

# Falun Gong in China: Review and Update

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Statement by Caylan Ford

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I would like to thank the Congressional-Executive Commission on China for organizing this hearing and inviting me to testify today.

As you will learn from the other witnesses today, hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners have been extrajudicially imprisoned in China over the last 13 years. Untold thousands have been killed. This is arguably the largest single population of prisoners of conscience in the world. But statistics alone cannot capture the gravity of this campaign, nor its impact on individuals, families, and communities. So I would like to begin my testimony with a story about one man whose experience is representative.

This is the story of Qin Yueming, a father and businessman from Yichun city in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang. Qin learned about Falun Gong in the spring of 1997, when he was 33 years old. One evening, while visiting a friend's home, he practiced Falun Gong's one-hour meditation for the first time and borrowed a copy of its central text, *Zhuan Falun*.

Soon, Qin's family and friends noticed that his temperament changed for the better; he was no longer irritable, he gave up drinking and stopped quarrelling with his wife. Neighbors recalled that he took it upon himself to repair the potholes on Lixin street where he lived. Witnessing these changes, Qin's wife also began

practicing Falun Gong, as did the couple's two daughters and several of their neighbors.



Qin Yueming

In October 1999, Qin traveled to a local petitioning office to appeal against the persecution of Falun Gong, then only in its third month. He was sent immediately to the Yichun city forced labor camp for two years. Not long after his release, in April 2002, security agents acting under the direction of the local 610 office forced their way into Qin's house, taking him, his wife, and their 15-year-old daughter into custody. In a Kafkaesque trial in which the judge followed the instructions of Communist Party apparatchiks, Qin was sentenced to ten years at the Jiamusi prison.

At Jiamusi, he endured regular torture and humiliation as guards sought to coerce him into renouncing his spiritual faith. Former prisoners recounted that he was tied to a "tiger bench," suspended with ropes, deprived of sleep, and stripped naked as guards poured freezing water over him.

By early 2011, Qin was finally approaching the end of his sentence. He was one year away from being released and, hopefully, reunited with his wife and now grown daughters.

But that day would never come. One year earlier, the party's central 610 Office initiated a new, three-year campaign to intensify the ideological "reeducation" of Falun Gong adherents across the country. Communist party websites in every province of China carried details of the campaign, which set quotas for each region specifying the percentage of Falun Gong adherents who were to be "transformed"—a process of coercive and often violent indoctrination that ends when the victim renounces Falun Gong. The 610 office mandated that authorities every last Falun Gong practitioner in their locales to reeducation-through-transformation sessions (Falun Gong practitioners are estimated to still number in the millions in China). If the practitioners did not renounce, they could be sentenced to forced labor or prison terms.

Those already detained were also targets of the new campaign. On February 21 2011, the Jiamusi prison where Qin Yueming was held formed a new "strict transformation ward." According to numerous reports from sources inside China, they were instructed to achieve a transformation rate of 85%. At least nine Falun Gong practitioners were transferred to the ward. Within two weeks, three of them were dead.



Photograph of Qin Yueming's body taken on Feb 26, 2011

Qin was the first victim. Less than five days after the establishment of the strict transformation ward, Qin's wife received a call from the prison informing her that her husband had died, ostensibly of a heart attack. When she arrived at the prison, she found his entire back covered in deep purple bruises, with dried blood around his nose and mouth. When pressed for an explanation on how he sustained these injuries the prison guards declined to answer, but other inmates relayed that Qin had been violently force-fed the night before. They believed the feeding tube might have punctured his lung.

Days later another Falun Gong practitioner in the same ward was killed. 48-year-old Yu Yungang had been abducted in February 2009 and sentenced to eight years at the Jiamusi prison for practicing Falun Gong. He died on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2011. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, the third man was killed for refusing to renounce Falun Gong: 55-year-old Liu Chungjing.

News of the deaths at Jiamusi prison were quickly relayed via an underground network of Falun Gong adherents. With the help of censorship circumvention software, they published reports on websites overseas. The prison was placed under lock-down. Family members of the deceased came under intense surveillance. Qin's wife and youngest daughter were detained and interrogated, and ultimately sent to the Qianjing forced labor camp. Just two months ago, in October, seven more Falun Gong practitioners were handed prison terms ranging from 11 to 14 years, simply because they'd been caught visiting Qin's widow.

This story illustrates the continued importance accorded to the eradication of Falun Gong by the central leadership of the Communist Party, and testifies to the severity of the campaign.

Yet Qin's story does not end here. The persecution of Qin Yueming and his family was too much for his friends and neighbors in Yichun city to bear. His oldest daughter initiated a petition to authorities demanding redress and accountability for his death. Soon, the petition garnered over 15,000

signatures.<sup>1</sup>

As a point of reference, when Liu Xiaobo won the Nobel

Peace Prize for his contribution to Charter 08, the charter had about 10,000 signatures.

And this was not the only such petition in China. In Heilongjiang, Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong, Liaoning, Henan province and elsewhere, similar petitions have appeared demanding justice for Falun Gong practitioners. They have been signed by thousands of ordinary citizens, including members of the security forces. The petition for Qin Yueming's family included signatures from a guard in the prison where he was held.

The petitions do not appear to have succeeded in changing the will of central party authorities. Although many Party members believe that the suppression of Falun Gong was misguided and unnecessary, to change course now—after so much time has passed, so many human and material resources spent, and so many lives destroyed—would amount to a potentially fatal admission of Communist Party fallibility. So from the top down, the campaign grinds on.

Every year, central party authorities launch renewed efforts to eliminate Falun Gong, undermine public sympathy for the practice, and crack down on the proliferation of informational literature produced by Falun Gong practitioners.

In 2007, security czar Zhou Yongkang ordered the nation's security forces to wage a strike hard campaign against Falun Gong ahead of the 17<sup>th</sup> party congress and Beijing Olympics. References to this crackdown appeared on websites of every provincial jurisdiction in China. In the first six months of 2008, at least 8,000 Falun Gong adherents were abducted by security agents.<sup>2</sup> Many of them were sentenced to labor or prison camps; some, like the popular folk musician Yu Zhou, died within just days of detention.<sup>3</sup>

In 2009, the central CCP leadership initiated the "6521" project aimed at intensifying surveillance and suppression of Tibetans, democracy activists, and Falun Gong practitioners. The campaign was rumored to have been led by Xi Jinping, now the leader of the CCP. In



Signatures and thumbprints on a petition demanding justice for Qin Yueming's family

<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, "Urgent Action: Falun Gong Practitioners Tortured," 22 August 2012.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the pre-Olympic strike hard campaign, see Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Annual Report 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Jacobs, "China Still Presses Its Crusade Against Falun Gong." *New York Times*, 27 April 2009.

parallel, PSC member Zhou Yonkang led his own top-level CCP committee for the “Comprehensive Management of Social Order,” which exhorted security agencies to “closely watch out for a strike hard” against Falun Gong.<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, anti-Falun Gong propaganda has been largely absent from national state-run television programs and newspapers since around the time of the 16<sup>th</sup> party congress in 2002. The campaign’s continued prominence in the national media was attracting unwanted international attention to the suppression, and a new generation of leaders evidently decided that a better PR strategy was to allow the issue to fade away. But while the high profile, national propaganda campaign petered out, propaganda activities against Falun Gong at the local level have continued unabated.

Early this year, the 610 office launched a comprehensive campaign to “clean up” Falun Gong informational literature—that is, the flyers, booklets, and DVDs produced clandestinely by Falun Gong practitioners, challenging the official propaganda against the practice, and detailing the persecution suffered by adherents.<sup>5</sup> Evidence of this “clean up” campaign is found on party websites from all corners of the country this year, from Guangdong to Heilongjiang to Yunnan province. The initiative mobilized neighborhood committees to tear down Falun Gong messages plastered on “billboards, light posts, telephone poles, [and] telephone booths.” In Weifang city, authorities were required to conduct twice-daily patrols<sup>6</sup>; in Qingdao, they demanded 24-hour vigilance against Falun Gong’s posters.<sup>7</sup>

The notices also required neighborhood committees to hold study sessions to “unify their thinking” on the anti-Falun Gong work, and “step up publicity efforts” to win public opinion in the campaign. This included mobilizing local party functionaries to screen anti-Falun Gong films and go door-to-door collecting “family commitment cards”—promises from families not to support Falun Gong.<sup>8</sup> Notices from party authorities also remind citizens that they must not “listen, look, believe, or disseminate” information given to them by Falun Gong practitioners. Additional guidance of this nature is provided on local party websites. Sometimes, as is the case in Luzhai county in Guangxi province, citizens are also reminded that they are responsible for ensuring that their relatives living abroad stay away from Falun Gong.<sup>9</sup>

Within schools, students are subjected to anti-Falun Gong training sessions, and are sometimes made to watch videos of Falun Gong practitioners recanting their faith, no doubt after being coerced and possibly tortured. Those wishing to gain admission to university programs—especially at the graduate level—must first sign a pledge demonstrating that they

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<sup>4</sup> Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Annual Report 2009.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Wangu Town Communist Party Office. “Wangu Town to carry out special operations work focused on cleaning up and collecting ‘Falun Gong’ reactionary propaganda, 13 February 2012; Jinan Municipal People’s Government. “Notice to be on guard against and attack ‘Falun Gong’ reactionary propaganda activities,” February 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Weifang city Beihai Road neighborhood office. “The neighborhood office will continue to expand activities to clean up and investigate “Falun Gong” reactionary propaganda,” February 14 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Qingdao, Laoshan district neighborhood office, “Zhonghan street launches cleanup and investigation of Falun Gong propaganda activities,” 6 June 2012.

<sup>8</sup> For example, see Jingtai County People’s Government. “Township report on the progress of anti-evil religion work,” 22 March 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Luzhai county government. 2012. “Eight methods for the public to respond to the infiltration of Falun Gong evil religion reactionary propaganda,” 5 June 2012.

have the “correct attitude” on Falun Gong. In some large workplaces, employees must still gather regularly —sometimes weekly—to participate in study sessions to strengthen their resolve against Falun Gong.

The Communist Party documents published this year emphasize again that the struggle against Falun Gong is of a “long-term, acute, and complex nature,” and admonishes cadres to “overcome the paralysis of thought, and truly understand the struggle has always been an important long-term political task to grasp unremittingly.”<sup>10</sup>

Monetary rewards and punishment are employed as incentives to comply with the party’s dictates. For instance, in March of this year, authorities in Jiaonan Shandong offered 5,000 - 10,000 Yuan for assistance in locating Falun Gong’s underground printing sites.<sup>11</sup> In Tanghe County, the heads of village-level security are fined 50 Yuan for every three items of Falun Gong literature uncovered during door-to-door searches.<sup>12</sup> A party document uncovered in several geographically disparate locales exhorts authorities to create a climate in which Falun Gong are treated “like rats running across the street that everyone shouts out to smash; don’t leave them any space.”<sup>13</sup>

A party document from the Laodian township in Yunnan province dated May 15, 2010 notes that Falun Gong adherents in custody are becoming “more and more difficult to transform,” with practitioners returning to the practice with greater frequency. It further notes that Falun Gong “is fighting with us to win the masses, and the struggle to win people’s hearts is still very intense.”<sup>14</sup> A similar document released by a national organization with ties to the 610 office in August 2010 reports that the work of “transforming” Falun Gong practitioners “has encountered a new series of problems. The work is increasingly difficult, the cycle is getting longer and longer, the recidivist rate is increasing.” Party cadres in charge of the work are becoming weary, notes the document, and some had apparently had their loyalties tested. It warned “the competition against Falun Gong is the principal means of competition for the hearts and minds of the masses.”<sup>15</sup>

The continuous suppression campaigns launched against Falun Gong evince two things: first, to the senior leaders of the Communist Party, the eradication effort remains of utmost importance, and continues to command tremendous human and material resources. Recently released prisoners from China continue to report that in many detention facilities, Falun Gong practitioners comprise the majority population<sup>16</sup>; they are still singled out for abuse and

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<sup>10</sup> Weifang city Beihai Road neighborhood office, “The neighborhood office will continue to expand activities to clean up and investigate “Falun Gong” reactionary propaganda,” 14 February 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Jiaonan municipal CCP office, “Open letter concerning the clean-up and investigation of Falun Gong reactionary propaganda materials,” 27 March 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Tanghe County People’s Government. “Zhangdian town carries out special operations to control and collect ‘Falun Gong’ reactionary propaganda,” 20 February 2012.

<sup>13</sup> A typical example was published in Laiyang City, “City management unit strengthens measures to clean up of Falun Gong propaganda materials and enact punishments,” 5 March 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Chinese Communist Party Laodian Committee, “Laodian Township 2010-2012 work plan to educate, transform, and conquer key targets to solidify the overall battle,” Laodian Document No. 20, 15 May 2010.

<sup>15</sup> China Anti-Cult Association, “Properly Establish the Basic Thoughts for the Transformation-Through-Reeducation Assault and Overall Battle,” 5 August 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Smith, “Activists Suffer as China Holds on to Labour Camps,” *Deutsche-Presse Agentur*, 13 January 2011.

mistreatment, and as some of the other witnesses here will describe, there are ongoing allegations that the organs of Falun Gong prisoners of conscience are sold for transplant.

But the official communist party literature also reveals, perhaps unwittingly, that the 13-year-old campaign to defeat Falun Gong has failed; that local cadres suffer lethargy and “paralysis of thought” in pursuing the campaign, that more and more people are returning to or taking up the practice of Falun Gong, and that, despite all its efforts, the Communist Party is losing the battle for the hearts and minds of the Chinese people.