

# From Military Officer to Refugee

*Written Statement by Falun Gong Practitioner Hu Zhiming*

Congressional-Executive Committee on China Hearing: Falun Gong – Review and Update, December 18, 2012

I wish to express a heart-felt thank you to Chairman Smith and Co-chairman Brown for holding this important hearing. I am truly honored to be your guest and hope that my experiences below will be helpful to you.

I have organized my written testimony into four sections.

- 1) Personal experiences of finding and practicing Falun Gong, both before and after the persecution.
- 2) Resistance to the persecution.
- 3) Details of three instances of detention over 8 years and two months.
- 4) Observations on how practitioners' resistance to the persecution has rendered it unsuccessful and how it cannot be sustained for much longer.

## 1) Personal Experiences of Finding and Practicing Falun Gong

I was born in northeast China, Liaoning Province, in the middle of the Cultural Revolution, in 1972. Because my father had been labeled a Rightist, the first fourteen years of my life were spent living on different farms with my parents and three older brothers, where we received “re-education” through manual labor. I vividly remember as part of the re-education posters depicting Confucius as a ferocious monster and liar when he was criticized by the CCP in its political activity. I also remember being terribly cold. Our clothes were always tattered and I believe that because of this, I had a runny nose, congested sinuses and horse breathing for my entire life.

My views on Confucius and the cultural legacy he represents, as well as my nasal condition dramatically changed when I first started practicing Falun Gong in November, 1997. At that time I had already earned a B.S. in Radar and a M.S. in Informational Technology from the Air Force Engineering University in Xi’An City. I was living and working at the Institute of Military Training Equipment under the Air Force Headquarters in Beijing. Although I was an Officer in the military and enjoyed a good lifestyle, I felt empty. Chinese people as a whole knew little of our cultural heritage, which had been systematically destroyed by the CCP through its many political activities. Still, very few people, if any, believed in Communist ideology, either. I believed there was more to life than material pursuit.

My older brother, who was living in San Francisco, mailed the main book of Falun Gong, Zhuan Falun, to me. I immediately discovered that this practice represented a precious opportunity for any individual to raise their spirit, as well as the best opportunity for society to stabilize and return to a level where ethical behavior was cherished. In these

early weeks of practice, the most memorable experiences were the inexplicable healing of my life-long respiratory and sinus condition as well as dramatic improvement in my outlook of the world. The military bureaucracy is extremely politicized and corrupt, with bribery and embezzlement being the norm. By adjusting my behavior to Falun Gong's guiding principles of Truthfulness, Compassion and Tolerance, by taking personal interest more lightly and by striving to be unaffected by others wronging me, I felt lightness in my spirit and in my step. Work and relationships went more smoothly and I found a happiness I had never experienced.

I benefited greatly at this time from the veteran Falun Gong practitioners at the practice site within the Air Force Command University, which was across the street from my campus. 40 to 50 Air Force officers or professors regularly attended the morning exercises.

At this time, 1998-1999, Falun Gong practice sites were everywhere. Just about every morning, when I left my campus for errands around Beijing, I would see scores, even hundreds of people practicing the Falun Gong exercises in parks or grassy boulevards.

## 2) My Resistance to the Persecution

Starting in April of 1999, the situation changed dramatically. After the "4-25 Incident," in which as many as 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners appealed to the central government to, among other things, release Falun Gong practitioners detained in Tianjin city and stop publishing articles defaming Falun Gong, most workplaces and housing units around Beijing put pressure on people to stop practicing Falun Gong. Nearly all of the 40-50 Air Force officers and professors in my practice group continued, however.

By June, the situation was more tense. China had sought to have Mr. Li Hongzhi extradited from the United States. Mr. Li published a short article in response but many practitioners were not able to read it as the regular channels among practitioners had been disrupted. Perhaps members of the Falun Dafa Buddha Research Society had already been detained. Perhaps in some areas the Internet was already blocked. I did not know the exact reason but I printed this and several other subsequent articles by Mr. Li from the Minghui.org, a website founded by US – based practitioners. I distributed copies to the military officers.

By mid-June, the Minghui website was blocked and I had to circumvent the blockade using techniques that most computer users would be unable to use. At this time we also lost our practice site as a regulation had been passed prohibiting military personnel from practicing Falun Gong. We tried to practice outside the Air Force compound but were usually forced to disperse by public security.

On July 13, Mr. Li published another short article. I was again able to print and make copies of it but by this time there were few people left to give it to. They no longer came out to the practice sites and I lost contact with them from that point on.

On July 20, when the practice was officially banned, the whole country seemed to be on edge. I later learned that not only all military personnel, but even all workplaces and

housing units across the country ordered all people to watch CCTV news programming that explained the ban on Falun Gong. Even people who had never heard of Falun Gong were ordered to watch it. The widespread reaction was initially one of shock and curiosity.

Already relatively sheltered because I was living on a military compound, in the next two or three months I had very little contact with other practitioners. I left Beijing for several weeks in August and September for a military exercise and when I returned the situation was the same. I decided to bypass the Internet blockade again to find out news from the Minghui website. I learned that thousands of practitioners from around the country had been pouring into Beijing to appeal the government ban. I also learned that there had already been cases of abuse, including practitioners being tortured to death.

I learned that the burden on Beijing practitioners was immense because hotels would not give rooms to appealing practitioners from out of town, and, more over, there were updates on the increasing gravity of the situation that the out-of-towners needed to hear. I realized that my skills on the computer were quite valuable at this time and took it upon myself to share these with other practitioners.

By the beginning of 2000, the situation among practitioners had changed dramatically. It had gone from one of shock, disbelief and confusion to one of urgency and clarity. The persecution was getting more and more serious, with deaths and accounts of abuse mounting. We needed to be proactive.

Then-UN Ambassador Kofi Annan was scheduled to visit Beijing in March, 2000. I agreed to assist in a plan to collect signatures from practitioners around the country for a petition that would ask him to intervene. As my days were generally quite busy on the military compound I knew I needed more time to accomplish this task and in early March decided to leave, with no notice.

The political affairs committee of my workplace found out and acted right away. They had always known I was a practitioner but were loath to report me or even put a lot of pressure on me. As the military and political organs are different entities, they chose to bide their time with the many officers in their ranks who practiced Falun Gong. They did not want the responsibility of transforming practitioners, (who posed no threat to their organization, and usually, as in my case, were model employees,) and yet, at the same time, did not want the political blemish of having a Falun Gong practitioner. When I left, however, they needed to report my status as a Falun Gong practitioner and, now, one who was missing.

They looked at the records of my apartment landline and within one weeks time were able to find me in the act of exchanging signatures for the Kofi Annan petition. They took me back to my workplace where the Air Force Deputy Commander criticized my boss over my situation.

They held me for more than two months at an Air Force base outside of Beijing. I stayed in a bunker and was watched 24 hours a day by 4 soldiers at any given time. The soldiers respected me because I was an officer but they were ordered to show me endless hours of

brainwashing programs. I rationally explained why all of the programs were false and how they had not convinced me to stop practicing.

Seeing that they couldn't convince me to quit practicing along these lines, officers attempted to appeal to me on ideological grounds, stating, "As a Master's degree holder you are a member of the Communist Party? As a military officer you should be especially clear ideologically. How could a military officer not be an atheist?" I asked for a piece of paper and wrote, "Then I quit the Communist Party."

They then showed me a report that the Central Government had written on Falun Gong prior to banning it. It estimated the number of practitioners around the country to be 80 million which was later lowered to 60 million for the reason that limited the effect. The officers then argued, "But you are still a military officer. Think about it. If so many people are practicing, including military officers, and they are not ideologically clear, how can our military continue to function properly?" I wrote, "then I won't be an officer anymore."

Having failed to transform me, 4 armed officials escorted me back to my hometown, Dandong, Liaoning Province, in May. In Dandong, they registered my civilian status with local authorities as a matter of medical discharge. They did not mention Falun Gong as doing so would have placed the burden of transformation on the local authorities, who would then have insisted that the Air Force be in charge of transforming me. This fact is illustrative of the means of the Communist Party system to carry out the persecution of Falun Gong. Because the Communist Party decreed Falun Gong to be illegal, it put pressure on the military and all levels of government to carry out the decree. No level of government wanted the burden of transforming Falun Gong practitioners as it was expensive and exhaustive, but if they did not they could lose favor with higher authorities who would, in turn, lose favor with the Central Government. It was often easier to look the other way.

I stayed with my family for ten days in Liaoning Province but then returned to Beijing. As my records as a Falun Gong practitioner were only within the Air Force, I felt relatively free as a civilian. I met with several Beijing practitioners who were skilled in computers as I was. We decided that we needed to share our expertise with others around the country so as to create a network of people that could pass information to each other. More importantly, Minghui and other media would spread the blocked information to the international society, exposing the evil activity of the CCP. The free flow of information, we realized, was most feared by the Communist Party because it was the most important element to withstanding and exposing the persecution.

Travelling around China was difficult and complicated. Out of safety concerns my one companion and I could not contact many practitioners. We started with people we knew to be genuine practitioners, and then asked them to organize small meetings with 5 to 15 others who might possess the necessary technical expertise. Between May and October of 2000, we established viable lines of communication between Minghui and trained practitioners in at least seven cities from all different regions.

Through our efforts, timely news of practitioner detentions, abuse and deaths were reported on the Internet. In time the postings became detailed, including the names, addresses and phone numbers of the perpetrators. It was found, the years that followed, that as more and more information exposing the persecution was published, the pressure on local practitioners became less. Minghui also proved to be invaluable as a resource for practitioners to learn from each other about matters related to personal cultivation and matters of faith and courage.

### 3) Incarceration

Our successes came to a halt on October 4, in the early dawn hours, when a group of ten police officers knocked on my Shanghai hotel door. I yelled loudly so as to alert two other practitioners in nearby rooms. They managed to escape the hotel but the officers detained me and found evidence of the Minghui website on my laptop.

I went through a show trial and was charged with “using a cult to destabilize society.” They held me at a detention center for 26 months instead of placing me in prison because they wanted to find more evidence against me, an ex-military official with expertise in information technology. They wanted to frame me as a spy working with an overseas brother and possibly the American government. They wanted to build a story around me that would give credence to some of the propaganda that claimed Falun Gong was an established organization with a lot of funding from hostile overseas forces with political motives.

They were unable to collect any other evidence that would help those claims and sent me to the Shanghai Tilan Qiao Prison for 22 more months. Conditions were considerably worse in the prison. Whereas before I was beaten for refusing to wear the detention center uniform, I was still permitted to practice Falun Gong exercises and read Falun Gong books. In the prison there was no chance for Falun Gong exercises. They tried their utmost to “transform” me.

There were approximately 150 prisoners in my division and about 50 were Falun Gong practitioners. Very vicious criminals with sentences normally over 15 years beat us regularly. Their sentences could be reduced if they kept practitioners from practicing or even successfully transform us. The guards did not beat us themselves but further incited the criminals by placing one practitioner and two criminals in a three-square meter cell. As a practitioner I could withstand being in such a small space, but a violent criminal became even more violent under such circumstances.

In addition there were times when I was forced to watch brainwashing programs at deafening volumes, with the TV screen only one meter from my face, for 16 or more hours a day. They deprived me of sleep as well.

Under these conditions I was approaching rock bottom, so I started a hunger strike that would last from August to October of 2004. They bound my limbs and torso to a hospital bed so that I could not move at all. They inserted a feeding tube in through my nose to my

stomach. I was in this position for over a month, during the hottest time of the year, unable to move, itchy from sweat as well as weeks of defecation matter buildup. They also injected me with an unknown substance that would give me headaches that I felt put me on the brink of insanity. During this time they also drew large quantities of blood and routinely examined my body.

I survived my prison term and was released in October, 2004, having served a total of four years in the detention center and then prison. I lived in my hometown in Liaoning for six months but decided to not burden my parents and family members, who were not wealthy, any longer. I moved to Beijing to seek employment and resume work with practitioners there to counteract the persecution.

Several plain-clothed policeman saw me distributing a DVD of the 9-Commentaries to someone on the street in early September, giving rise to a chase and eventually capture. Another show trial ensued and I was again sentenced to four years in prison on Sept 23, 2005. I entered Beijing Haidian District Detention Center that was even more vicious than my experiences in Shanghai. Knowing the difficulties involved with a hunger strike, it took me some time to summon the will to sustain one. But by May 13, 2006, I was once again protesting my detention with a hunger strike. Guards shackled me to a hospital bed for six months straight and, similar to my experience in Shanghai, force-fed me through a tube in my nose, and injected me with drugs that numb the nerves. They took my blood samples and performed comprehensive physical examinations from time to time but never did they administer medical treatment for my ailments. I didn't know anything about organ harvesting at that time. Now looking back, I am scared, as they could be checking my candidacy for organ harvesting.

In six months time I was transferred to the Jinzhou Prison Hospital in Liaoning Province. They no longer needed to shackle me as by this time I was but a skeleton on the brink of death and totally immobile. The force feeding continued, as did the painful injections and oddly placed medical exams. During the next three years, until my term expired, my weight fluctuated. For months at a time I would grow bloated and fat, seemingly due to a different force-feeding diet. Then I would become skeletal once again when they denied me food.

I narrowly survived more than three years of such treatment, languishing on either a hospital bed or a wheel chair, until my term ended in September 2009. Hospital doctors advised my family that I would likely die and that, even if I didn't, I would be permanently disabled for the rest of my life.

#### 4) The Persecution Has Failed

The Communist Party's persecution has failed to wipe out Falun Gong from China and it can not be sustained for much longer. I make this assertion based on observations of the greater situation as well as personal experience.

For the ten years I lived in China under the persecution, I spent eight years and two months in custody, and over half of this time languishing alone. After my three releases from

custody I lived for a time with my parents in Liaoning Province. In 2000 I saw no signs of Falun Gong practitioner activity in Liaoning Province. In 2004 I saw attempts by local practitioners to place posters and signs about the facts of the persecution around my hometown. The attempts were noteworthy but they were infrequent, sporadic and were destroyed almost immediately. In 2009, however, I saw copious posters, signs, flyers and informational DVDs. Moreover, the posters hung in public places had been there for a long time, with ink faded from the sun and paper crisp from dried rain. I believe that, like my hometown in Liaoning, even the CCP continues to order people to persecute Falun Gong, more and more people know the truth of the persecution. That is, more and more people see through the once-widespread lies that substantiated the decision to ban the practice.

I make the above assertion because I have also seen the efforts by people like myself, proficient in computer technology and proxy circumnavigation software, breed success in making Minghui an accurate, timely and truthful tool to expose the persecution.

Finally, I make the above assertion based on my personal experience. When the doctors released me, an immobile skeleton in a wheelchair, to my parents and brothers in October 2009, they said I would likely die. For this reason the 610 Office and other public security personnel didn't bother my home. But I resumed my cultivation in Falun Dafa, studying the teachings, reflecting on matters of my spirit, and practicing the Falun Gong exercises. In two months time I could walk around my house. In three months time I could perform strengthening exercises outdoors. I stand here before you today, three years later, almost completely healed with no visible trace of the depraved state the persecution left me in. This is a testament to the power and wonder of this spiritual practice. It also perhaps helps you understand how I could withstand 8 years of hell and persevere in my faith.

For a person of faith, his conscience, more than the physical body, is his life. This persecution has managed to take away physical bodies but it has not managed to shake the conscience of the people. I believe we are now seeing the people of China wake up to the facts of this persecution, to the facts of the Communist Party's wickedness and, soon, to a day when our conscience is free.

I thank you and the great nation you represent immensely for your efforts to bring justice to China.