relativism—if he means that anthropologists are forbidden to criticize “other” cultures and relativism is about tolerating intolerances (see Renteln 1990). It is also ironic to see how Young brings up Confucianism and the Cultural Revolution at the same time. I wonder if he would acknowledge that Confucianism, like qigong, and many ancient Chinese traditions, was banned during the Cultural Revolution period?

Having said that, Young is simply citing it as an example to illustrate his criticism of universal human rights since the Falun Gong issue has become a popular topic of the general discourse criticising human rights violations in China. Over the years, the symbolic meaning behind Falun Gong's activism, as suggests by Palmer (2007:281), appears as one of the best-organised and persistent oppositional movements in China and abroad. But Young's view of "Chinese culture" as a homogenous entity is, indeed, underplaying cultural fluidity. Although I would still disagree with Rahn (2002) who argues that torture and detentions of Falun Gong practitioners are "appropriate, necessary and acceptable" even if I was convinced that Falun Gong is a "cult" as accused by the Chinese state. On the other hand, her criticism of Falun Gong has pointed to one of the causes of Falun Gong's controversies.

Among these Falun Gong controversies, there is one tragedy that stands out amongst the rest. On January 22 of 2001, the eve of the Chinese New Year, five presumed Falun Gong practitioners from Kaifeng, Henan doused themselves in gasoline and set themselves on fire in Tiananmen Square. One man sat down in a Falun Gong posture and remained seated as the flames consumed him (Ownby 2008b). Police officers who were patrolling the area quickly approached them and extinguished the flames. A CNN crew that was there on a routine check at the time reported the event. But their film was confiscated by security officials and not returned (Ownby 2008b; Schechter 2001). One woman died on the scene. Her daughter and the other adults were taken to a hospital. The twelve-year-old girl, Liu Siying, died in the hospital several weeks later. During an interview, she explained that her mother had told her to set herself on fire to reach "a wonderful world with gold everywhere" (Ownby 2008b:216). Other survivors of self-

immolation spoke of a violation of trust perpetrated by the Falun Gong's master (ibid). Within a few hours, the state *Xinhua News Agency* offered a brief report to foreign media and seven days later the incident was aired on the CCTV which showed footage of five people engulfed in flames that was taken from nearby surveillance cameras (Ownby 2008b; Schechter 2001).

Overseas Falun Gong practitioners immediately contested the accuracy of the report and insisted that Falun Gong teachings prohibit suicide (Ownby 2008b). Many foreign journalists were also sceptical about the incident. For example, Schechter (2001) points out that only state-approved Chinese media was permitted to interview people who were involved in the incident. Philip Pan, a journalist from the *Washington Post*, traveled to Kaifeng, talked to Liu Siying's neighbours and discovered that no one was aware that they were Falun Gong practitioners (Ownby 2008b). Other questions have been raised as well. For instance, why were the police officers patrolling the area equipped with fire extinguishers since that is not standard equipment for most police officers in China or elsewhere (Ownby 2008b:217); how did *Xinhua* manage to produce a report so quickly, only a few hours after the incident occurred? (Schechter 2001:22-23); and how could it be medically possible for the girl, Liu Siying, who just had a tracheotomy from the burn injury speak clearly and even sing in the report? (Ownby 2008b; Schechter 2001).

While Chinese authorities and media presented the self-immolation incident as evidence to further their claims of Falun Gong as an "evil cult," many Falun Gong practitioners and journalists began to accuse the Chinese authorities of staging this event. The allegation against Falun Gong is supported by Rahn. To quote her (2002:50):

The Chinese government has put most of its energy into defining its adversary the FLG movement, although as of Spring 2001 it began some efforts at self-

definition to counter-act the Falun Gong's message. The government's attempts at defining its opponent have been played out mainly within China, with some success, particularly due to the intensified campaign following the self-immolations in Tiananmen Square in January 2001.

Ownby, on the other hand, suggests a different perspective. As he writes:

Although the arguments of Falun Gong practitioners seem cogent, it is very difficult to arrive at a final judgment about the self-immolation. If those who set themselves on fire were not practitioners, then who were they? Where would Chinese authorities have found "actors" (including children) willing to play such roles? What would have been their motivation? I suppose that it is possible that there are desperate people in China (and elsewhere) who will do *anything* for money (which would go to their families in this case, one supposes, unless the authorities had promised to rescue them before the flames could do harm). Or the entire event could have been staged. But it seems just as possible that those who set themselves on fire might have been new or un-schooled Falun Gong practitioners, had discovered and practiced Falun Gong on their own (and badly) in the post-suppression period, and, for whatever reason, decided to make the ultimate sacrifice (Ownby 2008b:217-218, emphasis in original).

Up until this date, the dispute remains unresolved.

Generally speaking, scholarly discourses on Falun Gong reject most of the accusations made by the Chinese government, for instance, the link between Falun Gong and violent rebellions (e.g. Frank 2004), between Falun Gong and "dangerous cults" (e.g. Ownby 2008b) or Li Hongzhi charging excessive fees (e.g. Tong 2002a). Nonetheless, the role of the leader is still essential to the Falun Gong dispute. The attacks on Li usually focus on two specific points: Li's biography and his leadership. First, for example, one of the points that has been persistently attacked by the CCP is that Li changed his birth date from July 7 of 1952 to May 13 of 1951. The Chinese government condemned Li for purposely changing his birthday to be the same day as the birth of Sakyamuni—the

founder of Buddhism—so Li could claim that he is a reincarnation of Buddha¹⁵ (Penny 2003). Li rejected this statement and asserted that it was one of the administrative errors done during the Cultural Revolution (Schechter 2001).

The second point of attack relates to Li's seemingly atypical assertions and his charismatic authority. In *Zhuan Falun* Li explicitly condemned many other qigong schools for charging too much with “false teachings,” as he claims, “I’m the only one who’s really transmitting a practice that takes you to higher levels” (2003:1). Li also asserts that he embodies all types of special powers and he is the saviour of his disciples and humanity. As he states (2003:127):

I have countless Law Bodies which have my enormous divine Law-power, and they can display their great divine powers and great Law-power. Also, what we’re doing today isn’t as simple as it looks, and I didn’t just come out to do this on some kind of impulse. I can tell you that a lot of Great Enlightened Beings are watching this event. This is our transmitting a true teaching in the Age of the Law’s End for the last time. When you really cultivate on a true path nobody will dare to just go and give you trouble, and what’s more, you have my Law Bodies protecting you, so you won’t run into any danger.

In order to be healed and allowed to enter the heaven in afterlife, the practitioners must practice spiritual cultivation by following the three core principles of the belief—truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance—to purge negative karma.¹⁶ In addition to his teachings, Li forbids people to write on or highlight his book (2003:349-350):

¹⁵ During a meeting, Professor Brian Given pointed out that the Buddhist concept of reincarnation is much more complicated than a birthday.

¹⁶ Karma (业力) is an important moral concept for Falun Gong as some scholars suggest that much of Li’s message is cast in the language of Buddhism (e.g. Ownby 2008b). In *Zhuan Falun* (2003:137-149) Li refers to positive karma to “白色物质” [white matters] while negative karma as “黑色物质” [black matters]. Li claims that “Our human bodies have both of these kinds of matter” (2003:138). For Falun Gong practitioners, one of the cultivation goals is transforming from black to white matters through “doing the right things”—to be True, Good, and Endure—which are the three core principles of Falun Gong.

Some folks just go and start marking up this book of mine. Now, those of us with open Third Eyes can see that this book is full of dazzling colors, and sparkling with golden light, and every word is in my Law Body's image. If I lied I'd be cheating you, so I'll tell you: the marks you make are so dark, and you dare to just mark it up like that?

As this thesis does not focus on Falun Gong's teachings, I did not ask practitioners to what extent would they follow Li's writings. During my fieldwork, some practitioners advised me to study *Zhuan Falun* with respect (e.g. cannot write anything on it) because it is not an ordinary book. In her analysis of Li's teachings, Rahn argues that Li's messages prevented practitioners from reading the negative publicity in the media which depicts them as "evil people" (2002:53). As she writes: "This limited information and strong dualistic thinking may make it difficult for practitioners to either accept that others may not agree with them, or to give validity to the alternative view of others" (ibid). According to Rahn, Li's teachings have encouraged practitioners to close their eyes to other "truths" around them. Consequently, Li discouraged practitioners from looking at Falun Gong from different perspectives.

During my review of relevant literature, I find most of scholars express empathy toward Falun Gong practitioners, yet at the same time, they are often sceptical about Li's charismatic leadership. For example, Ching points out there is a paradox of the Falun Gong movement. As she argues (2006:52):

The real irony is that, given such assertions, why should the movement fight so hard for its survival in China and worldwide? Would it not be more appropriate for the leader to ask his followers to stop public acts that would lead to instant arrest and possible death under torture? After all, the movement promotes physical and mental health, and the leader should protect his own, rather than have them suffer.

Ownby also writes a similar statement: “From a non-practitioner’s perspective, Li seems to ask that his followers make sacrifices that he himself has not made, and he would certainly not be the first charismatic leader to do so” (2008a:119). During two interviews, I used the term “牺牲” [sacrifice] to describe their tireless efforts in activism. The practitioners corrected me and said that it is a voluntary act from within, not for the sake of something else because they believe in karma. As one informant explains: “Of course, what we do is money, energy, and time-consuming and sometimes very frustrating but we have to see beyond these challenges. As a practitioner we are learning to abandon human attachment¹⁷ and by doing so we are becoming unselfish.”

In spite of the controversial aspects of Li’s charismatic leadership, I find the following analyses regarding the conflicts between the Chinese government and the Falun Gong are most balanced because they situate the “Falun Gong’s controversy” within a broader social and historical context.

As noted above, Tong (2002a) has rightly pointed out that the number of followers that could mobilize and the number of demonstrations that were able to perform were interpreted as a threat in the eyes of the Chinese state. Since the Tiananmen Square students protest of 1989, the issues of freedom of speech and any kind of public demonstration in China has become a sensitive topic, including qigong (Ots 1994; Ownby 2005). For example, Ots notes that when he revisited Beijing in November 1989, a Nanjing crane-qigong master whom Ots had previously studied with was attacked by the local office of public security. Ots further remarks that it was hard to find groups of practitioners practicing qigong in parks. When he returned to the Earth-Temple Park in

¹⁷ The literal translation for “人世间欲望” is human attachment; however, “materialism” might be more understandable for those non-Buddhist and/or English-speaking readers.

Beijing which it used to be a favourite location for hundreds of qigong practitioners it was practically empty. He writes (Ots 1994:130):

There was only one man who engaged in small, circling movements of the hips. He was totally in control and, as if afraid of being watched, he cautiously observed the surroundings. There was no trace of the emancipator air of self-expression and joy of prior years. When I left the park, I stopped and took a few deep breaths of air that gave some temporary relief to my constricted chest. Then I shook myself and hurried away.

Ots's writings reveal what the mood was like in Beijing after the June 4th, 1989, at least inside qigong circles. Ots's observation is echoed when, as mentioned, Madsen (2002) and Tong (2002a) insist that the CCP cannot afford nor tolerate any massive non-governmental organization, especially after the Tiananmen Square protests. The national suppression of Falun Gong since 1999 had an even greater impact on qigong overall (Palmer 2007). Qigong had mostly gone underground. They either practice at home by themselves or retreat to the mountains away from official surveillance (Chen 2003).

From the perspective of embodiment, Ots (1994) and Chen (2003) study qigong with the concern of how 'body' became the site of subjectivity. Ots adopts a phenomenological approach to probe the question of qigong's relations with emotions and self-expression. His study of spontaneous-qigong suggests qigong as a primary means to release and experience one's true self, which argues that a repressed body can express the emotional self through practicing qigong. As a medical anthropologist, Chen focuses on public/private spheres, healing practices and health institutions where she argues qigong can not only be seen as a new private space for individuals, but it also creates a new form of urban interaction that may transcend the constraint of the state. Both Ots and Chen share a similar perspective. They believe that practicing qigong is

supposed to be spontaneous and immediate, which is opposed to the norm-governed institutions.

In a related but different way, Ownby agrees there is a fundamental difference between socialist discourse and qigong. To quote Ownby (2008b:124): “Socialism demands individual sacrifice for the well-being of the collectivity, and no individual can be liberated until the masses have achieved liberation. By contrast, the logic of cultivation, and of qigong, is an individualistic logic.” Given the historical fact that qigong as a whole was under the national suppression, Ownby argues it is correct to say the preceding period of liberalization and the qigong boom in China were unusual, but the crackdown on Falun Gong was not particularly controversial because there was increasing tension between many qigong schools with the Chinese authorities. As he writes: “Sooner or later the qigong boom would have run afoul of the Chinese state, and it may well be that Li Hongzhi and Falun Gong were simply the unlucky first victims” (2005:208). Furthermore, Ownby uses the Bible story of David and Goliath to comment on the battle between the Chinese state and Falun Gong. In his words:

As for who was right and who was wrong, Li Hongzhi put his practitioners in danger through his unwise decision to challenge Chinese authorities in late April 1999, and should be held responsible. At the same time, the Chinese state grossly exaggerated the danger Falun Gong represented. Falun Gong was not and is not a “cult” on the order of Aum Shinri kyō or the Solar Temple, and nothing that I have learned about Falun Gong over years of research would lead me to believe that the imprisonment, torture, and death of a single practitioner has been justified. I wish that Falun Gong practitioners and Chinese authorities had been able to read this volume prior to April 1999. Li Hongzhi might have known better than to take on Goliath, and Chinese authorities might have realized that their campaign against David was not worth the effort in terms of time, money, and above all lives. To some extent, it is China’s blindness to its own religious

history which permitted the qigong boom and its aftermath, the brutal campaign against Falun Gong (Ownby 2008b:164-165).

Yuezhi Zhao (2003) also focuses on the ideological and social context. She argues that the emergence of Falun Gong in 1992 and the crackdown on Falun Gong, in contrast to Ownby's argument, were not a coincidence. The rise of Falun Gong in China should be analyzed alongside the collapse of the state socialist health-care system in 1992. The collapse resulted in unaffordable medication for a large percentage of the population. In the early 1990s, after Deng Xiaoping's economic reform policy was challenged by socialism, Deng "called for an end to debates about the political and social meaning of the economic reforms, and urged the entire population to plunge into the sea of commercialism and engage in the pursuit of material wealth and national power" (2003:211). Falun Gong, in contrast to economic consumption, "insisted on the search for meaning and called for a radical transcendence of materialism in both the mundane and philosophical senses" (ibid). By focusing on self-cultivation and individual moral salvation, Falun Gong has attracted people who believe practicing Falun Gong as an apolitical way to address their unfolding struggles during the social transformation in China. Viewed in this perspective, Zhao argues that Falun Gong practitioners have established a "resistance identity;" an identity that "resists prevailing pursuits of wealth, power, scientific rationality, and indeed, the entire value system associated with the project modernization" (ibid). Since Falun Gong offers an alternative meaning of life, Zhao states the popularity of the Falun Gong movement can thus be viewed as a reflection of "the deep and widespread ideological and identity crises that followed the 1989 suppression of an elite-led prodemocracy movement" (ibid).

While the scholars above provide historical, social, and ideological references to help explain the crackdown on Falun Gong, others probe the CCP's somewhat sensitive political relationship with religions in contemporary China. In China, the state only recognizes five official religions—Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism—and any sect or practice outside of this category remains “unlawful,” and is denied legal protection under Chinese law (Ching 2006). For this reason, Ching argues that “Falun Gong was careful not to make itself into a religion. In China, it had no temple, no official headquarters, no formal rituals, and it exacted no fees from its followers. Its gatherings were always in public” (2006:43) to point out Falun Gong did not want to be recognized as a religious group. However, in her view, “whether it claims to be a religion or not, Falun Gong obviously has religious features” (2006:53). Ching's argument highlights the connection between the heated debates as to whether or not Falun Gong is a religion with the Chinese political arena.

Ronald Keith and Zhiqiu Lin (2007, 2009) use Falun Gong as an example to illustrate their analysis of China's criminal justice system. From a legal perspective, Keith and Lin point out that China's legal system makes a politically determined distinction between legitimate religion and heretical cults “to deal with the use of ‘religion’ to carry out ‘counterrevolutionary activities’ so as to avoid contradiction with positive reform policy that sought to protect so-called ‘normal’ religious activity” (2009:235). Keith and Lin (2009) remark that it is not “illegal” for the CCP to refuse Falun Gong as a “religion,” nor is it illegal to punish the followers for their participation in an “illegal cult” organization. Keith and Lin (2007) also suggest that China faces a national health crisis, and it becomes even more politically sensitive after the ongoing

campaign to suppress the Falun Gong. This view is echoed when Chen (2003) insists that the rise and fall of qigong healing should be viewed within the larger political and economic context of China's rising market economy.

As noted, Chen argues that the practice of qigong goes beyond physical exercises. "It was a new way that offered a coherent means to structure daily life amid concerns about reform and corruption. Qigong and other self-healing practices restored a sense of moral codes and breathing room in everyday life" (Chen 2003:187). Chen points out that the rapid growing social issues, such as, the ongoing demands of materialism and consumption, the problem with poverty and unequal access to health care, present a challenge to the Chinese state on how to retain social order and control under market liberalism. To quote Chen (2003:185):

Two decades ago, there were few private markets, restaurants, toy stores, or beauty salons in most urban areas. Now, public and private spaces have been refashioned to meet the needs of a population with different material desires and consumption. With visible changes that extend well into rural regions, new forms of consumption continue to deepen existing inequalities. The shifts in everyday life are intricately linked to a changing state bureaucracy that is also adapting to social changes.

In this regard, Chen argues that the root cause of the crackdown on Falun Gong is related to the government's opposition during China's reform era. Under this context, therefore, Falun Gong is not necessarily controversial, but rather predictable. Chen argues as follows:

It is not surprising that the unbridled forms of healing promoted by falungong directly confronted the regulatory nature of spiritual civilization promoted by the state. Notions of cultivation practiced in such groups were deeply unsettling to the very existence of the state bureaucracy, disrupting notions of order and progress toward material civilization (Chen 2003:186).

Palmer (2007:281-282) explores the question about Chinese socio-religious movements under a dictatorship. While it is easy to point out the Falun Gong's issue is a struggle for spiritual freedom against dictatorship, Palmer argues, that if the state is so repressive, why were the national qigong movement and Falun Gong promoted and protected by the state? In Palmer's view, we must understand qigong and Falun Gong within a broader social context. China has been going through a rapid social transformation and the evolution of modernity within a short period of time, which greatly influences many of these issues. As he explains (Palmer 2007:296-297):

[Qigong movement] was deeply involved in political networks; with ideological issues of scientism and modernism; with identity definition and nationalism; with the living traditions it was actively seeking to transform; and with the first stages of China's market reforms. The qigong movement is a prism through which many strands of the rapidly unfolding story of post-Mao Chinese society come together. It occurred in a society that was undergoing several successive shocks: the collapse of political utopianism, market by the end of the Cultural Revolution and then by the failure of the 1989 student democracy movement; the deployment of bureaucratic rationalisation and technocracy; the rediscovery of the nation's cultural heritage; the rush to Westernisation; finally the dismantling of the unit system and the rapid shift to a consumer society celebrating money and hedonistic pleasure—all within two decades.

Palmer further points out that while traditional culture became a commodity, "a resource to extract and package for the booming markets of tourism, leisure and health" (2007:302), consumers are concerned about China's business accountability. The entrepreneurial business practices of many qigong masters "triggered controversies over 'fakes', 'forgeries' and 'swindling'" (2007:302) that might damage the Chinese market. As a result, the political backing for commercialised qigong diminished.

It is within the similar context of the commodification and commercialization of qigong, that Adam Frank (2004:260-261) argues that under the encouragement of entrepreneurship from the Chinese government Li had already recognized Falun Gong's potential for overseas marketing before the crackdown on Falun Gong in 1999. Also, Li's writings reflect a specific knowledge of what might appeal to both a Chinese and a Euro-American New Age audience. Frank cites from Geremie Barmé who notes that among Chinese artists in the early 1990s, dissent became a fashionable, "packaged" commodity. To view Falun Gong in this context of dissent, Frank argues that Li, an intelligent entrepreneur has successfully turned government repression into a sales strategy. As Frank draws the example from Rupert Murdoch, CEO of News Corporation, the company which owns STAR TV in China: "Rupert Murdoch, for example, is widely seen in Western circles as colluding with the CCP at any cost, his public condemnation of Falun Gong transferred significant social capital to Li and actually helped Li to keep Falun Gong in the news, as did the support of international human rights activists and U.S. presidents" (2004:261).

As an anthropologist, Frank (2004) has conducted his ethnographic research with Falun Gong practitioners in the southern United States and Washington, D.C. during an interesting time—the Spring of 1999—around the time of the crackdown in China. Frank's arguments of Li's entrepreneurship might have been the case before, but it does not seem to apply to today's Falun Gong "business" since all of their materials (e.g. books and videos) are free to download on Falun Gong's websites, and any workshop or exercise session are free of charge. Nonetheless, from Frank's account we can examine overseas practitioners' shifting attitudes before and after the crackdown. Frank's

statements will be discussed in Chapter Three when we explore overseas Chinese Falun Gong practitioners' living experiences in Canada. First, it would be helpful to understand who the Falun Gong practitioners are, and their backgrounds in North America.

A Demographic Profile of Falun Gong

The transnational flows and the activist movement carried outside of China by overseas Falun Gong practitioners are important for a number of reasons. First, the practitioners in North America played a role in helping Li to settle in the United States in 1996 (Ownby 2008b). Second, practitioners continue to expand Falun Gong's practice and belief system around the world even after the Chinese state outlawed Falun Gong more than a decade ago. Third, a large number of overseas Falun Gong practitioners were professionals with considerable financial means (Tong 2009). They have set up international media, *The Epoch Times* (established in May 2000), the New Tang Dynasty television station (February 2002), Sound of Hope radio network (June 2003), and various websites¹⁸ to get their messages out (Ownby 2008b; Porter 2003). Fourth, they constantly perform peaceful demonstrations, participate in parades, issue a Falun Dafa proclamation in various cities, collect signatures for appeal letters, lobby Western governments and international NGOs and hand out information in public to promote their causes (Porter 2003).

The number of oversea Falun Gong practitioners is hard to document. Ownby (2008a, 2008b) has noted (and my ethnographic research has confirmed it) that one difficulty in gathering the number of practitioners is the lack of an organization. Local groups post their practice sites on Falun Gong websites, but do not attempt to keep up

¹⁸ See, for example, <http://www.flghrwg.net/>, <http://www.grandtrial.org/English/>, and <http://www.fofg.org/>

with how many practitioners attend. It is difficult to identify exactly how many Falun Gong practitioners are living in Ottawa, since Falun Gong is not an “organization” and there is no documentation to record “membership.” According to Tong (2002a:641-642), Falun Gong’s loose organizational structure was a result of the political tension.

After Li left China in 1995, within two years the Falun Gong high-ranking leaders in China made a formal statement declaring that the Falun Dafa Research Society no longer existed. After they disbanded the central organization, they further abolished the names of main stations and chiefs, and then instructed practitioners to practice among themselves, or learn from books and video. It was necessary for Falun Gong to adopt survival strategies after sensing troubles with the state. As Tong puts it (2002a:638):

Politically, it is in the interests of the regime to demonstrate that the *falun gong* was well organized, to make the point that its many protest rallies were not spontaneous acts of its practitioners, but premeditated protests orchestrated by its leaders to challenge regime authority and disrupt social order. The more organized the *falun gong* could be shown to be, then the more justified the regime’s repression in the name of social order was.

Consequently, the organizational structure of Falun Gong has become decentralized; it is much looser with greater local autonomy as practitioners from each city tend to organize their activities. It is this decentralization which is the cause for present day Falun Gong’s minimal organizational structure. At the same time, there are also difficulties in identifying practitioners since they can learn from books and video at home. Most likely, not every practitioner goes to a practice site nor do they always join Falun Gong events. Thus, it is only reasonable to say that researchers who conduct fieldwork with overseas Falun Gong practitioners can only estimate the numbers.

Kavan (2008) has conducted fieldwork research among the Chinese Falun Gong practitioners in New Zealand. In Kavan's approximation there were 100 Chinese Falun Gong practitioners in New Zealand when her fieldwork was conducted several years ago. Frank's article (2002) does not reveal the total number of practitioners he met during his fieldwork. On one occasion, Frank mentions there were some 500 practitioners attending a Falun Gong event in Washington, D.C. in July 1999. Porter (2003) suggests that approximately 10,000 practitioners in the United States and 4,000 in Canada are reasonable numbers. Ownby (2008b) estimates the overseas Chinese Falun Gong practitioners probably number in the hundreds of thousands worldwide. In Ottawa, usually between twenty-five to thirty-five people show up regularly at the weekly Sunday practice and study sessions. I first estimated there were 50~60 Falun Gong practitioners. During the interviews three informants told me there should be around 100 regular practitioners. It is quite possible since I do not recognize all of their faces at the Sunday sessions and some of the practitioners I met only at the interviews.

It is significant that scholars' research reveals that a large percentage of practitioners are very well educated. According to Frank (2002), of the 50 people he interviewed, roughly 90% of them have a university degree with a background in science and technology. Ownby also finds most of the Chinese practitioners in North America have been educated in the hard sciences. Ownby (2005, 2007, 2008a, 2008b) has probably conducted the most comprehensive fieldwork (1999 to 2003) among overseas Falun Gong practitioners in Eastern Canada and Northeastern United States. His articles and the book have offered the richest detailed accounts on overseas Falun Gong practitioners. Ownby's ethnographic data in Toronto, Montréal and Boston (2008b:134-

138) suggests that most of the practitioners are relatively young and in general are financially well-off and well-educated. For example, the average age in Montréal is 41.88; 40.75 for the Toronto survey; and 39.47 for the Boston survey. Chinese practitioners who attended a conference in Toronto and who responded to Ownby's survey said that 41.7% of them had completed bachelor's degrees, 18.2% had M.A.'s and 7.3% had Ph.D.'s, 9.6% people reported household incomes higher than \$100,000 Canadian dollars, 3.6% people make between \$80,000 and \$100,000, 12.7% between \$60,000 and \$80,000, and 18.7% people reported household incomes between \$40,000 and \$60,000. In addition, the Western to Chinese practitioners' ratio is about 1 to 9. About three out of five Chinese practitioners joined Falun Gong after moving to North America. The overall gender ratio is three women to two men. More than 90% of Chinese practitioners began practicing Falun Gong between the years 1995 and 1999.

My ethnographic data in Ottawa is quite consistent with Ownby's. The Chinese to non-Chinese practitioners' ratio is about 9 to 2, and the gender ratio is about 3 females to 2 males. Based on the guiding assumption that people who have lived in China and Canada may have better understanding about immigration experience, I only interviewed first generation Chinese. Among the ten interviewees, five were females and five were males. The average age is 47 years old. Of the ten interviewees, two of them had completed bachelor's degrees, five had M.A.'s and four of them hold Ph.D.'s degrees. Most of them have received their highest education in a western country. Nine out of ten started practicing Falun Gong between the years 1994 and 1998. Eight interviewees moved to Canada before the crackdown on Falun Gong in July 1999.

Demographically speaking, the majority of Chinese Falun Gong practitioners in North America are young professionals who are well-educated and financially well-off. Evidence suggests Falun Gong appealed to people from diverse backgrounds throughout China, including peasants, factory workers, military personnel, university professors and students, Communist Party members and government officials (Frank 2004; Ownby 2008b). In contrast to the different demographics, Ownby points out that the “Chinese who came to North America met the very tough demands of immigration authorities” (2008b:136). I also find the immigration policy in Canada can explain the profile (I make no claim to the case in the United States). As noted in the introductory section, the growing number of well-educated Chinese immigrants in Canada is the result of China’s rising supply of university graduates and Canada’s increasing demand for skilled immigrants (Li 2010). Since the points based system was introduced in 1967, a large number of young, well-educated and skillful Chinese applicants fit the criteria. To say Falun Gong only attracts well-educated people in Canada might be inaccurate. Instead, the immigration policy is selecting types of Chinese immigrants that can enter Canada.

Falun Gong’s Credibility

Contrasting Falun Gong’s sources and Chinese official accounts, Tong argues that the sources provided by both parties are problematic. He posits that a “selective presentation and source bias are likely to be present in the adversarial polemics that characterize both regime and Falungong discourse” (2009:126). Although Tong does not provide numbers of victims since it is difficult to document, he appears to find Falun Gong’s sources more verifiable. As he puts it (Tong 2009:128):

[T]he publication of such persistent abusive, often brutal behaviour by named individuals with their official title, place, and time of torture in the Falungong

Web site for more than six years, apparently without official sanction, as well as the substantial year-to-year increase in the number of unnatural deaths of Falungong practitioners in custody and the lack of well-publicized documents reaffirming the official policies, also suggests the regime's lack of will to cease and desist such behaviour, and absence of official determination to put an end to such collateral damage .

Tong suggests one view, while Ownby holds another.

Although Ownby (2008b:199) may agree with Tong's argument that Falun Gong's accounts of the violence are more credible than the Chinese state's denial of Falun Gong's claims, he argues Falun Gong is not totally transparent either (2008b:226). For example, during years of fieldwork research, Ownby had learned little about the upper ranking system of Falun Gong organization in North America, and the financing of the Falun Gong-affiliated newspaper. The *Epoch Times* is widely published in 17 languages in 33 countries¹⁹ which usually require considerable financial backing and worldwide organization.²⁰ The walls that Ownby has faced during his research make it difficult for him to believe that Falun Gong's organizational structures are as "loose" as they would have outsiders believe. He states that, "To my knowledge, no newspaper has ever met a deadline by relying on decentralized local practitioners" (2008b:vii). Ownby also finds that much research is heavily biased, which makes it difficult to have a clear picture of what is happening within Falun Gong. As an example, he references the Matas-Kilgour report.

David Matas and David Kilgour are two well-known Canadian human rights activists. Matas is a lawyer and Kilgour was a former Member of Parliament and Cabinet

¹⁹ See <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/about-us.html>

²⁰ In three cities I have been to, Toronto, Ottawa and New York, the *Epoch Times* are distributed for free in both English and Chinese versions.

Minister. In May 2006, John Jaw from the Coalition to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong in China (CIPFG)²¹ wrote a letter to Matas and Kilgour. Jaw asked them to investigate the allegations of mass organ harvesting from unwilling, living Falun Gong prisoners in China, and leaving their investigation methods in their own hands. The group offered to pay for all expenses. Matas and Kilgour volunteered to do the investigation, but Chinese authorities refused to admit them to China. Based on available evidence and the combination of factors, such as, interviews with the ex-wife of a surgeon who had removed corneas from approximately 2,000 anaesthetized Falun Gong prisoners in Shenyang City during the two year period, and conversations with two volunteer Mandarin-speaking investigators who called hospitals in China to inquire about organs, Matas and Kilgour supported the allegations. They write (2009:16):

Our conclusion is that there has been and continues today to be large-scale organ seizures from unwilling Falun Gong practitioners. We have concluded that the government of China and its agencies in numerous parts of the country, in particular hospitals but also detention centres and “people’s courts”, since 1999 have put to death a large but unknown number of Falun Gong prisoners of conscience. Their vital organs, including kidneys, livers, corneas and hearts, were seized involuntarily for sale at high prices, sometimes to foreigners, who normally face long waits for voluntary donations, of such organs in their home countries.

Chinese authorities denied the organ harvesting accusation (Ownby 2008b), and Ownby shared in their skepticism of the allegation. Ownby argues that the Matas-Kilgour report, like most of the human rights NGOs (e.g. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International), relies heavily on materials provided by the Falun Gong practitioners, rather than researching from every angle (2008b:225-226). Ownby’s argument points to

²¹ CIPFG is a Washington-based Falun Gong advocacy group (Ownby 2008b).

one of the difficulties which Falun Gong continues to struggle with. Besides all the charges against Falun Gong as discussed previously, one of the tensions that arise in the Falun Gong controversy has been between the Chinese regime accusing overseas Falun Gong's affiliation with Western forces to subvert China, and Falun Gong asserting that their anti-persecution campaign is not a political movement.

Critics of Falun Gong, such as Rahn (2002) and Kavan (2008), argue that much of the information about Falun Gong in the Western media misleads the public. As noted, Rahn points out that although the anti-Falun Gong campaign might be seen as ruthless and unnecessary in the West, the Chinese government's response toward the Falun Gong is part of a cultural paradigm, which has been a feature of Chinese history. Rahn further points out that Falun Gong's demonstrations in China go beyond the demands of justice; instead, they are driven by political ambition (Rahn 2002:51):

[The Chinese state] believes the group is led by a charismatic leader who "hood-winked" millions of Chinese into following him and is now using them for his own political ends. It believes the Falun Gong has joined anti-China forces in the West to bring down the Chinese Communist Party. Having banned the group, it claims it is now resisting anti-China forces that want to destabilize its society, and helping to re-educate Falun Gong followers back into normal lives.

Falun Gong may have developed a publicly acceptable role in the West as a human rights movement, but Rahn argues the dangerous and violent side of the Falun Gong²² has been disregarded. Hence Rahn advocates that we must view "Falun Gong" beyond the human rights issues in China in order to truly understand its nature. Furthermore, Rahn suggests much of the miscommunication between the Western public and the Chinese public because it is difficult for outsiders to understand the strategy adopted by the Chinese state.

²² As noted earlier, Rahn is referring to the self-immolation incident in Tiananmen Square in January 2001.

Kavan agrees with much of Rahn's arguments. Kavan argues that the sources from Chinese government are generally more accurate than the Western media, because the latter rely heavily on Falun Gong sources, rather than official government documents. Kavan compares Western and Chinese presses to suggest the contradictory accounts between these two media is a result of reports produced by Western media and NGOs (e.g. Amnesty International) which are not independently verified and which rely mainly on Falun Gong's materials. For instance, according to the *Xinhua News Agency*, the leader of Falun Gong, Li Hongzhi, threatened public safety because Falun Gong is responsible for over 1,000 deaths in China; furthermore, many Falun Gong members infiltrated the Communist party to overthrow the government (Kavan 2008:10). *Xinhua* further claims that the Western media have inaccurately portrayed Falun Gong as a harmless mediation group, which makes China look ridiculous (ibid). Kavan supports the reports produced by the *Xinhua* when she argues Li's writings carry political ambition. As she writes (Kavan 2008:10):

Even so, there is no evidence that in the early stages Li planned to topple the Communist party. To be sure, members today are political. They yearn for the demise of the party—parading down streets singing “no more Communist party, no more torture”, surrounding Chinese embassies silently chanting “all evil be destroyed” and triumphantly share any news suggesting that the Communist party is collapsing. However, their opposition to the Party seems to be the result of being persecuted, rather than the cause of the ban.

Kavan is aware that “Xinhua is China's principal news agency, controlled by the state-run Department of Propaganda” (2008:5) and “there is more diversity in the Western reports and on the critical issue of human rights abuses, the Western reports are more reliable” (2008:15). Yet, she still rejects the credibility of the Western press. In Kavan's

view, the Western press have been kind to the Falun Gong issues because the Western press “have sometimes supported their religious and political agendas” (2008:1). The so-called “Falun Gong’s struggle” appeals as an ideal of “amelioration of suffering and freedom of religion” which “has produced a story that the West wants to believe” (Kavan 2008:16). In summary, Kavan suggests both Falun Gong and the Chinese regime suppress dissenting voices.

Zhao, on the other hand, argues that the reason Falun Gong appeals to the West is because “it addresses universal concerns, asking humanity to take a ‘fresh look’ at itself and re-examine its dominant value system” (2003:211). In Zhao’s analysis, after Falun Gong was outlawed in China, the overseas practitioners turned to media resources (i.e. television, press, websites and books) as a tool to highlight the Chinese state’s ongoing persecution. Zhao refers to the Falun Gong’s anti-persecution campaign as Falun Gong’s media activism. By using media as one of their activist approaches, Zhao argues Falun Gong, like the CCP, has adapted a similar discursive strategy which “is also not free of the symbolic violence typical of the Chinese official discourse” (2003:221). In terms of the Falun Gong’s attitude toward dissenting opinions, Zhao might agree with Kavan. To quote Zhao: “Just as the Party does not allow negative critiques of its doctrines and is averse to ideological pluralism, Falun Gong does not abide any refutation of its claims and negative comments. Thus, although the Party and Falun Gong oppose each other, they have in common their ‘unitary value orientation’” (2003:215). At the same time, Zhao states that “it is unlikely that foreign government and the global media will go beyond sympathetic promulgations and the occasional media story to seriously pressure the Chinese government to legitimate Falun Gong inside China” (2003:222). Zhao

indicates the only way we can settle the controversy of Falun Gong's media representation is through the freedom of the press. Since the "truth" of Falun Gong can never be told under China's tightly controlled media environment, the point is to understand that the implications of Falun Gong are profound, both inside and outside China.

Other scholars offer different explanations for the assertion of Falun Gong's "political motivations." For example, Ching argues that when Falun Gong practitioners seek justice and gain international support by pressuring and embarrassing China, the CCP reinforces the belief that the Falun Gong's activism is politically intentioned. As she explains: "In itself, Falun Gong is not political. However, under persecution, members have developed an astonishing political consciousness. To protect their own group survival, they have become a political force to be reckoned with" (Ching 2006:52). Ching's statement echoes Ownby when he suggests (2008b:221):

Falun Gong had no choice but to become political once the campaign of suppression began, even though this was not its choice and even though it tried very hard to frame the issues otherwise, as most practitioners consider themselves Chinese patriots and did not see their practice of Falun Gong as a challenge to Communist Party leadership

Based on his understanding of the Chinese culture and language, Ownby explains that the term "political" in Chinese "refers narrowly to relations with party authorities and not more broadly to the use of power in the public arena" (2008b:170). Hence, Ownby suggests that it is possible that the Chinese practitioners who were involved in demonstrations in China did not regard their activism as political. In today's Falun Gong, Ownby notes that some individual practitioners might remain apolitical; however, he argues that many of the activities carried out by the overseas Falun Gong practitioners are

clearly political. For example, Ownby points out that the Falun Gong-affiliated newspaper, the *Epoch Times*, often lays emphasis on issues of human rights in their use of such attention seeking words as “concentration camp” or “genocide” (2008b:226). While he understands that “Falun Gong is desperate to get its cause back into the news and that the lesson it has learned over the years is that sensationalism works” (ibid), but when the Falun Gong’s claims lack evidence, third-party observers doubt all materials and data. To quote Ownby (2008b:226):

This is unfortunate, for even if concentration camps do not exist, the persecution of Falun Gong has been real, and even if the group has stretched the truth to try to win media points, this does not make it a cult. It is too easy to dismiss all Falun Gong claims of suffering and victimization on the basis of their leaders’ desperate attempts to call attention to the plight of their fellow practitioners.

In other words, this hurts not only Falun Gong’s objectivity, but also its creditability. Falun Gong’s credibility remains controversial and is open to debate. Based on the above accounts there seems to be no question that, even though Falun Gong practitioners might have exaggerated the effectiveness of the practices or the numbers of victims, it is still important to remember that the persecution of the Falun Gong practitioners in China is real.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter provides background on Falun Gong in its political and social context surrounding the 1999 crackdown. The historical section presents the processes of which Falun Gong was a part of the national “qigong boom” movement in post-Mao China (Ownby 2008b). This chapter also demonstrates that Falun Gong’s current controversial issues are linked to the anti-Falun Gong campaign in China. The rationality behind why the Chinese government mobilized vast resources to suppress Falun Gong is

controversial and open to debate. It might be premature to anticipate a publicly accepted argument. I tend to agree with scholars who place Falun Gong in a historical and social context, and who argue that China, as a rising modern nation-state faces two challenges since entering the global market economy: 1) a national health crisis (Keith and Lin 2007; Zhao 2003), and 2) how to retain order and control under market liberalism (Chen 2003; Palmer 2007). Within this context we can therefore understand that the implication of Falun Gong's controversies is, in fact, a struggle during the progress toward material civilization. As Palmer (2007) and Zhao (2003) remind us, the timeline of the rapid economic and social change in China's reform era has only been less than thirty years.

This thesis does not claim to elucidate the root causes behind the suppression against Falun Gong. Rather, it points out that the issue is not whether Falun Gong has a political agenda, but instead questions what has happened to them that caused the overseas Falun Gong practitioners to passionately fight against the Chinese government. As Kavan (2008) and Zhao (2003) point out, the Chinese government manages information that may be unfavourable to its authority, Falun Gong has also adapted a similar discursive strategy. But on the other hand, how far does Falun Gong have to go to prove that the persecution in China is real? Has Falun Gong picked the wrong battle to fight? I think one of the best ways to precede answering these questions is through identifying their diasporic activism. Given that Falun Gong's anti-Communist activism is mostly taking place outside of China, it is necessary to examine overseas Falun Gong practitioners. The next two chapters analyze how their identities are lived and experienced in diaspora spaces.

CHAPTER TWO

Situating Falun Gong in Diaspora Studies

It has been said that the contemporary world is in “the age of migration” (Ma 2003). Academic interests have increasingly focused on the issues of migration, as well as transnational and international studies. As Laurence J.C. Ma (2003:5-6) points out, the old conceptions of migration were incapable of capturing the complexities of the rapidly changing nature of global migration. New analytical frameworks are needed to understand the emerging themes. James Clifford argues there is a growing academic interest in the concept of diaspora. As he writes, “Diasporic language appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing minority discourse. Transnational connections break the binary relation of ‘minority’ communities with ‘majority’ societies—a dependency that structures projects of both assimilation and resistance” (1997a:255). In the last two decades, theorizations of diaspora have emerged in area studies, ethnic studies, and cultural studies; however, the concept of diaspora remains a major site of contestation (Brazier and Mannur 2003).

This chapter has two purposes. The first is to demonstrate how Falun Gong relates to major debates in diaspora studies, and the second is to raise some questions about the current mainstream discourses of diaspora studies, particularly in the context of Chinese migration. I first provide a literature review of diaspora studies and Chinese diaspora studies in order to discuss what scholars mean by “diaspora” and “Chinese diaspora.” Furthermore, how is the theory of diaspora connected to concepts of identity, ethnicity, transnationalism and hybridity? I then offer an analysis on how Falun Gong fits into diaspora studies. In the later part of this chapter I will first incorporate some interview data into the discussion of Chinese diaspora’ relations to Chinese modernity, I will then

compare and contrast three theoretical frameworks—transnationalism, diaspora and hybridity—to show their differences in methods and frameworks. The aim is to unpack and locate Falun Gong's relationship with its homeland and the host country in order to point out that the conceptual challenge for this thesis project is to find a balance between homeland-diaspora-hostland relations.

Review of Diaspora Studies

For many years, the phenomenon of diaspora exclusively dealt with the scattering of Jewish populations. Etymologically “diaspora” comes from the Greek term *diasperien*; ‘dia’ means across, and ‘sperien’ refers to sow or scatter seeds (Brazier and Mannur 2003:1). It was first used in the Septuagint when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek. Diaspora initially described exiled Jewish people. Later it was used as a term for the Black African diaspora, beginning in the sixteenth century when a large number of Africans were enslaved and placed in the “New World” (ibid). When the word “Diaspora” is capitalized and in singular, it refers specifically to the Jewish diaspora. When uncapitalized the word “diaspora” usually describes a population of migration from one country—normally their country of origin—to a hostland or multiple hostlands (Cohen 1997; Safran 2005).

Diaspora, as a conceptual framework, has grown significantly in the last two decades, but there is no simple agreement on what diaspora is or does. Generally speaking, there is a theoretical divide between two groups: Scholars (e.g. William Safran and Robin Cohen) who use diaspora as a descriptive tool, *versus* scholars (e.g. James Clifford, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy) who apply diaspora as a process (Kallra et al. 2005). The first group is more interested in the categorization of what constitutes a diaspora

community; the latter finds diaspora as a way to critique the dominant categories of solid analysis and their underlying essentialism (Kalra et al. 2005).

The often-cited definition was developed by political scientist William Safran. He regards the Jewish diaspora as a paradigmatic “ideal type” to lay out six principles to define diaspora communities (1991:83-84):

(1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original ‘center’ to two or more ‘peripheral’ or foreign regions; (2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; (3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; (4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; (5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and (6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.

Safran’s definition came under criticism due to the overemphasis on the (real or imagined) linkages between the homeland and the diaspora community, which leads to an oversimplification of the entangled relationship that actually exists between a social formation and its cultural productions (Mishra 2006).

As an example, historian and cultural theorist critic James Clifford (1997a) in his theorization of traveling and cultural formation, presents a strong argument which proposes a de-centered and de-territorialized view of diaspora movement and subjectivity. To quote Clifford, “the transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland—at least not to the degree that

Safran implies” (1997a:306). What is suggestive here is that Safran’s definition underplays the various interactions between the host society and the diaspora groups. In other words, Clifford sees the solo emphasis on the homeland as underestimating the fluidity of diaspora formations.

At the same time, Clifford agrees with Safran that there is a need for more theorization of diaspora. He argues that the term “diaspora” has too often been used to describe any population from one nation scattered into many different countries. As he states (1997a:250):

Diasporic populations do not come from elsewhere in the same way that “immigrants” do. In assimilationist national ideologies such as those of the United States, immigrants may experience loss and nostalgia, but only en route to a whole new home in a new place. Such narratives are designed to integrate immigrants, not people in diasporas.

This statement implies a diaspora group is constituted by complex social and political formations. The way Clifford approaches the theorization of diaspora puts greater emphasis on consciousness and experience. He argues as follows: “the term *diaspora* is a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement” (1997a:252, emphasis in original). As Clifford points out, diaspora should be characterized and differentiated from the other social and spatial “disposition” migrants groups who were defined previously in the field of migration studies.

In his newer article, Safran (2005:36) recognizes that when a diaspora community adjusts to the host societies, it become a center of cultural creation. He also recognizes that to theorize the Jewish diaspora as an “ideal type” might not be the ideal. As he writes: “In my article (1991), I used the term ‘ideal type’ (in the Weberian sense). I now hesitate

to use it, since it has been misconstrued by some as implying an 'ideal' situation" (2005:56). Therefore, Safran has revised his previous definition (2005:37):

1. They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original 'center' to two or more 'peripheral' or foreign regions.
2. They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements, and, often enough, sufferings.
3. Their relationship with the dominant element of society in the hostland is complicated and often uneasy. They believe that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it.
4. They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—if and when conditions are appropriate.
5. They continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity, which reach across political boundaries, are importantly defined in terms of the existence of such a relationship. That relationship may include a collective commitment to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its independence, safety, and prosperity. The absence of such a relationship makes it difficult to speak of transnationalism.
6. They wish to survive as a distinct community—in most instances as a minority—by maintaining and transmitting a cultural and/or religious heritage derived from their ancestral home and the symbols based on it. In so doing, they adapt to hostland conditions and experiences to become themselves centers of cultural creation and elaboration.
7. Their cultural, religious, economic, and/or political relationships with the homeland are reflected in a significant way in their communal institutions.

Although the definition is still based on the Jewish diaspora as the paradigmatic one, Safran argues several diaspora communities such as the Albanian, Cambodian, Croatian, Cuban, Iranian, Kurdish, Rohingya, Serbian, Tibetan, Vietnamese, and West Indian do share most of the features with the Jewish diaspora. It is interesting to note that Safran (2005:38-39) agrees that no diaspora, including the Jewish one, completely fits his definition.

Aside from Clifford's influential de-centered and de-territorialized contribution to diaspora studies, scholars in this field often reference two postcolonial theorists, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. In his important essay, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (2003) Hall studies the African Caribbean diaspora (including his own) to explain how the concepts of identity and diaspora are evidently interrelated. Hall indicates there are at least two ways of thinking about identity. First, it is defined "in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves,' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (2003:234). Hall argues that even though such a conception of identity played a critical role in all postcolonial struggles, it is grounded in "the act of imaginative rediscovery" (2003:235) to believe that there is an "identity" waiting to be found.

Identity in the first sense is understood as a collective, shared history among individuals that are considered to be stable. Hall then offers a second way of thinking about identity to challenge the meaning and representation of "one people" are not a fixed essence of the past. As he states: "Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture" (2003:236). To explain the process of identity formation, Hall argues that rather than thinking of "identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (2003:234). In this regard, identity is understood as an unstable process which can never be consistent; it always depends on socio-political situations.

Based on the second understanding of identity, and drawing upon Derrida's notion of *différance*, Hall proceeds to theorize the different heritages of the Caribbean islands' complex relations to the "First World" that are constitutive of Caribbean diaspora identities. Hall's understanding of diaspora identity is based on the concepts of *différance* and hybridity. To quote him (Hall 2003:244, emphasis in original):

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

In Hall's view, Caribbean diaspora identities can appropriate dominant cultural symbols as useful strategies for resistance. If diaspora can be seen as a social form, a diasporic space can be a site of cultural creativity as well as conflict. In this approach, Hall opens up the arguments of cultural construction and identity fluidity to question diasporas' ethnic essentialism.

In a related vein, Paul Gilroy (2003) draws on Hall's insights, Clifford's work on traveling culture, and William E. B. Du Bois's concept of a double consciousness to investigate the complex dynamics of slavery and colonization amongst Black Creole communities across the Atlantic. Gilroy looks at "black nationalism" in a more refined political language to point out that the term "black" is by no means a singular ethno-national category. Rather, it is a political category referencing the common diaspora experience, and the marginalization by the Western modernity. Diaspora identity has become a useful tool in the politics of resistance, even among black communities with very different histories and traditions. What is even more interesting is that when Gilroy refers to a "double consciousness," he is arguing the black hybridity experience, in turn,

became a counter-culture which has influenced Western modernity. For example, slavery, as understood by Gilroy, was fundamental to modernity (2003:74-75). In other words, the Black Atlantic, as an imagined community, is the basis of black politics which is also embedded within Western modernity.

Another influential scholar, sociologist Robin Cohen (2008:1-14), has summarized four phases for diaspora studies. First, in the 1960s and 1970s diaspora studies extended from the classical use of the term, *Diaspora* (singular and capitalized), and became more commonly applied to the dispersion of Africans, Armenians, and the Irish. Second, in the 1980s and onwards, the term *diaspora*, as Safran (1991) notably argued, was deployed as a “metaphoric designation” to describe different categories of people—“expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities tout court” (Cohen 2008:1). Third, under the influences of postmodernism and social constructionist critiques in the mid-1990s, the ideas of “homeland” and “ethnic/religious community” have become de-territorialized. However, Cohen argues that “such critiques of diaspora might have been to regard them as inappropriate or misplaced as they reflected political agenda that had little to do with the history and meaning of the term, or the phenomena it sought to, and continues to, explain” (2008:11). Therefore in the last phase, Cohen calls on every scholar in current diaspora studies “to find some dialogical possibilities between diaspora scholars and their social constructionist critics” (2008:11), accordingly they can work toward a consolidation phase.

Still, some fundamental features of diaspora need to be understood. Cohen refers to Rogers Brubaker who suggests there are “three core elements that remain widely

understood to be constitutive of diaspora” (Cohen 2008:12). These three core elements present as follows: “There are *dispersion* (either traumatically or voluntarily and generally across state borders); *homeland orientation* (whether to a real or imagined homeland) and *boundary maintenance* (the processes whereby group solidarity is mobilized and retained, even accepting that there are counter processes of boundary erosion)” (ibid, emphasis in original).

While some scholars argue Safran’s definition, based on the Jewish prototype, is too constricted, in the view of others (e.g. Clifford 1997a), the term diaspora has taken on too many meanings. Founder and editor of the journal, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Khachig Tölölyan argues the term diaspora “now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community” (1991:1). Diasporas, understood by Tölölyan, “are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (1991:5). This argument places diaspora in direct relation to nation-states. Tölölyan also establishes a close linkage between diaspora and ethnicity. As he argues, “All diasporic communities are also ethnic communities, but not all ethnic communities are diasporic; to put it another way, when strictly defined, diasporas are a specific subset of ethnic minorities” (2007:649). This statement suggests that the analysis of diaspora must include the concept of ethnicity.

Critics observe that the looser usage of “diaspora” has created more confusion with other terms and terrains such as transnationalism and hybridity (Mishra 2006). This dispute is precisely obtained by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. As they argue:

[Diaspora] is often used as a catch-all phrase to speak of and for all movements, however privileged, and for all dislocations, even symbolic ones... [W]e caution,

therefore, against the uncritical, unreflexive application of the term “diaspora” to any and all contexts of global displacement and movement; some forms of travel are tourism, and every attempt to mark movements as necessarily disenfranchising become imperialist gestures (Brazier and Mannur 2003:3).

In the introductory chapter to their edited volume, *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (2003), Brazier and Mannur suggest that traditionally, ‘diaspora’ was conceptualized as an “exile or nostalgic dislocation from homeland” (2003:4). Now the concept itself has offered critical spaces for critics to reflect on “the discordant movements of modernity” (2003:3). While they accept the concept of hybridity opens up the room to discuss diasporans’ double (or even plural) experiences (both Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy are included in this volume), these critics explicitly differentiate diaspora from transnationalism.

For anthropologist Aihwa Ong, diaspora is too vague a concept; she prefers to focus on transnational relations (Mishra 2006). In the words of Ong (1999:13):

The unified moralism attached to subaltern subjects now also clings to diasporan ones, who are invariably assumed to be members of oppressed classes and therefore constitutionally opposed to capitalism and state power. Furthermore, because of the exclusive focus on texts, narratives, and subjectivities, we are often left wondering what are the particular local-global structural articulations that materially and symbolically shape these dynamics of victimhood and ferment.

Ong’s well-known book, *Flexible Citizenship: the Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999) is one of the most cited works in the study of transnationalism where she explores a wide-ranging experience of displacement and migration across different temporality and spatiality that are grouped under the name, “Chinese diaspora.” Ong’s examination of the Chinese diaspora takes issues with existing theory of postmodern/poststructuralist identity formation, and uses the term ‘flexible citizenship’ to describe the cultural logics

of highly mobile Chinese immigrants (usually elite and entrepreneur) who are being constantly shaped and negotiated by the nation-state, the market and the family. As a result of their multi-territorial flexibility, the identity is de-centered (Chun 2001). This is how Ong defines it: “I use the term *flexible citizenship* to refer especially to the strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals seeking to both circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work and family relocation” (1999:112, emphasis in original). One of Ong’s key arguments is that “new Asian values,” which rooted in transnational capitalism, have become the driving force of the recent Chinese migration globally.

The three often-cited theoretical approaches in diaspora studies—hybridity, diaspora and transnationalism—have been developed and contested in the discussion of global migration phenomena. Inevitably, the growing studies of diaspora communities will always put current theories in contest. Interestingly as Cohen (2008:14-15) observes, this is one of the reasons why the term “diaspora” has become so popular because it is highly contested.

Review of Chinese Diaspora Studies

In 1990, it was estimated that there were just over 30 million Chinese outside China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau; approximately 85 percent of them lived in Asia including countries like Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand (Skeldon 2003:54-55). The studies of Chinese global migration particularly in North America are relatively new but emerging rapidly (Ma 2003). According to Ma (2003), the history of Chinese international migration should be divided into two periods. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, predominantly Chinese villagers from Guangdong and Fujian

provinces left China to North America for labouring work. After the 1960s, as economies prosper in Asia, most Chinese migrants who arrive in North America are well-educated professionals and sojourning businesspeople. As noted in the preceding chapters, when the points system was introduced for selecting immigrants in 1967, a large number of wealthy entrepreneurs, well-educated and skillful Chinese applicants were qualified to be admitted into Canada. During the 1960s and the 1970s, the Chinese applicants were mostly from Hong Kong and Taiwan. After China adopted the economic reform policy in the late 1970s, China has become the top five source countries. Between 1998 and 2007, Canada received on average 33,443 immigrants from China annually (Li 2010). The growth of Chinese immigrants and the integration of the Asian economy into the global market, have led to the rising literature on Chinese diaspora in the past two decades (Ma 2003).

As there is no simple definition of diaspora, there is also no single theory that can encompass the diverse experiences of the overseas Chinese. In contrast to the general diaspora studies, I find there are at least two themes that emerge in Chinese diaspora studies. First, scholars in this field, particularly those who study Chinese diaspora under the context of minority discourse, are less concerned with the descriptions of what constitute a “Chinese diaspora,” but instead are more attentive in the social interaction between overseas Chinese communities and their host societies. Simply put, they are interested to find out if a Chinese migration group maintains their “Chineseness” in a host country. Second, there is a theoretical tension between scholars who “celebrate” the Chinese diasporas’ engagement in the recent rise of Chinese capitalism and modernity (e.g. Aihwa Ong and Tu Wei-ming), *versus* those who criticize the ideological

dominance of “Chineseness” or “Chinese values” that draw a solid boundary between “China” and “the rest” which leaves less room for the discussions of ethnic ambiguity and cultural fluidity (e.g. Ien Ang, Allen Chun and Rey Chow). Scholars from the latter group typically argue against the underlying cultural hegemony and the marginalization of minority—be it ethnic, geographical or religious.

The view that the Chinese diaspora is trade-based was articulated by Robin Cohen and later by Aihwa Ong. Cohen (1997:83-104) classified the overseas Chinese under the category of “trade diaspora” to compare and contrast with the Jewish diaspora. According to Cohen, the Jewish diaspora developed a form of “pariah-capitalism” to provide “the basis for complete trust inside the group and an acute need to create some security against the threatening outsider” (1997:101). Likewise, trade diaspora, such as Chinese, Lebanese and Indians, seems to create an advantageous commercial and entrepreneurship within the ethnic groups and those in the homeland—which is the Chinese transnational capitalism that Ong was referring to in her work.

Cohen (1997:88-89) has also highlighted an interesting role played by the Chinese diaspora in modern Chinese history. Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925) is the Father of the Nation (國父) in both China and Taiwan (as the founder of the Chinese Nationalist Party). He was educated in Hawaii and Hong Kong as a medical doctor and later became a leader for a rebellion group who fought against the Qing Dynasty. As an exile, Sun recognized the potential resources with the large number of overseas Chinese. He, therefore, promoted the revolutionary messages of the homeland to mobilize the Chinese diaspora. The support of the diaspora led to the success of the 1911 revolution, the key event that allowed Sun and his followers to declare China a modern nation-state. Sun was elected the

first President of the Republic of China. However, after the Chinese Revolution in 1949, the geopolitical rift between the People's Republic of China (led by the Chinese Communist Party) and the Republic of China (led by the Chinese Nationalist Party), and a high number of second and third generations living overseas were more assimilated within their host societies. Ultimately, the Chinese diaspora became detached from China (Cohen 1997:89). What is important to note here, is that as Sun recognized that the contribution from overseas Chinese was so significant that he once said, “华侨是革命之母” [Overseas Chinese is the mother of revolution] (Mansingh 1991). This historical example stands as proof that the influence from overseas Chinese to China cannot be underestimated (Mansingh 1991). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why scholars are continuously interested in the idea of how to mobilize the Chinese diaspora.

As a result of the increasing economic flows and social bonds between China and its diaspora, the concept “Greater China” has become quite popular. The term “Greater China” was developed to explain the common bonds shared by all ethnic Chinese. Geographically speaking, it usually refers to the cultural and economic ties among the relevant territories (i.e. China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan), while others are more interested in the political aspect of it (Harding 1993). Political scientist Harry Harding identifies three main themes in the discourse of Greater China. First, as mentioned, the rise of the transnational Chinese economy has intensified the complexities of economic, cultural and political bonds between China and its diaspora. Second, the prospect of a reunification of a “completed Chinese state” in which Taiwan is next in line to be unified with China after Hong Kong was in 1997 and Macau in 1999. The third discourse refers to the emergence of a global Chinese culture. There are ideological problems with this

term. Allan Chun probes the question, “what constitutes ‘Greater’ and why” (2007:32), Greater China is a controversial concept (Harding 1993). However, Tu Wei-ming (1991) argues otherwise.

Professor of Chinese history and philosophy at Harvard University, Tu is well-known for his advocating for the Confucian tradition and his concept of “Cultural China” which was influenced by the idea of Greater China (Ang 1998). Tu points out that “being Chinese” outside China is reinforced by a powerful Chinese historical consciousness and “the symbol of the ‘children of the Yellow Emperor’ is constantly reenacted in Chinese literature and evokes feelings of ethnic pride” (1991:3). For Tu, the main theme for “Chinese culture” is “culture” in contrast with “Cultural China” which highlights the rising political and economic influences from the People’s Republic of China. He then links the idea of Cultural China with three “symbolic universes” (1991:12-13). The first one consists of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Macao as these societies are predominantly populated by ethnic Chinese. The second one means the Chinese populations outside of Greater China (i.e. China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan). The third symbolic universes refers to blood ties (by birth or marriage) with China and any individual who is interested in Chinese culture and brings their conceptions of China to their own communities. Tu asserts that “the periphery,” Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, as well as overseas Chinese communities in other parts of the world, will play an increasingly important role in shaping the development of the “core” (i.e. China). The Chinese diaspora, claimed by Tu, will take a lead role in the process of Chinese modernization. For this reason, Tu calls for a broad definition of Chineseness that can

transcend ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious boundaries in a newly conceived cultural space that encompasses all of the overseas Chinese population.

Like Greater China, critics argue Cultural China is actually an Orientalism (Said 1978). As Ong writes: "The irony of a professor [referring to Tu] trained in the orientalist tradition of American East Asian Studies teaching Chinese subjects how to be Confucian seemed to escape notice as Singaporeans were persuaded that being Chinese was inseparable from being 'Confucian'" (1999:69). Cultural critic, Rey Chow, also points out that Tu's conceptions of Chineseness and Chinese identity are loose and vague:

As China emerges as a world power by the end of the twentieth century, these volatile realities of ethnicity will inevitably have to become a central part of modern Chinese studies. It is in this context that we should rethink the use of the label "Chinese," which occurs as frequently as its status remains untheorized and taken for granted (Chow 1998:7-8).

Chow (1993) criticizes that the whole problem with the seemingly unambiguous, unquestionable idea of "China," "Chinese," or "Chineseness" has become a privileged theme in Chinese Studies, which often consists of the "masked hegemony" in the first world. Chow coins the term "diaspora" to refer to a space occupied by the "intellectuals of colour" (notably in North America) who, as understood by Chow, play the key role in constructing the knowledge production of the "East" in the "West." To quote Chow:

The space of "third world" intellectuals in diaspora is a space that is removed from the "ground" of earlier struggles that were still tied to the "native land." Physical alienation, however, can mean precisely the intensification and aestheticization of the values of "minority" positions that had developed in the earlier struggles and that have now, in "third world" intellectuals' actual circumstances in the West, become defunct. The unself-reflexive sponsorship of "third world" culture, including "third world" women's culture, becomes a mask

that conceals the hegemony of these intellectuals over those who are stuck at home (1993:118).

Chow is critically against what she calls “the lures of diaspora” (1993:99), as she argues that the growing production of Chinese Studies in the “First World” is a discursive paradigm of Orientalism. For example, when “minority discourse” became a hot topic in cultural studies in the West, some overseas Chinese intellectuals “are now choosing to speak and write from a ‘minor’ position. While enjoying the privilege of living in the West, they cling, in their discourse, to the status of the neglected ‘other’” (Chow 1993:109). Chow then argues that the themes produced by diaspora intellectuals are hegemonic over those scholars “at home” where the oppressed voices still remain unheard.

Chow suggests that contemporary Chinese Studies are explored by intellectuals by moving outside “Chinese” territory, geographical and cultural and at the same time moving into the global space “in which discursive plurality inevitably modifies and defines specific cultural identity rather than the other way around” (1993:95). The point is not to debate who is more “authentic,” as Chow notes the limits of Edward Said’s Orientalism. The “productivity of white guilt” (1993:10-14), as she argues, has rendered Western scholars and non-Western scholars who proclaim dedication to “vindicating the subalterns” to be silent about Third World struggles. Instead, scholars (particularly Chinese intellectuals) must use their privileged academic authority “as truthfully and as tactically as they can—not merely to speak as exotic minors, but to fight the crippling effects of Western imperialism and Chinese paternalism at once” (1993:114). Chow discusses her own position, as a scholar who has linked to both Hong Kong and the United States, to encourage other scholars in similar situations to speak up for minorities’

suffering and victimization. Simply put, Chow challenges the authority of hegemonic institutions to essentialize culture and identity.

Ien Ang, a professor of cultural studies, echoes Chow's appeal as she criticizes the idea of Cultural China as an "obsession with China" (1998:231). As a Chinese-Indonesian growing up in the Netherlands in the 1960s who does not speak Chinese, Ang's Asian background had no real significance to her identity because it was necessary to assimilate as a "survival strategy" in order to fit into the society and to allow for the possibility of upward mobility. Despite her perfect Dutch and her assimilated lifestyle, Ang reveals that people were never satisfied when she told them she was from Holland. Also, she is expected to speak and act Chinese (whether by Westerners or Asians). Ang refers to this collision as a cultural-political implication that "can never be a perfect fit between fixed identity label and hybrid personal experience" (2001:11). By challenging the meaning of Chineseness, Ang argues that people should have the capability to choose and define ethnicity and culture as selectively as they wish. She states: "If I am inescapably Chinese by *descent*, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*. When and how is a matter of politics" (1998:242, emphasis in original). In raising this statement, Ang is also noting a complex relation between identity and larger political forces. This point is exemplified in Allen Chun's works.

Anthropologist Allen Chun (1996), in his earlier article, examines the linkage between Chineseness and the notions of nation-states. For Chun, there is no singular materiality of what constitutes "Chineseness." As he argues (1996:112-113):

The Chinese may attribute their ethnic unity to the Han, but, in fact, the peoples consolidated by the Han empire were certainly not ethnically homogeneous. Likewise, the term *chung-kuo* (middle kingdom), as well as the concurrent notion

of Chineseness as *hua-hsia* [华夏, an ancient name for China and Chinese culture], predates the Chinese empire, but the centripetal unity emanating from this civilizing center was something that in predynastic times actually united different polities occupied by diverse peoples who had inherently different languages, beliefs, and practices—in short, different ethnic cultures.

Chun hints above that ethnicity and culture are often used as sources for the construction of identity; however, these three concepts are quite distinct. Identity, as understood by Chun, “is essentially a tie that binds people to communities through webs of power and meaning” (1996:125). Here, Chun is referring to Michel Foucault’s concept of power and discourse to point out that the formation of identity involves “the authority of statements about shared values embodied in language, ethnicity, and custom, as well as shared myths encoded as genres of knowledge, such as history, ideology, and beliefs” (1996:115). Nonetheless, the point is not to dispute whether or not Chinese identity is a construct, but rather to ask the important questions (as I have also borrowed Foucault’s terms) why have certain formations of “Chineseness” become more important than the others? How are they related to other discourses?

Later Chun (2007) argues that the increasing cultural and economic flows between Chinese-speaking societies and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) are driven by the capitalist development in China. Contrary to Tu’s idea of Cultural China and his claims that “the periphery” (i.e. Chinese diaspora) plays an important role in shaping the “core” (i.e. China), the center of gravity has moved into the PRC itself. This new economic system is also behind the politics of “Sinocentric” as Chun provides the example of “Hong Kong’s rich capitalists who ended up being the biggest promoters of reunification with the motherland [i.e. China] and toeing the official line to suppress

democracy” (2007:35). In other words, Chun argues this market-driven logic is tied up in political ideology.

Chun’s argument will be discussed further in this chapter within the context of Falun Gong. But first, it is important to look at my ethnographic data from first-person interviews. I will then offer an analysis on how the concepts of transnationalism, diaspora and hybridity intertwine with the stories told by some overseas Chinese Falun Gong practitioners.

Transnationalism or Diaspora?

Although Ong’s study has contributed greatly to the understanding of recent (after 1960s) overseas Chinese communities, to confine Falun Gong within Ong’s concept of Chinese transnationalism may be problematic. First of all, the indentured labourers and sojourning businesspeople in America and Southeast Asia, and the newly emerged affluent upper-middle class entrepreneurs and professionals described by Ong are all motivated by, and benefited from, economics. It is correct to say that a large number of Chinese Falun Gong practitioners immigrate to Canada based on their education, training or other skills, but their emigration choice is not always motivated by financial reasons. For example, out of the ten practitioners I interviewed, eight of them had to leave China because of political or social struggles. Seven interviewees made the decision to emigrate even before the crackdown on Falun Gong in 1999. One interviewee, Mark, was in prison for three and half year for being a Falun Gong practitioner in China. In 2002 the Parliament of Canada passed a motion which supported the rescue of Falun Gong practitioners who have families in Canada. With the help provided by Amnesty International, Mark came to Canada in 2004. Six interviewees (Nancy, Lily, Sophie,

Maria, Nathan and Richard) were admitted as skilled worker immigrants and only two of them (Maria and Richard) said they left China to improve their lives and their children's lives in Canada. The remaining three interviewees (Amy, John and Carlos), came to Canada as international students, and later were given a Canadian citizenship under a special provision of the Immigration Act.

As an example of how Canada reacted to the Tiananmen Square massacre, on June 30 1989, Ottawa announced that Chinese students who wished to remain in Canada could have their visas extended for one year and the priority was to be given to those students and their families who wished to file for permanent resident status as a special humanitarian case. By April 1990, there were 8,703 Chinese applicants for permanent residence in Canada, 7,666 of them (including 2,374 who applied for refugee status) were accepted (Gecelovsky and Keenleyside 1995). John, Carlos and Amy were granted citizenship under these circumstances. Prior to June 4 of 1989, they were graduate students attending different Canadian universities. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square incident, they were too disappointed with the Chinese government to return to their homeland. As Carlos said during my interview, "I decided to stay in Canada because of the Tiananmen Square massacre, which had completely changed my view of the Chinese communists."

Two interviewees, Nancy and Nathan, were international students in two western countries and they returned to China after their graduation. Not long after their return, they were distraught with their country; they decided to emigrate to Canada. Another interviewee, Lily, was also a graduate student in Canada. She had a job offer before her

graduation, hence she decided to stay in Canada. She described her stay in Canada to me in the following way:

Even though I had a really good job in China, and everybody said how lucky I was to have that job, I did not feel any attachment to it. I like how the interrelationships work here, people are generally respecting of each other, and you have the freedom to do whatever you want as long as you take care of yourself. Here, having freedom is so easy, like it is in the air.

In short, Lily was talking about her newly found freedom in Canada.

Second, unlike the Chinese economic immigrants as described by Ong, who have the ability to move across transnational boundaries and take advantage of the global capitalist market, the Chinese Falun Gong practitioners are not particularly mobile, at least not in the territory of China. They know too well what would happen to them if they went back to China. Sophie's and Richard's stories reveal this point.

Sophie and her husband are a well-educated middle-class couple who lived in an urban city in China. They first encountered Falun Gong in 1994, but were not practitioners until years later because, as a young and busy family with a newborn, they had much bigger concerns in their lives. They worried about public security and food safety issues. For example, Sophie was frightened to give her baby milk. She said, "I could just tell there was something wrong with the milk powder."²³ Also, the pollution problem had worsened in their hometown. Sophie and her husband decided to apply for immigration to Canada. In 1999, a few months before the crackdown on Falun Gong (July 1999), their application was accepted. They moved to Canada and began a new life.

²³ The milk scandal in China had become a serious national crisis and later affected those on an international scale (Barboza 2008). More than 50,000 children have been hospitalized and six died in China alone (Liu et al. 2010).

After they settled in Ottawa, Sophie had become a regular practitioner of Falun Gong. Her husband disengaged himself from it because he worried that his affiliation with Falun Gong would prevent him from returning to China. Sophie told me that her husband found his suspicions to be justified while on a trip to China a few years ago. Some officials from the Ministry of State Security (国家安全局) interrogated him and took his computer away because of his past Falun Gong links. Fortunately, without too much trouble, he returned to Canada safely.

Unfortunately, not everyone escapes these situations as easily as Sophie's husband. Richard and his wife began to practice Falun Gong in 1995 and moved to Canada in 1997 as skilled worker immigrants. A few years later, Richard was hired by an American company to work on a foreign investment project in one of the urban cities in China. On one night, a dozen agents from the Ministry of State Security broke into Richard's hotel room. The intruders first deactivated all communication devices, then they searched the entire room. Richard, his wife and their infant were not allowed to move. After two and half hours, the agents took Richard's personal and business belongings (e.g. his passport, credit cards, electronic devices and FLG books) and forced Richard to leave with them. In the next 24 hours, more than ten people took turns interrogating Richard non-stop. He was not allowed to contact anyone or go to sleep. The agents claimed that they knew much about the Falun Gong practitioners in Canada. At first Richard did not believe them, but as more detailed information was revealed, Richard found it hard to ignore their claims.

Richard was released the next night. Richard found out later that agents were interrogating his wife in the hotel room during his abduction. The agents threatened them

not to tell anyone what had happened as they were under 24-hours surveillance. A few days later, Richard got a chance to contact the Canadian embassy by using a phone at work. Knowing Richard and his family were restricted from leaving the city, a Consulate of Canada promised to pay them a visit soon. When the Security Bureau found out about the meeting, they kidnapped Richard again from work and held him captive until the Canadian embassy intervened on his behalf. A few days later, Richard and his family returned to Canada safely.

To bring the point back to the theoretical analysis of transnationalism in the context of Chinese diaspora, I now return to Chun's argument where he criticizes that Tu (1991) and Ong (1999) put too much emphasis on a market-oriented framework. In his article, "Diasporas of Mind, Or Why There Ain't No Black Atlantic in Cultural China" (2001), Chun examines the Chinese diasporic identity when he compares and contrasts between Aihwa Ong's *flexible citizenship*, Tu Wei-ming's *Cultural China* and Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, as these three approaches have engendered fresh and thought-provoking theoretical debates on identity formation and cultural boundaries that aim to transcend the borders of the nation-states.

As noted above, in his important work, *Black Atlantic*, Gilroy argues that the common black diaspora experiences (i.e. racism and the marginalization in Western modernity) have transcended the cultural, historical, political, and geographic boundaries, and have become a useful tool in the politics of resistance. In a similar fashion, Tu argues that ethnic Chinese people around the world should build "sentiments of togetherness" as he sees an opportunity in the rise of "neo-Confucian" values and economies (Chun 2001:103). Therefore, *Cultural China* calls for Chinese diaspora to offer new

corresponding models of Chineseness that can transcend national boundaries. Using the concept of “flexible citizenship” to argue that multi-territorial identities are de-centered, Ong suggests that the end product of Chinese transnationalism is an alternative Chinese modernity (Chun 2001). Unlike Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* which overlaps with, and is embedded within, Western modernity, in Ong’s view, the characteristic of a de-centered modernity in the Chinese context can therefore be developed without any references to Orientalism and Western modernity (ibid). According to Chun, Ong claimed to offer the flexibility for Chinese diaspora identities to maintain their autonomy (away from Western hegemony).

In Chun’s criticism, although Tu claimed to speak for the diversity of changing Chinese identities, Chun argues that it is in fact Sino-centric. As he writes, “I think it is easy enough to show how such an imagined community is really limited to a small group of diasporic intellectuals in the ivory tower and is really far removed from the diverse kinds of geopolitical shifts that have been influencing Chinese in different social settings” (2001:105). Chun (2001:98) argues that Ong’s transnationalism has overlooked the fact that it is the rise of the global capitalism that has enabled such Chinese transnationalists to flourish.

Echoing Chun’s arguments, I have presented examples from some Chinese Falun Gong practitioners to suggest that not every Chinese person is benefiting from the Chinese transnational capitalism. Contrary to Gilroy, who views modernity as a bottom-up process, which has contributed to the rise of the *Black Atlantic*, Tu and Ong locate the Chinese transnational capitalism as a top-down process in the rise of Chinese modernity (Chun 2001). The overemphasis on (and perhaps celebrating too early?) the emergence of

Chinese capital system, they appear to favor materialism by viewing Chinese transnational capitalism as only carrying positive effects that might transcend the ongoing tensions of multicultural practices and multiple identities. However, the Falun Gong's case suggests that not every Chinese person is celebrating the rise of Chinese modernity if it does not mean having greater autonomy. Here, I find it ironic in giving that Ong advocates the autonomy of Chinese identities. Instead, I am in sympathy with Chow (1993) when she argues that the point is not about West versus East, but rather attending to the oppressed and persecution everywhere.

It is evident that although both approaches, diaspora and transnationalism, are closely related, there are differences in their methods and frameworks, and the connotations should not be confused (Brazier and Mannur 2003). As argued by Safran:

Diaspora refers specifically to the movement—forced or voluntary—of people from one or more nation-states to another. Not all transnational relations are diasporic. Transnationalism speaks to larger, more impersonal forces—specifically, those of globalization and global capitalism. [...]. Conversely, not all diasporas have continuing transnational relations (Safran 2005:50).

Safran has made the point clear. Given that Falun Gong's migration experience cannot, and certainly should not, be reduced to the global capitalist flow, I suggest the analytical framework for the Chinese Falun Gong immigrants cannot be understood solely under the concept of transnationalism.

Hybridity or Diaspora?

As discussed earlier, the increasing rhetoric of hybridity is associated with the emergence of postcolonial theorists such as Stuart Hall (2003). Likewise, Ien Ang (2001) advocates that a Chinese diasporic identity should be viewed under the theoretical framework of hybridity (not to be confused with the early sense of miscegenation), that

identity is positioned in the political choices of ethnicity and culture. In her article, "Together-in-Difference: Beyond Diaspora, into Hybridity" (2003), as suggested by the title, Ang argues diaspora essentializes and naturalizes Chinese identity (e.g. Chinese people must know how to speak Chinese) because of its overemphasis on the internal homogenous and unity within the group. Consequently, ethnic essentialism has led to the fixed dichotomy between Chinese and non-Chinese. For Ang, hybridity offers a possibility to bridge differences because, in an era of globalization, we no longer have the secure capacity to draw the line between "East" versus "West," 'Chinese' versus "non-Chinese," or "us" versus "them" (Ang 2003).

Critics have argued that hybridity oversimplified the new influx of global identity because it failed to attest to the deeper logic of accumulation and consumption (Kalra et al. 2005; Mishra 2006). For example, sociologist Floya Anthias (2001) argues against hybridity because it avoids dealing with struggles based on existing cultural hierarchies and hegemonic practices. In this regard, hybridity has followed the same culturalist essentialism trap as the earlier notion of ethnic essentialism.

Anthias (2002) is known for her concept of "translocational positionality" where she examines British-born youths with Asian and Cypriot backgrounds to address the importance of location and position for investigating collective identification as well as an understanding of the broader social relations that are constituted during the process of identity formation. I am impressed with Anthias's translocational positionality; however, I find it difficult to apply to the Falun Gong diasporic situations for a couple of reasons. First, the official ban of Falun Gong occurred recently (twelve years ago), hence, the majority of overseas practitioners are first generation immigrants. Their "location" and

“position” are not as ambiguous relatively compared to the second or third generation migration. Second, according to my interview data, ten Chinese Falun Gong practitioners all unquestionably agreed that they had made the right migration choice—forcibly or voluntarily—as they often express appreciation about their newly found freedom in Canada. That being said, it does not mean that the Chinese Falun Gong immigrants have never experienced discrimination in Canada (most of their pressures come from non-Falun Gong Chinese communities, of which will be discussed in the next chapter). What is important to note is that the Chinese Falun Gong immigrants are more concerned with their freedom of belief (especially after the crackdown in China) than the trans-ethnic aspect of their lives in Canada. For these reasons, I will point out the limits of hybridity from a different approach.

I agree hybridity can weaken “Chineseness” or “Westernness” essentialism, but I want to take this discussion in another direction by pointing out that overseas Chinese have always been hybrid. Even, I think, Ang would agree with this point. This is how Ang defines hybridity (2003:147, emphasis in original):

What has been less emphasized however is that pervasive hybridity also has radical ramifications for how we think of different “peoples.” Indeed, as hybridization consists of exchanges, crossings, and mutual entanglements, it necessarily implies a softening of the boundaries between “peoples”: the encounters *between* them are as constitutive of who they are as the proceedings *within*. [...]. These encounters are not always harmonious or conciliatory; often they are extremely violent, as the history of colonialism has amply shown. But even in the most oppressive situations, different “peoples” who are thrown into intercultural confrontation with each other, whether by force or by will, have to negotiate their differences if they are to avoid war. The result, after many centuries of contact history, is a profoundly hybridized world where boundaries have become utterly porous, even though they are artificially maintained.

From the points that Ang makes, my understanding is that, in fact every society is hybrid as no culture is isolated today. If hybridity has developed through the encounter of different cultures, then hybridity is talking about globalization—a movement that, whether by force or by will, brings “peoples” to encounter differences. In the case of overseas Chinese, their encounter of and reaction to “globalization” is different.²⁴ There are some overseas Chinese whose engagement with globalization has transcended national boundaries and become what Ong has termed “flexible citizenship” (Ong 1999). For many overseas Chinese Falun Gong practitioners, they may benefit from multi-territorial flexibility to practice their belief freely, but at the same time the Falun Gong struggle in China has not been transcended. Overseas practitioners thus view their belief as having not yet been free.

Given the fact that Falun Gong’s anti-Chinese Communist activism is a significant part of overseas practitioners’ migration experience, hybridity may help us to understand Falun Gong’s living situation in the host country (Canada), but it does not explain what they see as the cause of their suffering, which is rooted in the homeland (China). Argued by Braziel and Mannur (2003:3):

Theorizations of diaspora need not, and should not, be divorced from historical and cultural specificity. Diasporic traversals question the rigidities of identity itself—religious, ethnic, gendered, national; yet this diasporic movement marks not a postmodern turn from history, but a nomadic turn in which the very parameters of specific historical moments are embodied and—as diaspora itself suggests—are scattered and regrouped into new points of becoming.

²⁴ This point is made by anthropologist Anna Tsing (2003). Her research investigates multiple parties who were engaged in the environmental social movement in Indonesia. As Tsing’s study demonstrates, different parties had encountered globalizing processes differently and each party also had very different experiences from the impacts of globalization that vary greatly from one group to another.

Hybridity may offer the solution to overcome the dichotomy between West and East by de-essentialized and de-naturalized identity (Ang 2003), but it jumps too quickly from one “identity” to another which leaves us less time to discuss Falun Gong’s connection to history and homeland—the source of being different.²⁵

The framework of diaspora, however, has its own limits. For instance, diaspora does not transcend differences of race, class, gender and sexuality (Brazier and Mannur 2003). But in my view, the concept of diaspora focuses on migration displacement which allows scholars to challenge the notion of belonging, and to show that these social constructions of communities are always mediated by issues of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and citizenship.

Another criticism of diaspora, as discussed, usually addresses Safran’s overemphasis on the (real or imagined) linkages between the homeland and the diaspora community. As noted, Clifford (1997a), Hall (2003) and Gilroy (2003) define the concept of diaspora identity in the sense of “becoming” rather than “originating” to point out that homeland is less relevant to the reality of diaspora communities. I agree with their arguments that during the process of diasporas’ adjustment to host societies, it becomes a center of identity creation. To place the Chinese Falun Gong diaspora completely inside this framework, however, may be difficult for a number of reasons. First, one can debate whether the memory of “homeland” is real or imagined, but the crackdown on Falun Gong in China is very real and it is continuously impacting their lives in Canada (more

²⁵ A good example can be found in Brian Axel’s work on the Sikh diaspora. Axel (2001) argues that most studies of diasporas put too much emphasis on the analyses of the nation-states, in which either diasporas reside or their places of origin. Axel’s criticism is drawing from the argument that “homeland” has been constituted as a “reality” for which the overseas Sikhs are willing to live and die. Viewed in this perspective, Axel argues one cannot understand the formations of Sikh diaspora without understanding the complex Sikh historical interrelations with the colonizers. The challenge, Axel writes, “is not to recuperate the older essentialisms of diaspora studies or of work on overseas Indians, but rather to interrogate precisely how colonialism, the nation-state, and the diaspora are related (2001:22).

examples will be presented in Chapter Three). Second, the Chinese Falun Gong diaspora might have difficulty accepting the overemphasis on local orientation because a large part of their diasporic formation is tied up with their ongoing struggles with the Chinese state.

Having raised these difficulties I simply want to point out the conceptual challenge for the Falun Gong diaspora is to find a balance between homeland-diaspora-hostland relations since both places cannot be dismissed for them. In other words, the Falun Gong's case may be able to combine the social constructionist view of a de-essentializing identity and the actual transnational connections between a homeland and a host country (Cohen 2008). The conceptual challenge for this thesis project, then, should be asking if there cannot be transnationalism without nations, if there cannot be hybridity without ethnicity, can there be diaspora without neither nation nor ethnicity?

Concluding Remakes

This chapter demonstrates the critical aspect of Chinese diaspora to point out that overseas Chinese populations are not a homogenous group. By drawing from several scholars, who have been working in the field of Chinese diaspora (Ang 1998, 2001, 2003; Chow 1993, 1998; Chun 2001, 2007; Ong 1999; Tu 1991), and from my interview data, we understand the distinction between different types of immigrant situations has to be made. For example, the term "flexible citizenship" (Ong 1999) is used to describe affluent Chinese business families who are able to make an impact on the Chinese transnational market from the overseas Chinese, such as Falun Gong practitioners who are less concerned with the economic power, but rather struggling with their own freedom and mobility. This chapter also analyzed the differences between three theoretical approaches of analyzing Chinese who live outside of China: transnationalism,

hybridity and diaspora. While transnationalism focuses on capital flows, both hybridity and diaspora are interested in cultural formation: diaspora pays more attention to migrants' ties with homelands, while hybridity puts emphasis on host societies. As a result of their different orientations, these three concepts carry different connotations. By challenging transnationalists' market-oriented framework, and hybridity's lack of a proper historical understanding of diasporic connection to the homeland, I favor diaspora because it lays emphasis on the theme of "becoming scattered" from a specific historical moment to a new process of becoming (Brazier and Mannur 2003). In other words, the concept of diaspora focuses on how a migration phenomenon is lived in the past and is experienced in the present

As noted in Chapter One, Adam Frank (2004) argues that the persecution of Falun Gong in China has made Falun Gong world-famous. I would like to point out that it is also the suppression which has driven the Falun Gong practitioners to promote themselves tirelessly in the public. Since a large part of Falun Gong's diasporic formation is tied up with their ongoing struggles with the Chinese state and it is influenced by the homeland-diaspora-hostland relations, the diaspora-state relation in this case should be seen as a triangle relationship between homeland-diaspora-hostland. The following chapter will more fully explore the concept of diaspora by examining the narratives of connectivity of the Chinese Falun Gong practitioners in Ottawa.

CHAPTER THREE

Falun Gong's Anti-Communist Sentiments

Since Falun Gong was banned by the Chinese state in 1999, overseas practitioners re-established its headquarters in New York in an attempt to keep their practices and beliefs alive. Not only have they successfully reconstituted their organizations “in exile,” the anti-Chinese communist activities carried out by the overseas practitioners create fluid transnational networks to form an emerging diaspora.

This chapter has two purposes: it seeks to expand more fully the Falun Gong's anti-Chinese Communist campaign, and to answer my key research questions regarding the Chinese Falun Gong diaspora. First, I will examine overseas Falun Gong practitioners' narratives about their struggle from my interview data, which I call the *Falun Gong's anti-Communist narratives*. The first part presents a comparative analysis between my ethnographic data and other scholarly accounts (Ching 2006; Frank 2004; Keith and Lin 2007; Ownby 2008a, 2008b; Tong 2009; Zhao 2003) to examine if my data is compatible with theirs. These accounts may be suggestive to two Falun Gong's current diasporic situations. First, the scale of anti-Falun Gong campaign has not been reduced. Second, overseas Falun Gong practitioners' attitudes have evolved in response to the changing political climate. By pointing out these situations, it helps us to understand how the overseas practitioners' identity formation has been influenced by Falun Gong's discourses before we enter the theoretical discussion.

The latter part of this chapter is a continuation from the previous theoretical framework chapter where I will first discuss my ethnographic research findings, then I will synthesize the theorizations of diaspora developed by James Clifford (1997a), Robin Cohen (1997), Paul Gilroy (2003), Stuart Hall (2003) and William Safran (2005). Based

on their analytical definitions of diaspora I will then attempt to categorize Falun Gong diaspora into five themes followed by the conceptualization of the Falun Gong diaspora identity. The aim is to answer the key research questions, while raising some critical questions about existing diaspora theories.

The Aftermath of the 1999 Crackdown

As noted in Chapter One, the April 25th Zhongnanhai incident in 1999, in which 10,000~15,000 practitioners gathered outside of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) central headquarters compound in Beijing, was China's largest social action since the Tiananmen students protest of 1989 (Tong 2002b). This event is a crucial reminder to almost every Falun Gong practitioner, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. I often hear Falun Gong practitioners talk about “4.25 中南海上访事件” [the April 25th Zhongnanhai Appeal Incident]²⁶ to discuss their history. It is important to note that this incident has become one of the controversies in the debate over whether or not Falun Gong had engaged a political movement. As argued by several scholars (e.g. Ownby 2008b and Tong 2009), saying that this incident was politically orientated has allowed the Chinese state to execute the official crackdown on Falun Gong since July 22, 1999.

Falun Gong practitioners commonly show a concern about what happened on April 25, 1999, because they consider this incident as a huge misunderstanding; whereas the Chinese government claims that the massive demonstration posed a violent and political threat to Chinese society, the Falun Gong supporters say it was a peaceful meeting to request a legal and non-hostile environment for practicing Falun Gong in

²⁶ Although the term “appeal” is commonly used among the Chinese and English-speaking Falun Gong practitioners, it might not reflect the Chinese meaning of 上访 (*shang-fang*). The proper translation for appeal is 上诉 (*shang-su*). The literal meaning of 上访 (*shang-fang*) is “to visit higher authorities,” which in my opinion, is a much more polite way to describe the act of requesting.

China (Schechter 2001). Julia Ching (2006:49) points out that a few days after the official crackdown on July 22, a daily Chinese-language newspaper based in the USA and Canada, *World Journal* (世界日报) reported that the April 25th Zhongnanhai demonstration was actually a “set-up” by the Chinese government. According to the article, Secretary for Legal and Political Affairs, Luo Gan (the same person who organized the ‘610 Office’) had been investigating Falun Gong and wanted it banned since 1996, but could not find any legal reason. Luo had the police direct Falun Gong practitioners to Zhongnanhai in order to create a situation in which they could be charged. To my knowledge, this report has not been verified by any scholars. Meanwhile, Falun Gong’s sources have repeatedly made the same claim,²⁷ and overseas practitioners tend to believe this version of story.

In September 1999, shortly after the crackdown, David Ownby began his fieldwork among the Falun Gong practitioners in North America. He (2008a:110) suggests that between the year 1999 to 2000, Falun Gong diaspora practitioners used media resources to successfully convince Western governments to place pressure on Chinese authorities on the issues of human rights violations. These governments were sympathetic to their plight until January 2001, when five alleged Falun Gong practitioners set themselves on fire in Tiananmen Square; not only did this act highlight the public relations battle between the Chinese state and Falun Gong, it also supported the Chinese state’s claims that Falun Gong’s “harmful effects” threaten public safety.

²⁷ See, for example, the article published by *Clear Harmony Net* (2010), “The Truth About the April 25 Appeal—Deceptive Propaganda Twists Peaceful Protest into ‘Justification’ for Violent Repression” and available online at <http://www.clearharmony.net/articles/201004/52958p.html> (accessed August 27, 2011). *Clear Harmony* is the most important Falun Gong’s website (Ownby 2008b). Almost every practitioner mentioned to me that I should read this website during my fieldwork.

During my interviews, all informants believed that the five people were not Falun Gong practitioners. They strongly argued that the Falun Gong teachings clearly forbid violence and suicide. Ownby supports this claim as he writes, “there is no sanction for violence in Li Hongzhi’s writings or in Falun Gong practice, whether it be violence directed at someone else or at oneself” (2008b:216). Furthermore, the Chinese government’s accounts of the event (for details see Chapter One) lead interviewees to believe that the self-immolation was staged by the government. A practitioner said to me, “Even though the incident has hurt Falun Gong’s reputation, I feel really badly for the victims who were involved. There must be a very sad reason why did they agree to do such awful thing for the CCP.”

Another interviewee also made a comment about the incident. “If I wasn’t a Falun Gong practitioner I would believe what the government says about how horrible Falun Gong is. By staging this tragedy, the Chinese government has successfully portrayed Falun Gong practitioners as criminals, and they can therefore justify their persecution against Falun Gong.” What has been said here is somewhat consistent with Ownby’s argument, as he writes, “Although Falun Gong practitioners and media outside of China insisted that the event must have been staged because there is no sanction for violence in Li Hongzhi’s teachings, the incident marked a major public relations victory for PRC [People’s Republic of China] authorities” (2008a:110). Ownby also suggests whatever sympathy Falun Gong had gained previously, dissipated after this incident. He explains that, “After the self-immolation incident, however, Chinese within China increasingly came to see Falun Gong as dangerous and untrustworthy, and media outside of China slowly began to disengage as well” (Ownby 2008a:218).

According to my interview data, the self-immolation incident had the same effect of turning overseas Chinese against the Falun Gong practitioners. One interviewee described how she lost support from the Chinese-Canadian community. “In the beginning of the crackdown, my Chinese friends and colleagues expressed sympathy and showed support for Falun Gong. Some even said to me, ‘It’s just politics.’ But after they saw the news about the Tiananmen Square self-immolation incident, they stopped talking to me.”

Another interviewee also stated:

My parents had always supported me in my practice of Falun Gong until the self-immolation incident. My family and friends worried that one day I might have a mental breakdown just like the people who set themselves on fire. I firmly told them: These people were not Falun Gong practitioners! All we do is cultivating [practicing Falun Gong and studying Falun Dafa] to improve our health and moral systems.

Whether or not Falun Gong was responsible for the five burn victims, the self-immolation image was already attached to Falun Gong symbolically. As Ownby writes, “the label ‘cult,’ applied to Falun Gong by the Chinese authorities, has never really gone away” (2008b:229).

On one afternoon I met John for an interview. In the middle of the intense conversation about how the CCP lied to the Chinese people and destroyed the Chinese culture, out of curiosity, I asked him if the CCP can reform and evolve, becoming a more “ideal” ruling power—at least to stop the persecution of Falun Gong in China. He replied:

It was not like we knew all about the CCP’s strategies from the beginning. At first we had the same hope. We thought the [Chinese] government just misunderstood us because they were misinformed. That’s why we tried every way we could to explain that our intention has always been apolitical. It’s been more than ten years, the CCP hasn’t listen to us; instead, they keep framing us by fabricating evidence, and the suppression against us is only strengthened. How

can we still believe that the CCP can change? In fact, I don't really care about which party is in power as long as the government is doing good things for the Chinese people. But after learning so much about the CCP, I know for sure that the CCP will never be a good government for anyone or any nations. If the CCP can change, they are not CCP anymore.

John's statement indicates that the Chinese government has increased the forces to suppress Falun Gong. Eight out of ten interviewees also agreed with this point. Two scholarly examples can be found in Ownby (2008a) and Keith and Lin (2007). Ownby (2008a:111) notes that the Chinese regime has invested millions in a censorship and surveillance project (commonly known as the "Great Firewall") to keep China's rapidly growing cyber-world free of Falun Gong-related information. According to Keith and Lin, during the SARS crisis in 2003, the Chinese authorities claimed Falun Gong had violated human rights as they "brainwashed" members to reject medical treatments. Falun Gong was also "accused of conspiracy to spread SARS so as to cause political turmoil. Followers stood accused of trying to get into hospitals where they allegedly schemed to contract SARS for the political purpose of spreading the disease to the public" (Keith and Lin 2007:413). As a result of Falun Gong's "crime" of deliberately spreading infection to cause social instability, the practitioners were sentenced to severe punishment.

Ownby argues that the growing suppression against the Falun Gong has created tremendous fear and suspicion among practitioners in North America. In his words:

[D]espite my sympathy for the plight of Falun Gong practitioners, it became impossible to deliver any sort of nuanced message through Falun Gong media, or even to have meaningful conversations with many Falun Gong practitioners whose worldview had become increasingly dualistic. Many practitioners also became insistent and almost paranoid, adopting an "us against them" mentality which makes interaction with them unpleasant and unproductive, and which, unfortunately, confirms the suspicions of those who all along saw them as a cult.

This was rarely the case when I was doing fieldwork between 1999 and 2002. [...]. The evolution of practitioners' attitudes is explained of course by the PRC's campaign against Falun Gong... (Ownby 2008a:118).

Similarly, Frank (2004) discusses the shifting attitudes among practitioners in the United States. As noted in Chapter One, Frank's fieldwork research with overseas practitioners was conducted during the crackdown in July, 1999. When he first began his research with the Falun Gong, it was a relatively unknown group. By the time Frank reconnected with the practitioners in the summer of 1999, "the situation had changed dramatically" (2004:253), as he noticed practitioners' shifting attitudes before and after the crackdown. Frank notes that the practitioners have been more actively engaged in social activities and they have also become more suspicious toward people, even within the Falun Gong community. He states as follows (2004:256):

Group activities outside of practice took on even greater importance during this period, and practitioners in Washington enthusiastically participated in public outreach activities. At the same time, since it was difficult to tell who was a practitioner and who was working for the Chinese embassy, distrust ran high. [...]. In one case, an elderly Chinese American from the Bay Area freely criticized Jiang Zemin and Chinese communism in general. As he spoke into my tape recorder, two women hovered close by, staring anxiously, and eventually interrupted to ask him the purpose of our interview. He explained that I was an anthropologist doing research on Falun Gong, at which point they pulled him aside out of earshot. A few moments later he returned and requested that I surrender the tape, repeatedly asking, "We're still friends aren't we?" I handed him the tape.

According to my interview data, before the crackdown, practitioners could simply concentrate on the cultivation. Several Chinese Falun Gong practitioners had formed workshops throughout Ottawa's community centers and public libraries. As told by Lily:

When I became a regular practitioner [in 1998] I found I benefited so much from it. I wanted to share it with people. A colleague and I were running workshops at our workplace during lunch break and many people came to join us, Chinese and Westerners. Since the crackdown, the campaign against Falun Gong has been spreading wrong information to make us look bad. We had to spend more time responding to the persecution. Consequently, we have less time to introduce people to Falun Gong's cultivation system or to teach people the practice.

Sophie also remarked on this point:

Within three to four years after the persecution, not many Chinese people joined Falun Gong. I believe it has something to do with the CCP's hate propaganda. Since then, we've been spending most of our time fighting CCP's fabrication and propaganda against us. It's like when you pour dirt into a glass of clean water, it takes much more effort to purify it.

In these statements, both Lily and Sophie explain their transitional activities—not by their choices—but they had to shift the focus from the cultivation to the cause. When I was scheduling interviews with practitioners, I noticed that not only do they have full-time jobs and families, they are also busy with all kinds of Falun Gong-related activities. I asked some practitioners if they still have a chance to practice Falun Gong or to study Falun Dafa. They responded “You will find times if you really want to do it.”

Without research on non-Chinese practitioners, it is not evident whether it can be said Falun Gong could generate wider public interest if the crackdown did not take place. The above scholarly accounts and interview examples, nevertheless, do suggest that overseas practitioners' attitudes and actions have evolved in response to the changing political climate of the anti-Falun Gong campaign. These accounts also suggest that since the ban in July 1999, the scale of anti-Falun Gong operations in China has not been reduced. This may present as evidence to support James Tong's argument.

As noted in Chapter One, through the analysis of how the Chinese state operates

the anti-Falun Gong campaign, Tong argues that the systematically organized crackdown on Falun Gong reflects the Chinese regime's coercive capacity to punish dissent. To quote Tong (2009:225):

As the first major political campaign in the post-Mao era, the anti-Falungong campaign was a powerful show of force that testifies to the centrality of state monopoly of coercive and propaganda institutions and the efficacy of the sanctioning and monitoring capacity of the communist state. [...]. Contrary to postulations that the power of the Chinese Communist Party has declined, that its monitoring and sanctioning capacity is eroded by market reform, and that its collapse is probable, even imminent and certain, this study demonstrates that the regime does not lack the capacity to respond to political challenges, the will to utilize that capacity, and the ability to achieve intended results.

Tong argues further that even the Chinese government has been facing serious social challenges during the reform era. For example, "its household registration system fails in keeping peasants on their farms and youths in their domiciles, and as its neoauthoritarian system in the work place offers fewer carrots to coax and sticks to coerce than before" (2009:225-226). These social challenges have not weakened the Chinese state's central control and most likely, did not engender much impact on China's political arena.

In order to fight back against the CCP, Falun Gong practitioners continue to organize the anti-CCP campaign to spread information about the persecution. As noted, the activities are mostly performed outside China's soil, for example, lobbying Western governments and NGOs and protesting in front of Chinese embassies. During my fieldwork, practitioners also revealed that they often send software programs to China to help users to avoid internet censorship. According to Ownby (2008a:219), practitioners in China have successfully hacked into Chinese TV networks and state-controlled satellites to broadcast Falun Gong's versions of reality. Yuezhi Zhao's account (2003:209)

provides a detailed example. In 2002, at the birthplace of Falun Gong, Changchun municipal cable television network was hacked by Falun Gong practitioners. For nearly one hour, Falun Gong's side of the events was successfully broadcast into more than 300,000 households.

Noah Porter's studies (2003:207-219) elaborate more on Falun Gong in cyberspace. Falun Gong's websites were first established in 1995, after Li Hongzhi left China. Porter notes that the websites were not advanced, nor did they have many functions until after the 1999 crackdown. Within a short period of time, Falun Gong websites grew rapidly because global practitioners were keeping updates with "Falun-Gong-related news and articles, keeping in touch with other practitioners, and reaching out to non-practitioners" (Porter 2003:219). Porter also states the Internet as one of the most important communication methods, he writes, "practitioners have generally use[d] the Internet to keep to maintain their horizontal linkages over cast distances, and provide a way to disseminate Li Hongzhi's articles" (2003:221). When I interviewed practitioners on how they keep up with the current situations in China while living in Canada, all answered that they receive information from websites created by practitioners in China. For example, Carol told me that, "Everyday Falun Gong practitioners and other people who have a helping heart in China would send true information to people outside of China through the use of the anti-internet blockage tools, sometimes telephone and fax."

One of the significant features I found among Falun Gong websites is detailed accounts of "experience-sharing" from first-person narratives.²⁸ Most accounts were first published on the Chinese-language website by Chinese practitioners, including those in

²⁸ See, for example, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/html/cate-76/> (accessed October 3, 2011) for the English-language version and <http://www.minghui.org/mh/fenlei/288/> (accessed October 3, 2011) for the Chinese-language version.

China. Usually within two to three days, their stories would be translated and posted on the English-language website. According to Ownby (2008b), Porter (2003) and Zhao (2003), practitioners often hold experience-sharing conferences in various cities, including secret ones in China. Occasionally, Li Hongzhi would appear unexpectedly at some conferences held in North America (Ownby 2008b). Ownby notes, that although it is unclear to what extent Li relied on cyberspace between 1992 and 1994, currently Falun Gong websites are one method to permit Li to stay “in virtual contact with his grassroots followers (so long as the followers wish to do so) without having to build an elaborate organization” (2008b:200). During my fieldwork, I found a great number of practitioners to be technology professionals. This may be suggestive of Ownby’s observation that many overseas practitioners possess considerable computer skills which play an important and effective role in helping to build Falun Gong’s international network in cyberspace.

While there has been much campaigning throughout the world by Falun Gong diaspora practitioners as a method of getting their messages out, they have also filed lawsuits in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, whenever Chinese officials were visiting those countries (Ownby 2008b:219). In addition to their anti-CCP activism, diaspora practitioners often contact scholars and politicians to investigate their cases on their behalf. For example, as noted in Chapter One, one of the Falun Gong advocacy groups invited David Matas and David Kilgour (2009) to do the investigation on organ harvesting from living Falun Gong practitioners in China. Heather Kavan (2008) also mentions that the reason she began her research with Falun Gong practitioners in New Zealand was because practitioners sent hundreds of letters to academic institutions

requesting that unbiased research be done. All of these activities and issues have become a component of the general discourse criticizing human rights violations in China. Thus, David Palmer states that “Falungong appears as one of the best-organized and persistent oppositional movements in China, far surpassing democratic dissidents in its organizational and mobilisational capacity, both in China and abroad” (2007:281).

The above-mentioned scholarly accounts and examples of Falun Gong’s activism suggest Falun Gong practitioners have been successfully keeping up its fight with the Chinese regime at the international level. The emergence of this transnational “anti-CCP” connection helps to build an intra-group network among the Falun Gong diaspora. Through technology, cyberspace serves as an important a “de-territorialized site” as well as a “site of resistance” for Falun gong practitioners across national boundaries to connect and bond together. Through information exchange, the majority of practitioners believe that, not only has the crackdown intensified within China, the persecution has extended outside of China.

“We’re Just Telling the Truth!”

Ms. Lin (pseudonym) is a Canadian citizen in her mid-70s who has been practicing Falun Gong since 1998. In 2001, she joined a Chinese Association in Ottawa. A few months later, two executives expelled Ms. Lin from the association telling her that Falun Gong is an “evil cult” and her practice was against the Chinese law. Ms. Lin filed a complaint to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, which alleged that she was discriminated against on the basis of her beliefs. In 2006, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario ordered the association to pay Ms. Lin compensation, and gave instructions to the Chinese association on how to follow human rights legislation according to the law of

Ontario. The association appealed the decision by arguing that it is within a cultural association's rights to refuse any religious proselytizing.

I first learned of this incident from Ms. Lin's family during an interview. The informant did not go into details as the legal case was still in process when the interview was conducted. Afterward, I found the document on the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario's website. A few weeks later, in May 2011, I learned from a local English-language newspaper in Ottawa that the Tribunal had reached the same decision for the case between Ms. Lin and the association. Other incidents include some practitioners in Flushing, New York who were suing one local Chinese restaurant because they were asked to leave when they walked in wearing Falun Gong T-shirts. Diaspora practitioners had been taking local Chinese-language newspapers in New York and Montréal to court for publishing prejudicial materials against the Falun Gong (Zhao 2003). Interviewees revealed the lawsuits against local Chinese-language press were also launched in Ottawa.

These local resentments against the practitioners do not occur on a daily basis, but it does affect many Chinese immigrants' views about Falun Gong. Most Falun Gong practitioners told me that they neither blame, nor are against ordinary Chinese. For example, during one interview, the topic of China's one-child policy came up in conversation when the informant was explaining how Chinese traditional cultures and moral principles have been destroyed by the CCP. According to her, beside the influence from the law enforcement, many Chinese people support this policy because they have been "brainwashed" by the CCP:

The old Chinese saying: "人之初性本善" [Humans were born to be kind-hearted] and the traditional Chinese moral system believes in theism, righteousness and compassion. But under the CCP, people are becoming pitiless about humanity

issues, such as forced abortions or killings. Through the years of Cultural Revolution, countless political campaigns and educations to socializing people against nature and humanity, the CCP has turned people to repel and distrust each other. As a result, people gradually became less empathic because they lost their fundamental sense of what is good and evil. But this is not the nature of Chinese people. Hence I feel it is my duty to tell Chinese people the fact that the CCP is misleading Chinese humanity.

Another interviewee talked about how the CCP “deceived” its citizens by blocking information inside China. She told me a story that happened in 2002 during the outbreak of SARS.

I received several concerned phone calls from families and friends in China. They worried about me because they saw the news about many SARS-related deaths in Canada. I told them they should be the one worried since it was spread from China. My family and friends didn’t believe me because by that time, the Chinese government had not yet come forward about the epidemic. The CCP blocked all news that was not favorable to the party and emphasized and exaggerated any negative news about western countries. Through the controls of media and information, it helped the CCP look better in the eyes of the people. I, for one, was once fooled by this lie. I used to believe stereotypes like “西方邪恶国家” [Evil Western countries] and “贪婪的资本主义” [Capitalism is immoderate] until I came to Canada I realized who is the real evil and the unethical one.

The above two statements, to a large extent, reflect Chinese Falun Gong practitioners’ view on the CCP. They claimed Chinese people have lost their ability to think independently under the CCP’s system of control. In other words, Chinese people are “innocently blinded by the CCP’s tactics” who might be “innocently convicted immoral actions.”

On one afternoon I met Lily for an interview. Both of us moved to Canada during the early 1990s. We shared a common experience that the Chinese people we met in

Canada before the 2000s were mostly from Hong Kong or Taiwan, which is a contrast to the majority of recent Chinese immigrants from China. I asked Lily one question, “Do you think, in general, has the immigrant experience changed the views of Chinese living in Canada, in terms of how they interpret the Chinese government or Falun Gong?” Lily said that it depends on the degree of integration with non-Chinese communities:

Chinese immigrants who came to Canada around the same time as I did, they usually dislike the Chinese government. Maybe that’s why we were more willing to explore what’s out there. Recent immigrants are different in a way that they only hang out within Chinese communities—at work, in school or live in a same neighborhood. They see themselves as being more open-minded because they are living in Canada, but in fact, they only read news produced by Chinese media and they only communicate with other Chinese people who also believe the Chinese government. [...].

Whenever any Western media press discusses human right issues in China, Chinese immigrants feel that they have been attacked by the West because they believed what the CCP had told them—any condemnation about the Chinese government is an attack to China and Chinese people. But the truth is that the CCP has created so many inequalities among Chinese people. I don’t tell people to join Falun Gong as Buddhism says “佛度有缘人” [Only those who want enlightenment can be enlightened].²⁹ But I strongly believe Chinese people have to see the true picture of the CCP. After all, this is all we’ve been doing—we’re just telling the truth!

Lily’s statement is interesting in the way that it probes the issues of multiculturalism in Canada. Evidence suggest that in the case of Chinese business immigrants (see Ong 1999 in Chapter Two) and the Falun Gong diaspora (see Falun Gong’s profile in Chapter One), both groups of Chinese immigrants have achieved a relatively high level of economic integration with the host societies, but how about their social and cultural integration? It

²⁹ Here I interpret the interviewee meant to say while she is actively promoting about the crackdown on Falun Gong in China, she does not always promote the practical and doctrinal aspects of Falun Gong because she sees that everyone has different paths to take and Falun Gong is not for all.

would be worth while exploring and examining the various types of cultural assimilations and social interaction with local communities to see if the degree of integration has impacted their different attitude toward homeland conflicts and the degree to which they engage in transnational activities.

During interviews, practitioners mentioned that it is not only Chinese people in Canada who hold prejudices against Falun Gong; they feel that some Western individuals and organizations have also viewed Falun Gong in a negative light. They believe these biases are directly imposed by the Chinese government. Interviewees discussed the following two events as proof of Falun Gong's current difficult situation in Ottawa. Both incidents have been verified with Ottawa's local English-language news reports. The sources, however, will not be identified to avoid sensitive political issues, and also to protect interviewees' confidentiality.

In 2008, an organization in Ottawa cancelled a Falun Gong's performance at the last-minute during one of the event's opening ceremonies. According to an online news article, the organization accused Falun Gong of misrepresenting themselves by not making its affiliation with a controversial religion known. One of the organizers remarked that the message behind the Falun Gong performance is political which was intended to humiliate the Chinese embassy. As a result, the organization refused Falun Gong's participation. The Falun Gong practitioners held a press conference and accused the organization of discrimination against their beliefs and demanded an apology. A few days later, the organization apologized to Falun Gong.

In 2010, a municipal officer in Ottawa rejected a motion to proclaim the recognition of the Falun Dafa Day. The same officer had approved the day the year

before, and Falun Gong had been allowed to celebrate for the two past years. According to a news report, the officer refused to sign the proclamation after returning from a business trip from China. An interviewee who was involved with the situation told me they had urged the municipal government for an explanation. Although the interviewee was not fully satisfied with the answer provided by the officer, the interviewee was glad to see that they had gained some support from other municipal officers. The interviewee said, “Even though [the officer] did not admit any affiliation with the Chinese government to the fellow officers and media, I believe the recent trip to China is the reason why [the officer] rejected our proclamation because this trip had brought them some business deals.” The interviewee also talked about how, after the crackdown in China, it was getting difficult to promote any Falun Gong-related activities within Chinese communities, which was not the case before 1999, when the Chinese embassy even praised Falun Gong during several Chinese cultural events in Ottawa.

In regards to the issue of China’s economic ties with Canada, one interviewee indicated that the Chinese state has been using China’s growing economic power to pressure Western countries. It led to several Western political figures—forced or voluntary—to avoid having to deal with Falun Gong’s causes and the human rights issues in China. The interviewee provided two examples: “[A politician] who wrote a letter to support Falun Gong had asked us to remove the letter from our website because the Chinese embassy refused [the politician] to entry into China for a business trip.” The interviewee continued to say, “Recent years, we have been contacted by many politicians and sponsors. They want their names or sponsorship to be removed from our websites. Some of them didn’t explain why. Most of them were frank in saying that they received

phone calls or mail from Chinese authorities or some local Chinese associations to warn them not to have any affiliation with us.” I asked the interviewee if they agreed to remove their names. The interviewee responded,

Yes and I feel sad. Not because they changed their minds, but rather why would this kind of situation would even occur in the first place? Why did they have to receive pressures from the Chinese government? Why can't the CCP respect the fact that people in Canada have the freedom and rights to choose what to believe?

I discussed this issue with another practitioner. She agreed that the Chinese government has been abusing power to pressure international communities on the issues of human rights. She also talked about her attitude towards the challenge. “The CCP has invested so much money, time and human resource to suppress us, but I am not afraid.” I was surprised to hear that. I looked at her and said, “I’d be worried if I were you.” She gave me a smile, “I’m still alive, am I not?” she said to me. I smiled back, “You’re brave,” I said with an optimist tone. “I don’t know how do you interpret this,” she said, “what this means to me is that the CCP is afraid of us. I believe ‘邪不胜正’ [Evil can never prevail over good] and all I do is tell the truth about the CCP. What’s wrong with that? I have nothing to be afraid of.”

Overall, practitioners see Canadians as polite and open-minded, and they feel that Falun Gong is highly acceptable to the Canadian public. Several interviewees indicated that Canada’s democratic political system has allowed Canadians to be more open of diversity, in contrast to the authoritarian regime in China. At the same time, practitioners often express a positive view of human nature as they believe the majority of people (Chinese and non-Chinese)—although they might not understand Falun Gong—would leave Falun Gong alone. Only those “lost souls” who were “seduced” by the Chinese

government would take action against Falun Gong practitioners. A few interviewees were more emphatic. One informant said she understands that Canada's business community is interested in making deals in the Chinese market, "but the silence on China's human rights violations is selling-out Canadian values: multiculturalism, democracy and freedom." The definition of Canadian values is beyond the point of this thesis; however, what we can see from these accounts is that practitioners have hope in Canadian government (and Western communities in general) of easing the campaign against Falun Gong in China. Ownby (2008b) also suggests this point.

Almost all practitioners suspected the Chinese diplomatic officials have received an order to suppress overseas Falun Gong practitioners. When I asked interviewees why there were more Westerners than Chinese who attended the Shen Yun Performing Arts show at the National Art Center on December 2010 in Ottawa (see details in the introductory chapter), seven responded that the Chinese embassy is threatening Chinese immigrants that they would get into trouble (e.g. authorities would visit their families in China) if they come to watch the show. Six interviewees said some pro-CCP-affiliated Chinese associations in Ottawa are giving out warnings about Falun Gong among Chinese-Canadian communities. However, practitioners often remarked that Falun Gong's relationship with many Chinese-Canadian communities has been improved, as Carol said, "More and more Chinese people don't buy into the CCP's lies and still come to watch Shen Yun."

Two interviewees claimed they experienced direct threats. One incident happened when she was in New York. Some Chinese people threw trash at her while she was walking with a Falun Gong parade. Another informant alleged his car was damaged by

the Chinese diplomatic agents in Ottawa. The glass was broken once and tires were slashed twice while he was parked near the Chinese embassy for demonstrations. He said, "I didn't see them do it. I don't have any evidence, but I don't think two separate occasions is a coincidence either. However, what I can tell you is that Chinese agents have been sending fraudulent emails to Western politicians about Falun Gong." I asked him if he saw the email. He replied yes, "some of them were forwarded to me." To further emphasize his case, he mentioned a case in Australia in which the Chinese authorities interfered with overseas Chinese communities and harassed overseas Falun Gong practitioners.

According to the *BBC Chinese* (2005) and three news articles from *Sydney Morning Herald* (2005), a former Chinese diplomat, Chen Yonglin (陈用林) was in hiding while applying for a protection visa for his family and himself. Chen claimed that he could no longer persecute dissidents and Falun Gong practitioners for the Chinese government; therefore, he abandoned his four-year position as first secretary at the Chinese consulate-general in Sydney on May 26 of 2005. Chen said China has about 1,000 spies working in Australia and he believed he would face persecution if he returned to China. One of Chinese Government spokesmen dismissed claims of a spy network, and said the news spread by Chen was fabricated. The spokesman told ABC radio, "These rumors are detrimental to China-Australia relations and China is ruled by law and all issues will be handled in accordance with the law" (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2005).

In 2007, Chen Yonglin came to Canada for a visit. While Chen received a warm welcome by Falun Gong practitioners,³⁰ the National Congress of Chinese Canadians (全加华人联会) announced a declaration in which they expressed their dissatisfaction with the Canadian government.³¹ According to the statement, Chen's hate propaganda against China caused social dissension among Chinese-Canadian communities. In short, their message was that by allowing Chen entry into Canada, the Canadian government jeopardized Canada-China relations.

During interviews, only two practitioners mentioned Chen's case. The second interviewee remarked on this. Anyone, Chinese people in particular, who brings up issues which challenge the CCP, is immediately silenced by the accusation that they are "jeopardizing" China's diplomatic and trade relations with other countries. "This is one of the reasons why many Chinese people have perceived the Falun Gong's anti-CCP activism as a betrayal of China," she told me. Three other interviewees also pointed out a similar argument. As one said to me, "We can talk all night about what does 'being political' mean or you don't even have to believe me. But remember, what is forgotten is that it was the CCP that 'politicized' Falun Gong in the first place."

To my knowledge, Chen's allegation and Falun Gong's suspicion of the Chinese espionage issue have not been confirmed by any scholars, and the issue of China's diplomacy is beyond the scope of this study. The point is to suggest that the anti-Falun Gong campaign has created an impact on overseas Chinese communities, including both

³⁰ Chen was giving a number of presentations to talk about how the Chinese foreign department has been seeking to control overseas Chinese organizations. See, for example, <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2007/6/13/86732.html> (accessed September 27, 2011).

³¹ The declaration in Chinese-language was published on 13 June, 2007, which can be found online at http://www.chinesepress.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2572:2011-07-06-16-36-29&catid=339:2011-07-04-16-23-50&%20Itemid=610 (accessed September 27, 2011).

Falun Gong and non-practitioners. Most importantly, the different responses between “pro-CCP” and “anti-CCP” to the suppression have generated resentment, either toward Falun Gong or the Chinese state, among overseas Chinese communities.

Practitioners’ opinions toward the CCP’s power, in a way, illustrate our different understanding between one-party system and multi-party system. The Canadian multi-party system is with what I am familiar, since that is the system I have been immersed in since I was old enough to vote (Taiwan became a democracy after the 1990s). When I discussed with the interviewees that I was confused about their distinction between “nation” and “state,” all informants said these are indistinguishable for many Chinese people. Several of them mentioned that they grew up with the propaganda slogans like “爹亲娘亲不如共产党亲” [Although Dad and Mom are close, they are not as important as the CCP] and “没有共产党就没有新中国” [There would be no modern China without the CCP]. Under such influence, Chinese people have been educated to believe the Party comes above all else. One interview said to me:

Chinese people have confused the CCP with China. They think that what the CCP wants is the best for their country. Under this ideology, it allows the CCP to provoke Chinese people’s patriotism to support the CCP. This might be hard for people like you [who grew up in democratic nations] to understand why so many Chinese people would believe “China will collapse without the CCP.”

Meanwhile, I asked interviewees if Chinese people actually believe every piece of information provided by the CCP unsubstantially. Most informants responded that they cannot speak for all Chinese people; some interviewees said that Chinese people are just afraid of the CCP’s authoritarianism and the social instability. This “fear of loss and chaos,” according to one interviewee, “is a tactic used by the CCP to control people’s minds.”

As noted in Chapter One, David Palmer (2007) uses the case of Falun Gong to analyze China's political interpenetration and polarization. He argues that Falun Gong's militant attitude toward the government has subjected themselves to the image of a non-governmental organization that was not afraid of the CCP. Palmer explains further that the political authority in China is exercised through the subjective perception and fear of its power. He then connects the crackdown of Falun Gong with this analysis to point out that the Falun Gong's apocalypticism supports the opposite position which differentiates itself from political party lines. He argues as follows (Palmer 2007:295):

This reinforcement of such impressions, through propaganda and the spectacular performance of power, is thus crucial. The Zhongnanhai demonstration threatened to shatter the fear of the people and to transfer symbolic power onto Falungong. Thus a Chinese practitioner who converted to Falungong after the demonstration told me, in a menacing tone: 'if the Party dares to act against Falungong, Li Hongzhi will show his power.' The repression campaign, which to many harked back to the political struggles of the Cultural Revolution, was precisely designed to revive this fear in the minds of the populace.

Of the ten interviews I have done, only one practitioner joined Falun Gong after the crackdown of 1999. Maria moved to Canada in 2000 and began practicing Falun Gong in 2001. Maria told me she used to believe the CCP's portrayal of Falun Gong when she was living in China, until she met some Falun Gong practitioners in Ottawa. She said, "When I first saw them I was thinking 'These people appear to be normal, why they are involved with such a terrible thing?' After I talked to them several times, I realized that this is a good, quality group of people. I started to read information on Falun Gong and I was shocked. I then wanted to learn more about Falun Gong."

As noted in Chapter One, Nancy Chen (2003) and Thomas Ots (1994) explain that the practices of qigong address the need for an emotional release outside of the state's

norm-governed structures. Based on the limited research on Falun Gong's teachings and the lack of practitioners' narratives, this thesis cannot provide a detailed analysis to link practitioners' perception of the Chinese state and the practice of Falun Gong. At the same time, it seems to me that practitioners have been applying Falun Gong's "spiritual values" to their versions of "truths." Yuezhi Zhao also identified this kind of discursive language in Falun Gong's media materials (2003:220):

Since Falun Gong does not make any distinction between "facts" and "values," the statement that "Falun Gong Is Good" is, from this perspective, as true as the fact that so and so has been beaten by the police. This, against a background of the Chinese state's brutal prosecution and graphic images of police brutality, gives Falun Gong's "truth clarification" campaign an extraordinary moral power.

Whatever "truths" mean to the practitioners and non-practitioner, the interview data does reveal a significant gap between an authoritarian government's tolerance of "act of resistance" and Falun Gong's seemingly naïve definition of "being political." Practitioners' dissatisfaction with the CCP and their allegation against the Chinese state could be termed "Falun Gong's anti-CCP narratives", as they not only present a challenge to the Chinese official allegations against the Falun Gong, but they also become an important "true version" for the ongoing process of Falun Gong diaspora identity formation.

Falun Gong and the "Authentic" Chinese Culture

During interviews two respondents referred to the case of Tibet to exemplify how they have been "brainwashed" by the CCP. One respondent remembered when she first met Tibetans several years ago in the United States during a demonstration. She was surprised to see that "Tibetans were just normal people!" (I was in a similar state of confusion when three other interviewees said they held a similar image about people

from Taiwan until they met “us” in Canada). Because of the shocked expression on my face, the interviewee shared her story with me.

On June 4, 1989, she was in Beijing. She did not go out that day, but her friends were near Muxdi (木樨地).³² They were running away from gunshots and tanks and they saw people get injured. Everybody was in shock. About three or four days later, she heard the news report that the officials had ended the student riots and that no one was killed in Tiananmen Square. She said to me, “On the one hand, I believed what my friends told me, I saw them panic. On the other hand, how can I not believe the news? I was so confused. It was as though I had two brains.” She shook her head and continued to explain:

This is what the CCP has been doing to Chinese people. Through the control of media, they share lies upon lies in order to justify their injustice actions; Chinese people are not entitled to the truth. This is why I had prejudices about Tibetans. This is why I did not understand what happened on June 4 and I was in Beijing!

All interviewees who participated in this study were born around the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976). Five of them had already left China before 1989, and not every interviewee was from Beijing. Out of the ten interviewees, four respondents mentioned the topic of 1989 Tiananmen Square in different contexts, and nine brought up their memories of Cultural Revolution. One interviewee said, “I was only five or six, so I don’t remember much from that [Cultural Revolution] period. Nonetheless, when I think about it I can still feel the atmosphere of chaos.” Another interviewee explains: “I watched a public trial (公审大会) when I was a kid. I was too young to understand what

³² During the interview I had no idea where Muxdi was and I did not get a chance to ask the informant. Later when I was transcribing and translating interview data I found out that Muxdi is around three miles west of the Tiananmen Square. Some sources cite Wikileaks’s recent publication to point out the massive massacre actually took place at Muxdi on the night of June 3; it did not begin with the Tiananmen Square. See, for example, the article titled “Wikileaks: no bloodshed inside Tiananmen Square, cables claim” by Malcolm Moore (2011) is published on <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/wikileaks/8555142/Wikileaks-no-bloodshed-inside-Tiananmen-Square-cables-claim.html> (accessed July 23, 2011).

it was, but I remember it was appalling.” Most respondents have condemned the Cultural Revolution as the “degradation of humanity” and according to two of them, “although the situation is not as bad as before, the CCP has never stopped being violent and creating conflicts and destroying Chinese traditions and cultures.”

The collective recollections of the Cultural Revolution from practitioners’ childhood memories correspond to William Safran (1991, 2005) and Khachig Tölölyan’s (1991, 2007) argument as they suggest a collective memory, vision, or myth, is a foundational element to the identity of a diaspora community. In this regard, the memory of “the chaos period during the Cultural Revolution” has perhaps intensified practitioners’ negative feelings toward the CCP. Furthermore, the image of China as an “oppressed nation,” has been, and is still subjected to political oppressions, which is repressing, not only Falun Gong practitioners, but among all Chinese citizens. At the same time, I also find practitioners have a tendency to refer to the Cultural Revolution as evidence to support their claim that the CCP is not grounded in Chinese cultural traditions.

During my fieldwork I noticed that practitioners insist that the CCP is “un-Chinese,” in order to highlight the argument that Chinese Communism is based on Marxist-Leninism, as if China has been “colonized”—neither by another nation-state nor by another ethnic group—but a Western-driven ideology (although China has always been multiethnic as argued by Chun 1996). I often hear practitioners (regardless the origin of birthplace) say China has “lost Chinese heritage” under the Communist Party rule. They often lay emphasis on Falun Gong’s practice and morality which are embedded in the “authentic Chinese culture,” in contrast to the CCP’s “un-Chineseness.” For example, Shen Yun Performing Arts is one of Falun Gong-affiliated groups which

performs classical Chinese dance and song. According to its official website,³³ “after the Cultural Revolution, Chinese traditional culture has been all but completely demolished.” The group is promoting themselves as “to restore and revive Chinese traditional culture” (ibid). When I mentioned to the interviewees that there were more Westerners than Chinese at the show I attended, two respondents said it is because Chinese people would rather save money than indulge in luxury spending. This kind of mentality is derived from “Chinese people suffered years of starvation in China under the CCP rule” according to one interviewee.

The above-mentioned interview data shows that practitioners feel that Chinese people and the Chinese culture would be better off without the CCP’s rule, and furthermore China could “return” to the way it should be. I interpret these discourses as Falun Gong’s cultural expression. Madsen (2000) and Zhao (2003) note that Falun Gong emphasizes the unity of physical and spiritual healing to bring about health benefits, in contrast to the Western distinction between medicine and religion. Particularly with Falun Dafa in which Li’s teachings of Chinese folk Buddhism and Daoism often criticize the limits of modernity (Zhao 2003). Perhaps this may be one of the reasons that inspired practitioners to cite their values within the confines of Chinese history. Drawing the “truth” from the Chinese Buddhist and Daoist cultures, it helps Falun Gong to contrast the idea that the CCP is based on the Marxist-Leninism paradigm. Despite the fact that such a statement tends to be embedded in the rhetoric of nationalism—or as Benedict Anderson (1994) terms it, “long-distance nationalism”—Falun Gong lays their cultural authority in the “authentic” Chinese Culture to challenge the Chinese Communist

³³ See Shen Yun’s official website, <http://www.shenyunperformingarts.org/company/about-the-company> (accessed October 11, 2011).

leadership in defining the meaning of “Chineseness.” As noted in Chapter Two, Rey Chow (1993) argues the point is not to debate who is more “authentic,” as she references Gayatri Spivak, who is known for the concept “strategic essentialism,” to promote unity and solidarity among minorities. Echoing Chow’s argument, therefore, the following arguments shift the focus from the completion between Falun Gong and the China state to the Falun Gong’s diasporic identity.

Wang Gungwu is a Chinese American historian who specializes in Chinese diaspora studies. He asserts that “the Chinese never had a concept of identity, only a concept of Chineseness, of being Chinese and of becoming un-Chinese” (1988 cited in Chun 2001:101). It has implied a close relation between—and often seemingly inseparable from—identity and ethnicity. I agree to a large extent that diaspora is about identity, but is it really about ethnicity?

Conceptualizing the Chinese Falun Gong Diaspora

My research questions revolve around the concept of identity. As presented in the introductory chapter, I use the following questions to lead my research: 1) How are geopolitical boundaries defined in relation to the Chinese Falun Gong diaspora? 2) What is in this transnational space between Falun Gong’s confrontational bonds to the “homeland” that in turn have shaped their diaspora identity? 3) How and why are Falun Gong diasporas involved in intra-state conflicts while living in host countries?

During the search for the Falun Gong practitioners’ identity in the field, I first conceptualized “identity” as a matter of *ethnic boundaries* (Barth 1969). This conceptualization was developed during the completion of my undergraduate Honours Research Paper (HRP) about the effects of multiculturalism on Taiwanese-Canadians

living in Toronto. In my HRP, I argue that while multiculturalism promotes ethnic identity and focuses on ethnicity as a primary identification, there is still a hegemonic notion of a “real Canadian” who is not multicultural. This led to a contradiction between multiculturalism as a national identity and a competing hegemonic white Canadian national identity. Many Canadians have started questioning what it means to be a Canadian. What is a hyphenated Canadian? (Abu-Laban and Stasiulis 1992; Bissoondath 1994; Elliott and Fleras 1992; Mahtani 2002; Siemiatycki et al. 2003). Based on this understanding of identity, I hypothesized that Chinese diaspora practitioners may have used “Falun Gong” as a way of not only of recalling the experiences of oppression, but also of reforming a transnational ethnic boundary. But this time, with the case of Falun Gong, and with a different theoretical and methodological approach, I find a broader meaning of the term “homeland.” This hypothesis has also been challenged when I encountered non-Chinese Falun Gong practitioners—be they Anglophone, Francophone, Indian and Korean—that I interacted with during my fieldwork.

Before the interviews, I was searching to see if the collective memory and profound sense of longing for “homeland” have any impact on the Chinese Falun Gong’s diaspora identity. I was surprised to find, although their memory of “homeland” is strong, their “homeland nostalgia” is relatively weak—by that I define nostalgia in the context of the “myth of retuning” (Safran 2005). Two questions related to the identification of “homeland” were asked of Chinese practitioners: What does “home” mean to you? And, where is your home? Six responded that Canada is the home where they want to settle for the rest of their lives, and China will always be the home in their hearts. Three practitioners did not feel particularly attached to either one. As they told me “we [as

practitioners did not feel particularly attached to either one. As they told me “we [as Falun Gong practitioners] are learning to become detached” to show that “home” is nowhere or anywhere for that matter. Of the ten interviewees, only one expressed an interest in moving back to China, if the living conditions changed. Then, why are they involved in intra-state conflicts while living in Canada? More curiously, why are non-Chinese Falun Gong practitioners also involved in the anti-Chinese Communist activism? If they have no affiliation to the “homeland,” then there must be a deeper reason as to why they are getting involved with state matters within China.

One Chinese practitioner said, “My home is in Canada. The anti-CCP activism I do here is for Chinese people because I believe it is an act of justice, and as a native Chinese I know more inside truths about China. It is not really for my own benefit or to say there is something I want from China is not true.” Another one told me, “Some people condemned me for spreading lies about the CCP. I live a comfortable life in Canada. If it’s not because I truly believe the CCP is so evil and is destroying China, why do I bother? After all, who is the one that cares about China here?” A similar comment was made by a non-Chinese practitioner. “People have been calling me ‘anti-Chinese’ for the wrong reason. I’m protesting against violence and injustice caused by the Chinese government. If we don’t protect our belief, nobody else will. It’s that simple.” This practitioner does not speak Chinese, and it does not stop him from feeling a sense of belonging within the Falun Gong community.

It is common to have non-Chinese stand up against the Chinese government. In China there has been a wave of demonstrations at Tiananmen Square by Western Falun Gong practitioners, and the demonstrators are usually arrested and expelled from China

(Ownby 2008b). The role played by non-Chinese practitioners is worth a closer study, but this topic is beyond the scope of my thesis project. According to Ownby, Western practitioners “appear to be ‘spiritual seekers,’ veterans of a variety of new religious movements, often closer to a ‘hippie’ or ‘nonconformist’ profile than most of the Chinese, who in general seem to be the straightest of straight arrows” (2008b:135). My interaction with non-Chinese practitioners was limited, since the Chinese diaspora is the main focus of this project. Based on numerous casual conversations with non-Chinese practitioners, my impression is that they were first drawn to Falun Gong because it promotes an ancient Chinese practice to enhance body, mind and spirit that aims to improve health and well-being. Perhaps like Ownby describes, the “spiritual seekers” found this “New age movement” (which is relatively old in the Chinese history) attractive and many of them have further developed sympathy over crackdown on Falun Gong in China.

While the majority of overseas Chinese practitioners were born in China, many of them are originally from Hong Kong, Taiwan or elsewhere. During my discussions in New York with two Taiwanese who had never been to China, I asked why they feel connected to the anti-CCP activism, since Falun Gong is not banned either in the U.S. or Taiwan. Both responded that they cannot watch this injustice and do nothing for the 学员 [members]³⁴ in China. Although many claim Falun Gong has a political orientation, I suggest practitioners, Chinese and non-Chinese, whether or not they have been personally oppressed by the Chinese government, are involved in Falun Gong-Chinese state conflicts while living in North America because they have sympathy for practitioners in

³⁴ Chinese practitioners usually use the term “学员” to refer to each other. I translated “members” because it is more understandable under that context. The literal translation is “trainees” which, in my opinion, this term reflects Falun Gong’s non-membership organizational structure and the practitioners are supposed to be students under Master Li’s teachings to develop and advance their knowledge and practice.

China with whom they share a “religious connection.” Together, they aim to achieve at least one ultimate goal, to stop the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China

If there is something called Falun Gong diaspora referring to Chinese practitioners residing outside of China, then what should we call non-Chinese Falun Gong practitioners? The lack of research with non-Chinese practitioners does not permit this thesis to pursue a solid argument—ethnicity might not be the main transnational connection linking a diaspora community. What I can suggest is that identity is a matter of *identifying*. The critique of the concept of identity from Brubaker and Cooper, for example, note that there is a tendency in scholarship to confuse identity as a category of practice and as a category of analysis. They argue as follows:

Reification is a social process, not only an intellectual practice. As such, it is central to the politics of “ethnicity,” “race,” “nation,” and other putative “identities.” Analysts of this kind of politics should seek to *account* for this process of reification. We should seek to explain the processes and mechanisms through which what has been called the “political fiction” of the “nation”—or of the “ethnic group,” “race,” or other putative “identity”—can crystallize, at certain moments, as a powerful, compelling reality. But we should avoid unintentionally *reproducing* or *reinforcing* such reification by uncritically adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis (2000:5, emphasis in original).

To place “identity” in such context has enabled this thesis to question two common arguments from the concept of diaspora. The first one is to question diaspora’s ethnic-centric identity. In other words, diaspora may be better seen as a social connection (Gilroy 2003; Hall 2003), rather than the essentialization of ethnicity, at least not to the degree how Tölölyan states: “All diasporic communities are also ethnic communities [...], diasporas are a specific subset of ethnic minorities” (2007:649). The argument that

diaspora identity is not naturalized by ethnicity leads to the following question, whether or not a homeland produces a diaspora (Axel 2001).

The formulations of diaspora theories offered by James Clifford (1997a), Stuart Hall (2003) and Gilroy (2003) critique the conventional concepts of culture, identity and geographical boundary. As noted in Chapter Two, by presenting a de-centered and de-territorialized view of diaspora, Clifford has criticized Safran's definition (1991) based on the fact that the "ideal-type" of Jewish diaspora underplays diasporas' social interaction and cultural production in host societies. In his more recent article, Safran (2005) argues that Clifford's de-centered view does not explain the formulations of minority cultures, and Safran further points out that a diaspora group without a "center" is unable to resist marginalization in host countries. To quote him (Safran 2005:51):

Clifford argues that the emphasis on the homeland as a center ignores the specific local interactions necessary for the maintenance of diasporic social forms. Clifford goes even further: he argues that there doesn't have to be any center at all. But if there is no "outside" centralizing focus, then one cannot easily speak of "transnational" relations; moreover, diaspora culture becomes too diffuse and unable to resist the pressures of the hostland culture, with the result that diasporas cannot easily maintain themselves as such.

Even though Clifford and Safran share different perspectives about the notions of "center" versus "peripheral" and "inside" versus "outside," they both agree that diaspora can be seen as a type of consciousness. As theorized by Clifford (1997a:256-257):

Diaspora consciousness is produced positively through identification with world-historical cultural/political forces, such as "Africa" or China." The process may not be as much about being African or Chinese as about being American or British or wherever one has settled, differently. It is also about feeling global. Islam, like Judaism in a predominantly Christian culture, can offer a sense of attachment elsewhere, to a different temporality and vision, a discrepant

modernity. [...]. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension.

For Clifford, the concept of diaspora is similar to his theory of traveling culture, which places “diaspora” in a mind that can travel from the past to the present time in dual or even paradoxical senses. It can be constituted negatively through “experiences of discrimination and exclusion” (ibid) and positively by the “identification with world historical cultural/political forces” (ibid) to highlight diaspora community’s often complex, yet tensional connections with both (whether a real or symbolic) homeland and host societies.

For Safran, diaspora is also a type of consciousness in the sense that it is an awareness of being different in a transnational situation. To quote him: “For a number of scholars, diaspora has come to embrace not only immigrants, but ethnic and religious minorities and other categories of groups—and even individuals—who wish to be part of society on their own terms” (2005:50). In this regard, almost every group who falls outside the majority norm can be defined as diaspora. Diaspora then, as Safran further argues, “implies a consciousness of being different from surrounding society and ‘an awareness of multilocality’” (ibid). If we define “diaspora” as a type of consciousness this definition allows the Falun Gong diaspora to access different times and places acting out the freedoms in Canada that they could not do in China.

To draw parts of the ideas from Safran, Clifford and Hall, this thesis categorizes the Falun Gong diaspora with five themes. 1) Although there was no obvious forced flight from China in the patterns of out-migration among Falun Gong practitioners (as the majority of those interviewed for the research had already arrived in Canada before the

1999 crackdown), they are more or less forced to remain in the diaspora as the Chinese state forbids practitioners from returning to the homeland. 2) Regardless of their social class, gender and regional backgrounds, practitioners consider themselves “victims” as they share a collective vision of the CCP to evoke solidarity (Safran 2005), particularly since its existence has been threatened by the Chinese state. 3) By promoting discourses, such as anti-communism and the recovery of a “true China,” overseas Falun Gong practitioners recall a collective myth of “homeland” which often contains negative sentiments (Safran 2005). 4) They place great importance on the “homeland” because of the positive identification with a Chinese historical/religious heritage and negative experiences of discrimination and exclusion from it (Clifford 1997a). 5) They use its diasporic role to place “Falun Gong struggles” in the universal fight for human rights against the Chinese state as a strategy to continue their practices and beliefs (Hall 2003).

But if there no “center” (i.e. Chinese as an ethnicity or nationality) for the Falun Gong diaspora group to share, as Safran (2005) points out, what ties Falun Gong practitioners together? Where does “identity” stand in the situation of diaspora? This argument links with my second research question: What is in this transnational space between Falun Gong’s confrontational bonds to the “homeland” that in turn have shaped their diaspora identity? I think Stuart Hall would argue to go beyond its conventional definition. What is more important is to see how identity has been (re)produced and transformed during a process.

As Clifford advocates a de-centered view, Hall argues diaspora identity is not “an essence but a *positioning*” (2003:237, emphasis in original). Identity is not something that has always been there to be discovered, but rather it is constantly producing and

reproducing through transformation and difference. To quote Hall, “diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, the imperializing, the hegemonizing, from of ‘ethnicity’” (2003:244). In other words, Hall agrees that a diaspora community does not need to have an “ethnic-center” in the (re)production process of a diaspora identity. Hall refers to identity as “strategic positioning” to point out that the innovations of culture can never be simple re-creations because they are the product of new material conditions (Kalra et al. 2005:37). As Hall writes, “there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’” (2003: 237). In other words, no such identity is coincidental. The construction of identity, as Hall argues, is selective by choices and achieved through transformations.

Gilroy (2003), on the other hand, applies the concept of “double consciousness” to the concept of diaspora. In his analysis of trans-Atlantic black culture, as noted in Chapter Two, the concept of “double consciousness” has enabled Gilroy to argue that the black hybridity experience, in turn, became counter-culture which has influenced Western modernity. To put it differently, the black diasporic identity and Western modernity are a twofold process. Following these lines of argumentation, I suggest that while Falun Gong’s diaspora identity is transformed between the transnational spaces with the Chinese government, their version of the “homeland” has also evolved while living in North America. Not only has China been caught up in the process of modernization (Chen 2003, Palmer 2007, Zhao 2003), the Falun Gong diaspora is also affected by it. This point is especially illustrative in Falun Gong’s multi-identities.

Under Chinese law, Falun Gong could not define itself a religion (Ching 2006). In exile, Falun Gong has to reframe their oppression under the discourse of human right (particularly with the notion of “freedom of religion”) to evoke better understanding for Western audiences. This “awareness of multilocality” (Safran 2005) perhaps is what Cohen calls an awareness of “cosmopolitanism and localism.” Cohen points out that since many members of diaspora communities are bi- or multilingual, they have the capability to gaining knowledge and power to determining their own diasporic role and identity because they are more integrated into the “counter-global global movement” (1997:169). As Cohen argues (1997:170):

Knowledge and awareness have increased to the point of cosmopolitanism or humanism, but at the same time traditional cultural values, which sustain solidarity and have always supported the search for education and enlightenment, have not been threatened. Awareness of their own precarious situation may also propel members of diasporas to advance legal and civic causes and to be active in human rights and social justice issues.

In this view, diaspora can be considered as an inspiration of resistance. If we define “diaspora” as a social resistance form (Cohen 1997; Hall 2003), the Falun Gong diaspora community plays the role of “international nongovernmental organization” to regain the “politics of resistance” which allows them to exert outside pressure in China’s domestic political arena.

From a qigong group (in China) to a religious group (in the West); from a socio-religious reform group (in China) to an oppressed group (in the West); from a controversial group (in China) to a human rights activist group (in the West), its internal organizational structure has evolved over these years (Tong 2002) in order to adapt to different strategies to better cope with changing situations. Different strategies have

produced different identities. The result of Falun Gong's multi-identities is driven from practitioners' interaction with cultural formations in North America, and their ongoing confrontational relations with the China state. Diaspora identity, then, in the case of Falun Gong, is about *strategic choices* (Hall 2003).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter argues that the grouping "Falun Gong diaspora" is not a static category. Rather than in reference to cultural essentialism or ethnic absolutism of an imagined homeland, Falun Gong practitioners (regardless the origin of birthplace) all recall a history which had begun in China (homeland), and their common experience of being a religious minority group in Canada (hostland). Given that the Falun Gong diaspora is not a given community, but rather members are constructed through a "religious connection" that is capable of performing adaptation and evolution to cope with the changing political climate, I suggest that the Falun Gong diaspora is built upon a historical position and their shared politics of differences.

This chapter also presents a de-centered and de-territorialized view of diaspora (Clifford 1994) in order to question if communities are bound by geographic borders or territorial identities. The argument has strengths and weaknesses. Drawing from Clifford's "de-centered" argument (1997a) and Hall's concept of "strategic positioning" (2003), I would like to suggest that Falun Gong diaspora is not an ethnic-centric community. However, in many cases, the concept of territory is still very much linked to politics, which often is associated with a state. Even though diasporic communities presumably can be de-territorialized, to a certain degree, diaspora is still territorially bound. Falun Gong practitioners, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, may benefit

from multi-territorial flexibility to practice their beliefs freely outside of China, but at the same time the Falun Gong struggle has *not* been transcended. To frame it differently, a Western practitioner does not make Falun Gong more legitimate in China; nor does a Chinese practitioner make Falun Gong less controversial in Canada. Perhaps Ang (1998) and Hall (2003) have been right after all—it is all about politics.

CONCLUSION

Future Research on the Falun Gong Diaspora

In attempting to capture the complexity of Chinese migration, this thesis examines an anti-Chinese Communist group with the concept of diaspora where I categorized them under the label *Falun Gong diaspora*. From Chapter One we understand Falun Gong's relations with China. From Chapter Three we see Falun Gong's situations in Canada. Through engaging with the theoretical discussion of diaspora in Chapter Two, I sought to bridge the transnational gaps, to break the binary relation of "West" and "East." Even though there is no widely agreed definition of diaspora, and the theorization of diaspora remains problematic. By challenging transnationalists' market-oriented framework and hybridity's hostland-oriented argument, I favor the concept of diaspora because it lays emphasis on how a migration phenomenon is lived and experienced. This is, if anything, what my thesis project is about.

In raising these challenges, I do not attempt to discredit transnationalism and hybridity because they all are equally important aspects in examining migration phenomena. From the perspective of transnationalism we see in the emergence of economic transnationalism, how Chinese capitalism transcended national boundaries to create economic opportunities for global accumulation (Ong 1999). From the argument of hybridity we understand that identity is often transformed with a fluidity of constructed situations and social institutions (Ang 2001; Hall 2003). Particularly from the perspective of hybridity we understand the production of hybrid cultural phenomena manifesting "new identities" (Hall 2003). Perhaps this simply reveals that people are increasingly mobile in the age of globalization and human experiences across different temporality and spatiality are far too diverse and complex. However, important distinctions still need

to be made between the political struggles entailed in different forms of movement and migration. As the story of Falun Gong has told us, sometimes a human migration phenomenon cannot be reduced to global macroeconomic or technological flows (Brazier and Mannur 2003).

Whether Falun Gong's anti-CCP activism is driven by a political orientation, or whether China is in fact the "homeland" of this group, a claim to a geopolitical territory is always disputed as a political matter. Falun Gong is blamed for carrying a political agenda with Western influences to sabotage China. Overseas Chinese Falun Gong practitioners are thus often perceived as "un-Chinese" or "Chinese traitors" in an effort to criticize their "un-patriotic" behaviors. Such condemnation is also embedded in the rhetoric of nationalism. These mutually unreflective positions between "anti-China" and "pro-China" are often simplified into a "Chinese versus Western" dichotomy. Whatever "Chineseness" means, it is sufficient to differentiate between people who do and people who do not belong (Ang 2003). But as Ang (2003) points out, in an era of migration and globalization we can no longer afford to draw a secure line between "East" and "West," "Chinese" and "non-Chinese," or "us" and "them." Meanwhile, we also notice that overseas Chinese populations are not simply homogenous. At different times, different spaces and their differences of class, gender, ethnicity and generation these ambiguous meanings of Chineseness will force scholars in the Chinese diaspora studies to reexamine "Chinese" essentialism and further lead to examine how the notion of Chineseness came into being (Chow 1993; Chun 1996). As Chen (2003) Palmer (2007) and Zhao (2003) point out, the suppression of Falun Gong is a social struggle in the process of modernity

in China. The debate over Falun Gong controversies is, after all, a reflection of a deeper debate about the nature of nation-building.

From this study we can see the mainstream Falun Gong diaspora discourse often portrays the “homeland” in traumatic terms such as violence and victimhood. Their profound sense of “losing China to the Communist Party” indicates that the Falun Gong diaspora retains a collective memory or vision of their original “homeland.” At the same time, it is unknown if Falun Gong’s practices and doctrines provoke this type of vocabulary. Drawing from Chen (2003) and Ots (1994), who both use a phenomenological approach on the bodily experience to provoke the concepts of identity and subjectivity, I would like to ask, in what way practitioners’ perspectives have transformed when practicing Falun Gong? As my interview data shows, the memory of the suffering (particularly during the Cultural Revolution) has a profound impact on Chinese practitioners’ consciousness. How does memory link to their political activism? In this regard, I first suggest theories that examine the structures of experience and consciousness, which may help to bring our understanding further—how does Falun Gong’s cultivation system of “the self” relate to practitioners’ collective memory of “China.” For example, phenomenology studies perception through memory, imagination, emotion and bodily movement—which may also help explain why non-Chinese practitioners, or practitioners not from China, also share such visions of “China”?

As noted, evidence shows both groups of Chinese business immigrants and Chinese Falun Gong immigrants are economically well-integrated in North America. It is unknown if this can be applied to their social or cultural integration. My second suggestion is that the data collection of socio-cultural integration from non-Falun Gong

Chinese immigrants is needed in order to compare and contrast with Chinese Falun Gong immigrants. A comparative analysis will explain if the degree of integration has influenced Falun Gong practitioners and those Chinese immigrants who hold different attitude toward homeland conflicts.

Scholars in the field of diaspora studies often link to the differing notions of nation-states. Among others, Clifford (1997a) argues that the different conceptualization of time and space forces us to reexamine the borders of nation-states. Gilroy (2003) argues that the black diasporic identity has shaped Western modernity in order to understand how “diasporas” can be marginalized across nation-states borders. Chun (2001) draws on Gilroy’s work to argue, that although the Chinese economic border has been reformed internally and opened externally, this does not mean that the social and cultural borders have been transcended. This argument is further exemplified in the title of Chun’s article “There Ain’t No Black Atlantic in Cultural China” (2001). In this regard, we have to wonder, can we see Falun Gong as a counter-culture that has the potential to influence China’s domestic political struggles?

Benedict Anderson’s well-known concept of the “imagined community” (1983) on nationalism establishes a close link between the process of identification and the process of nation-state building. In his later publication, “Exodus,” Anderson (1994:327) mentions the example of the Tiananmen Square massacre where financial and other support for the democracy movement came from many Chinese not resident in China. Drawing on Acton’s quote “exile is the nursery of nationality” (1994:315) Anderson argues the growing mass migration and mass communications make “today’s long-distance nationalism strikes one as a probably menacing portent for the future”

(1994:327). Tölölyan also cites the example from Sun Yat-Sen to point out: “Diasporas are sometimes the source of ideological, financial, and political support for national movements that aim at a renewal of the homeland” (1991:5). As noted in Chapter One, Sun was a nationalist-in-exile who had successfully mobilized Chinese diaspora for support and became one of the greatest leaders of modern China.

Now, there is no need to exaggerate the “revolutionary” role of Falun Gong. For one, even though Falun Gong has been politicized, they firmly refuse the label of a political entity. Second, not every scholar agrees that Falun Gong’s massive and cohesive oppositional movement to the CCP can be seen as a threat in China’s politics.

Ownby (2008b) and Palmer (2007), who study Falun Gong as a millenarian socio-religious movement, tend to see Falun Gong as a potential threat to the Chinese government. As Ownby concludes in his book: “This volume argues that Chinese religion needs to figure prominently in our rethinking and rewriting of China’s modern history, as well as in our reflections on China’s future, as the qigong boom and the rise and fall of Falun Gong leave little doubt as to religion’s power to heal, to motivate, to mobilize, and to unsettle China’s rules” (2008b:235). Yet, scholars like Tong (2009) and Zhao (2003), may argue the degree of Falun Gong’s influence has been overestimated. As noted, by revealing the Chinese regime’s coercive capacity to punish dissent, Tong argues modernization has not weakened the Chinese state’s central control or strengthened local autonomy, not even when the Chinese government has been facing many social challenges such as Falun Gong.

On the other hand, we know Falun Gong, in both indigenous and diasporic contexts, participate in high levels of internal and external communication through

cyberspace with financial and technical support. Hence I suggest the theoretical focus on long-distance nationalism (Anderson 1994) may help to understand how a diaspora group transforms their “imagined community” into transnational actions? Do Chinese diaspora politics present as a nationalist challenge to the Chinese state? These analyses may provide a more complete picture of contemporary China. Furthermore, the theoretical focus on nationalism can offer broader analysis of identity formations—it may include more crucial forms of identity construction such as class and gender—which this thesis is unable to carry out. In the long run, it would provide a better understanding of the “nature” of a diaspora community and the mutual relationship between states and migration.

We Know about Ethical Dilemmas. Can We Talk?

This thesis begins with my fieldwork experience. I hope it offers an appealing way to read about anthropology’s relationship to the people it studies—and particularly its relationship with the “oppressed.” I want to come full circle at the end of this thesis by invoking the questions of anthropology’s ethical responsibility.

In a way, this thesis project grew out of my Honours Research Paper (HRP). I argued for a greater acceptance (not tolerance) for cultural diversity; yet back in my mind I knew my HRP did not address many fundamental questions: Where do we draw the line between what is acceptable and what is intolerable in a multicultural society? Does the true meaning of multiculturalism mean that we should allow certain brutal cultural practices under the name of “diversity”? I became increasingly curious about the issues of human rights. I had the opportunity to gain access to Falun Gong, and I perceived Falun Gong as a human rights activist group that can further advance my understanding

in a more grounded idea of human rights. Unfortunately, I found I was faced with even more questions.

As noted in the introductory chapter, I had distanced myself from the fieldwork for four months. Given that this is my first ethnographic research and the project about Falun Gong is a study of an oppressed group who may modify their actions according to social contexts, I have thus experienced that the “reality” in fieldwork is quite complicated and contradictory. The dilemma has become a part of my everyday life, even when I am not doing fieldwork. I was never “in”, nor am I really “out.” As also noted, the challenge I confronted in this fieldwork is not exclusive to me. It is a common situation faced by most researchers who have conducted fieldwork among the Falun Gong practitioners. As Frank (2004) points out, the emerging scholarly discourse on the Falun Gong generally seeks a place for the practice in the wider context of Chinese history, but without resorting to sensationalism. Most scholars express empathy toward Falun Gong members, yet at the same time often publicly distance themselves from Falun Gong. It is like walking on a thin line “between being too controversial and gaining a professional reputation from writing articles and presenting papers on hot topics” (Frank 2004:247).

During the four-month break, as I searched for my role in this project, I asked myself what anthropology means to me. My question lead me to remember myself as a fresh university student reading ethnographies, Clifford Geertz’s *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) and Vincent Crapanzano’s *Tuhami* (1985), among others. Anthropologists’ ability to portray human life with “scientific facts” fascinated me. Later it came to be a disappointment when I learned that a serious massacre occurred in Bali and Geertz only mentioned it in a footnote. Even though Crapanzano wanted to help

Tuhami's sufferings, Crapanzano finds that we can only understand another individual in a social context. After anthropologists published the works about the people they studied, what's left for them?

Of course, things were very different then. Today we see anthropologists working with the people they study. For example, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) is advocating that anthropology must be politically committed and ethically grounded. On the other hand, scholars like Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Elsass question such ideals in their article "Anthropological Advocacy: A Contradiction in Terms?" (1990). As suggested by the title, they argue advocacy is incompatible with anthropology. Many of their arguments are based on their fieldwork experiences with the Arhuacos, an indigenous group in northern Colombia. Arhuacos asked Hastrup and Elsass to help gain foreign aid. Hastrup and Elsass hesitated as they were concerned about the political situation with the Bureau of Indigenous Affairs, and they wondered why the Arhuacos lawyers, linguists, anthropologists, and officials could not advocate for themselves. Moreover, they questioned whether they could really understand the complex Arhuacos' situation as they noticed members of Arhuaco were divided into "traditionalists" and "modernists" who do not share the same vision on how to improve their situations. In their dilemma, supporting one group means neglecting another group. Favouring one group will problematize the representativeness of the Arhuaco group and further jeopardize anthropology's credibility. In order to distinguish "objectivity" from "subjectivity" Hastrup and Elsass differentiate between anthropological knowledge and the knowledge of advocacy. To them, the advocate discourse is a "subjective" representation. They argue anthropologists should remain "neutral" to gain a comprehensive unbiased picture.

Contrary to the claim that advocacy is incompatible with anthropology, Scheper-Hughes argues, "If we cannot begin to think about social institutions and practices in moral or ethical terms, then anthropology strikes me as quite weak and useless" (1995:410). Scheper-Hughes rejects the so-called "neutral" and "objective" anthropology as she argues, "noninvolvement was, in itself, an 'ethical' and moral position" (1995:419) to point out researchers are always biased. Since "objectivity" and "neutrality" are impossible, Scheper-Hughes argues that it is more important to consider that "we can do the best we can with the limited resources we have at hand: our ability to listen and to observe carefully and with empathy and compassion" (1995:418).

I read these articles prior to my fieldwork. At the time I could not understand why Hastrup and Elsass had difficulties taking sides if they already recognized the Arhuaco's struggles. Even though I was skeptical that every anthropologist would agree upon the same moral value system, I supported Scheper-Hughes's effort in attempting to make anthropology more ethically grounded. When I began my fieldwork, I was made inevitably aware of the complex, ambiguous nature of human reality. One of the difficulties I found was that it is impossible to comprehend all contexts of the Falun Gong, because it is impossible to engage in conversation with every practitioner during fieldwork. One way in which I was prevented from engaging is because of the differing ways each practitioner views my identity and interprets my position in their group.

As an "insider" of Chinese descent and an "outsider" (not a Chinese citizen and not being a Falun Gong practitioner), my identities have impacted this ethnographic research in several ways. The most beneficial one is the language and to some Chinese Falun Gong practitioners I was perceived as someone whose identity is "politically

correct.”³⁵ For these reasons they felt more freely able to discuss their opinions and attitudes toward non-Falun Gong Chinese people with me. But there were practitioners who perceived me as being somewhat distant because we do not share the same historical and Falun Gong practice experiences. To say I did not expect potential miscommunications and misunderstanding prior to the fieldwork is not true. But when it occurred, it was difficult to cope and accept.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, it was in the middle of the Shen Yun show when I fully understood the differences and similarities between the Falun Gong practitioners and myself. It came to my realization that being “in-between” may provide me with a unique position to study Falun Gong. We are, after all, in some aspects culturally Chinese people and immigrants in Canada. I realized in order to understand Falun Gong practitioners’ perspectives I must first recognize our different ways of perception, further analyze what sort of themes the practitioners find important, and then discuss these with the informants throughout interviews. I would not have discovered this if I had not returned to the field. In the end, the four-month reflexive period was not a waste of time. From my personal experience, reading my fieldwork diary and writing ethnographies are good ways to reflect on the learning process. Once I identified my own position, I was able to gain knowledge with the benefit of hindsight.

Meanwhile, I have asked myself how this thesis project would be different if I had become a Falun Gong practitioner. My answer is that even though it is easy to pinpoint the problem of self-serving rhetoric, there are always problems in objectivity (Scheper-Hughes 1995). For example, scholars have pointed out during the “propaganda war”

³⁵ As a relatively young Taiwanese-Canadian who has been living in Canada nearly twenty years, I am unlikely to have any profound relationship with China.

between the Chinese state and Falun Gong, that the “evidence” produced by both parties are mutually problematic (Ownby 2008b, Palmer 2007, Tong 2009) and neither of them is free from the criticism of dissenting voices (Kavan 2008, Zhao 2003). By drawing on Ownby’s (2008a) argument which points out the problem with source credibility, I suggest when examining Falun Gong’s controversies, the discursive debates over objectivity have shifted the focus away from the fundamental issue of Falun Gong’s persecution. Although the topic of the Falun Gong could be seen as rather politically sensitive and credibility problematic and there is always a risk that one misreads scholarly works, at the same time, this thesis has demonstrated that Falun Gong’s organizational structures and strategies have evolved and will most likely be evolving in the future. The point here is not that scholars should not study Falun Gong; rather, sometimes debates are more about a claim in academic authority (Chow 1993) than about Falun Gong.

Prior to the Falun Gong incident on April 25 of 1999, almost no scholars had paid attention to Falun Gong (Ownby 2008b). After all, the crackdown on Falun Gong is what has generated academic interests. It is also the anti-Falun Gong campaign in China that has allowed Falun Gong to use its diasporic role to perform anti-CCP activism to exert pressure on China’s domestic political arena. In dealing with the Falun Gong controversy, we must not lose sight of the Falun Gong members themselves. While “outsiders” are primarily concerned about the validity of the Chinese government’s accusations, practitioners are more concerned about the sources of their oppression. No matter how we personally define Falun Gong and evaluate the credibility of Falun Gong, it is important

to remember the political consequences that practitioners have to suffer. Ownby sums it up best (2008b:230):

[H]owever we may personally react to Li Hongzhi's writings and whatever political course the Falun Gong movement may have taken since 1999, large numbers of perfectly normal people have been able to find spiritual significance in the scriptures and corporal technologies offered by Falun Dafa. We can decide that Falun Gong is not for us, but refusal to respect the beliefs of others is at best disinterest—callous disinterest when the beliefs are used to justify persecution—and at worst bigotry.

To engage this thesis in comparative analyses on theories relating to Chinese diaspora, the intention is to illustrate that there is no single theory, nor can a methodological approach encompass the diverse experiences of the overseas Chinese. The Falun Gong diaspora is just one among a myriad of Chinese migration experiences not yet covered by the existing scholarship in diaspora studies. I hope this thesis puts forward a number of starting points for an elaboration of the notion of Chinese diaspora. Anthropologists' ability to listen and to observe carefully (Scheper-Hughes 1995) and anthropology's relation to community-based studies, leaves me optimistically believing that it is within our capability to be sensibly engaged with, and critically reflect on, human phenomena, even if we are not always certain about positioning or politics at play.

I first walked into this ethnographic research with the expectation that this project was about human rights. I finished my fieldwork with the realization that it is a matter of who defines it and why. If Falun Gong's anti-Chinese Communist campaign can be considered as human rights fight for freedom of religion and if China's anti-Falun Gong campaign can be seen as human rights fight for cultural diversity, then the definitions of human rights, based on my understanding, is relatively fluid and strategic (see Englund

2006). It is elucidated by practice rather than knowledge. In the end, Falun Gong has taught me to respect people who perform their passions, who transform their ideas into actions. They might have been disappointed and they might even have been afraid, yet again and again, they fight tirelessly.

The story of Falun Gong diaspora is one of Chinese-Canadians' multiple stories. The story of Chinese-Canadian is a story of Canada's multiculturalism—a geopolitical space we all have shared, a policy to which we all have been contributing in building Canada, and a place that we all call home. These are their stories; these are our stories.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

The Chinese-Language Version:

- 1) 甚麽时候以及如何来到加拿大的?
- 2) 刚到加拿大时的印象?
- 3) 甚麽时候以及如何接触到法轮功? 成为学员的过程?
- 4) 身为一位加籍中国人, 加拿大与中国对你而言有甚麽样的意义? 哪个是你的家? 何谓家?
- 5) 你心目中"理想中国"应该是怎样的? 如果以後法轮功在中国情势好转了会想住那里吗?
- 6) 住加拿大的你是如何得知法轮功在中国的现况?
- 7) 觉得大众应该从哪个角度来了解法轮功?
- 8) 神韵那晚我看到观众席以西人为多, 为何没有更多的中国人来观赏?

The English Translation:

- 1) When and how did you come to Canada?
- 2) What was your first impression of Canada?
- 3) When and how did you encounter Falun Gong? How did you become a practitioner?
- 4) As a Chinese-Canadian, what do China and Canada mean to you? Which one is your home? What does "home" mean to you?
- 5) Can you describe if you have a picture of an "ideal China" in your mind? If the situation of Falun Gong is improved in China, would you move to there?
- 6) How do you receive information about the current situation in China while living in Canada?
- 7) How or from which angle should the public understand Falun Gong?
- 8) At the ShenYun performance, I noticed that there was a greater Western presence in the audience than Chinese. Is there any reason why Chinese in Canada are less likely to join this event?