



**Between State and Body:
Religious Geopolitics, Cultivation and the Falun Gong**

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Abstract

This research analyses an ongoing struggle between continually evolving forms of the Chinese Party-State's religious geopolitics, its repression of the Falun Gong, and FLG followers' self-cultivation and strategies of resistance to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The PhD begins with a discussion of the Party-State's strategies of sovereignty and governmentality, drawing upon the works of Foucault and Agamben, and using a documentary analysis. It then examines the FLG's discursive strategies by comparing scriptures before and after the ban in 1999 to examine how collective subject formation is continually evolving in ever changing political and social contexts. The second part of the study develops Foucault's discussion about self-care in an Eastern religious context, and is based upon original ethnographic data about FLG cultivators in Dublin, Taiwan and Hong Kong (2012-14). I adopt Foucault's work on the 'care of self', which includes self-examination, self-mastery, to analyse how individuals choose teachings to guide themselves, exercise the power to modify and improve themselves, and also care for others. Through the voices of more than 62 participants and including participatory observation, the study illustrates how individual FLG followers cultivate and transform themselves into spiritual or divine beings. Both Foucault and Master Li Hongzhi, the founder of the FLG, are sceptical about hierarchical power-relationships and pastoral care. FLG cultivation is characterised by individualised actions of self-care, self-mastery and ungovernability, which challenges the Party-State's religious governmentality. In addition, the CCP's oppressive sovereignty and legitimacy are confronted by FLG's reactive 'telling-truth/saving-life' activities, which include the use of urban landscapes, the internet, media, artistic performances and the UN Human Rights system. These projects are mostly organised by individuals and are based upon global cooperation among FLG followers. The PhD demonstrates how FLG's alternative geopolitical practices of truth-telling at multiple scales, while based upon the principle of caring for others, is integrated into a perpetual and dynamic process of individualised self-cultivation.

List of Acronyms Used

CCP: The Chinese Communist Party

DPP: The Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan

FGM TV: Fang Guangming TV, based in Los Angeles (run by FLG followers)

FLG: Falun Gong

GONGO: Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization

KMT: The Chinese National People's Party in Taiwan

NPC: The National People's Congress in China

NPC-SC: The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in China

NTD TV: New Tang Dynasty Television, based in New York (run by FLG followers)

PPD: The US Congress' Political Prisoner Database

PRC: The People's Republic of China

RAB: The Religious Affairs Bureau in China

SARA: The State Administration of Religious Affairs in China

UFWD: The United Front Work Department in China

YCA: Hong Kong Youth Care Association Limited

List of Specialist and Foreign-Language Terms Used

610 Offices: As the ‘Leading Group for Handling the Falun Gong Problem’, 610 offices form part of provincial, prefecture, county, and even township level government agencies in China.

Dafa: The Great *fa* of the FLG.

De: Virtue, merit and a precious white substance according to the FLG. One can carry *de* into next lives.

Dharma: Universal law that governs the order of the universe. Divine beings are subject to the same universal principles.

Fa: Buddha law, or *dharma*, which presents the fundamental principles of the universe according to the FLG.

Fa-rectification: According to the FLG, a process of transforming the current degenerated human world into a perfect condition in the near future

Falun: The wheel of *fa* according to the FLG.

Gong: Work, skill or achievement.

Kalpas: Vast periods of time with successive transformations of the world.

Karma: A black substance one obtains when one does a bad deed, according to the FLG. *Karma* is carried into next lives.

Laojiaosuo: ‘Re-education through labour’ camps in China, in which many FLG followers have been incarcerated. CCP Public Security organs issue, re-examine and alter decisions regarding potential inmates without third-party control.

Minghui.org: The main virtual platform for exchanging cultivation experiences among FLG followers both inside and outside China.

Nomenclatura: It includes all CCP-appointed personnel who have leading positions in the Party, including in: governmental organs, educational institutions, the judicial system, enterprise, research institutions, and even religious organisations.

Parrhēsia: Speaking freely or free speech; the utterance is the commitment by the speaker to the truth of what is spoken, and the subject becomes identical to the content/subject of what one has just spoken.

Qi: The flow of universal energy moving around and through the body as a substance.

Qigong: The exercise of *qi*.

Shen Yun: Divine Performing Arts Group.

Tongxiu: Fellow FLG cultivator.

Xinxing: Mind or heart nature; moral character.

Xitong: An inter-organisational entity that coordinates the relationships between administrative units so that they are consistent with the CCP's direction and influence.

Xiulian: Cultivation.

Xiulian ren: Cultivators.

Zhen, shan and ren: Truth, compassion and forbearance. These principles are considered to be the most fundamental natures of the universe according to the FLG.

Zhengfa: *Fa*-rectification.

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Chapter 1: Between State and Body: An Introduction

On 25 December 2013, I met a 73-year old Chinese woman living in Hong Kong, who was a follower of the religious movement, the ‘Falun Gong’ (hereafter FLG). ‘Fa’ is believed to be Buddha law, or *dharma*, which presents the fundamental principles of the universe. The word Falun is the wheel of *fa*. ‘Gong’ literally refers to work, skill or achievement. After she was expelled from Mainland China as a result of her religious practice, she set up what is known as a ‘truth-telling’ site in the Hong Kong city centre, which was around three years before we met. She had been coming to this site almost every day since then. Her story about how she started and continued FLG cultivation before and after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) banned the FLG in China in 1999 reflects many significant themes that this research will explore.

When this woman was 57 years old, she had already retired and started to practice the FLG in City A¹ in 1997, after having already tried various *qigong* breathing exercises. Before retirement, she had been a geologist and went often into the mountains for her work, which she considered was the cause of the pain she was feeling in her joints. By the age of 45, she had serious health problems, including pain in her cervical vertebrae, lumbar vertebrae and knees. A doctor told her that she would not recover. This was when she started to try different *qigongs* (breathing exercises), but would later end up quitting them:

We were that kind of people who were indifferent to fame and fortune. Intellectuals are indifferent to money. They [*qigong* masters] talked about money; I felt it was vulgar, so I gave up on them gradually. Then, I started to read books about Buddhism. I felt [...] noble and virtuous, and was attracted [to them] from the heart. So I started to read more. I read Shakyamuni’s *Diamond Sūtra*.

She also described herself as a person who was attracted to spirituality in general:

¹ I have masked the name of practice sites to protect the identity of this person. I have also changed the names of other individuals for purposes of maintaining anonymity.

Originally, I was a person who loved books and travel, visiting those temples. I haven't been to Shanghai, but I have been to Tibet (laugh) [...] I have always had an interest in temples, and some affinity with Buddhism. I had been to Kumbum Monastery in Qinghai province, such a desolate place. I felt especially great. I never wanted to visit those sites with grandiose architecture, like the Great Wall, that are associated with the strong desires of modern people. I don't find them interesting.

So, she started to read Buddhist scriptures by herself, even though she did not fully understand these texts. After two months of reading these scriptures, she felt that her mind had become clear and calm, and felt a sense of elevation. With her husband, she continued to buy and read new Buddhist scriptures. One day they saw one of the FLG scriptures *China Falun Gong (revised edition)* (1993) and they bought it 'because on the cover page, the Master sat down cross-legged. This was clearly a Buddhist book. We bought it and read it'. One day, when she was doing something else while seated on the bed, her husband tried the physical exercises depicted in the images in this new book.

Suddenly [...] I felt there was a force pushing me backwards, a very strong force pushing me back towards the wall. I said [to myself]: 'What kind of exercise is this? What a powerful practice!' I immediately put my things aside, jumped forwards and joined him. From then, we have practiced [the FLG].

This woman has never attended the public lectures given by Master Li Hongzhi, the founder of the FLG, in Mainland China. By the time she learned about the FLG, Master Li was already living in New York. One day in China they saw a street sign that said 'Teaching the FLG voluntarily'. They started by joining what is known as a *fa*-study meeting, organised by FLG followers.²

We [class members] didn't ask other people's names, addresses or jobs [in the *fa*-study groups]. We asked nothing; we just felt that this *fa* is more sacred than other things. [...] I felt my whole life was [devoted to] one thing, that is, true cultivation following *dafa* [the Great *fa* of the FLG].

² According to the FLG, *fa* is a Buddha law, *dharma* or the fundamental principles of the universe. In a typical *fa*-study meeting, followers read Master Li's scriptures and share their cultivation experiences. This practice is encouraged by Master Li. See Chapter 4.

When we discussed her experiences of the government's repression, she relayed this personal story to me:

It was on the 20th of July [1999]. They [the government] took people at midnight and in the early hours of the morning. I went to the local auditorium and we heard information [about these activities] [...]. The organiser of the FLG site [in City A] was caught, an old lady called GLT, Ms. GLT, not much older than me. It was pathetic; they put an electric taser into her vagina, among other things. Her son-in-law led us in meditation and we sat cross-legged in the auditorium. At that time, those police were not hitting people yet; they took us away, one by one into the car. The car drove very far away to the suburbs, then stopped and let all of us go [...]. At that time they weren't so aggressive yet, but probably the situation in Beijing was already severe.

After the CCP banned the FLG in July 1999, this woman's husband gave up his CCP Party membership and thus his high-ranking position as a general engineer, after he was asked to choose between the Communist Party and the FLG. Since they were retired and not bound locally by their work, they decided travel to Beijing to demonstrate in support of the FLG. Unfortunately, they got caught and were imprisoned for about one week and then sent back to City A. Later, they moved to City B in June 2000 to take care of their grandchild. There, although they didn't get involved with a local FLG network, the woman was recognised accidentally on the street by officials and imprisoned. She came to know other FLG followers in prison although 'we didn't become a group'. After her time in prison, some other people she knew had computers and gave her new FLG scriptures they downloaded from the internet. So she always had new scriptures. She moved to City C, as her daughter living in Hong Kong bought a house in that city. She and her husband got caught by the police again in City C. She reflected that:

We distributed the [FLG 'truth-telling'] materials during the day, [at places] like Walmart; we put materials near more visible goods. Somebody who saw it might take it. He, my husband, stuck up [FLG 'truth-telling'] posters — he was stupid, he stuck posters along the roads. The police saw this along the road and followed the track [of FLG posters]. After a couple of days, he was caught. We were then sent to Hong Kong, without being imprisoned. But we were expelled and our Mainland Travel Permit for Hong Kong and Macao Residents was confiscated. Since then, we have

never returned, we could not. Without the travel permit, you cannot get into Mainland China. It has been three years.

This time, they were expelled to Hong Kong and were not allowed to enter mainland China again.

The story of this woman demonstrates a thoughtful and active subject, who made a number of significant choices in her life. She was constantly moving between different spiritual domains and geographical spaces. She had practiced many *qigongs*, visited different temples, tried to read Buddhist scriptures by herself, joined FLG groups and stayed with her FLG cultivation under the CCP governmental repression. Although Master Li's charisma has been cited as a main part of the FLG development (Ownby, 2008: 25), this did not appear to be significant in the life story she relayed to me (see also Junker, 2014). Her devotion to the FLG and its practices was based upon her own personal religious understandings and what she considered to be mystical experiences. Her connection to other FLG followers initially may have helped with the exchange of information and cultivation experiences, but overall this was not determinant for continuing her cultivation either before or after the 1999 repression. Despite the absence of a strict and hierarchical organisation, she kept up with FLG practices, and read and followed new scriptures (downloaded from the internet) wherever she moved to. These spiritual texts were not ancient, but continuously updated according changing social and political contexts. Her case, as well as the many others that contributed to this study, sheds light on the importance of FLG followers as dynamic subjects who constantly seek spiritual guidance independently, and use their own judgment as to what constitutes truth, true teachings or true meaning for their lives. The relationships between a subject and spiritual teachings are very dynamic and complex.

This PhD analyses the evolving responses towards the Chinese Party-State's repression of the religious movement, the FLG, by its members at political, collective and bodily scales. The development of the FLG religious movement after the Chinese

government's ban of the group in 1999 reveals an ongoing struggle between always evolving forms of Party-State governmentality and sovereignty, and FLG followers' ideas, practices and forms of self-cultivation that challenged state repression and the CCP. Through new ethnographic research that incorporates the perspectives of FLG followers practicing in Dublin, Taiwan and Hong Kong from 2012-2014, complemented by policy and discourse analyses of Chinese Party-State documents and FLG scriptures, this study contributes to empirical works by Chinese Studies scholars about the FLG as well as to theoretical concepts in political geography about religious and progressive geopolitics. Building upon Foucault's concept of 'care of the self', I document how the process and power of individual self-constitution and self-transformation can confront state sovereignty through the sovereignty of individual bodies of courage and non-compliance. In the next section (1.1), I provide a brief overview of the social and political contexts within which the FLG originally developed inside China (1992-1999) and introduce some of the group's global activities after 1999. Section 1.2 describes the main research questions of the dissertation, and Section 1.3 provides an overview of each chapter, including theoretical foundations, methodology, and data analysis.

1.1 A Brief Introduction to the Falun Gong

The world religions of Buddhism, Daoism and Islam have coexisted throughout ancient Chinese history. During the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1979, religions were faced with complete eradication by the Chinese Communist Party's regime. In the People's Republic of China (PRC), following the economic reform of 1979, religious activities have been permitted but only under strict regulation, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2. Yang Fenggang (2012: 87f.), a sociologist and a leading scholar of religion in China, divides religious organisations, personnel and activities in China into three categories according to their relationship with the PRC government: 1) a 'red market' of

legal, official religious organisations, including Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism; 2) a ‘black market’ of illegal religious organisations and activities, which now includes the Falun Gong; and 3) a ‘grey market’ of religious practices that occupy an ambiguous legal status, such as *qigong* or Mao worship. During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a boom in *qigong* practice in China (Palmer, 2007), which Yang (2012) describes as filling an unsatisfied religious ‘demand’; Leung (2002) associates it with declining support for communist ideology, along with the weakening of totalitarian social control. The FLG was established in 1992 during this boom period for *qigong* practice.

From 1979 to 1999, various *qigong* groups and their activities thrived in various public spaces and social domains, such as through group practices in parks, workshops, scientific conferences and publications for the general public (Palmer, 2007: 14). Several state institutions also contributed to the flourishing of *qigong*, including the China Qigong Sports Society, the China Medical Qigong Science Society, the International Qigong Science Federation, the China Somatic Science Research Society and the China Qigong Science Research Society (ibid: 175). *Qigong* combines various forms of breathing exercises with elements of traditional Chinese and modern Chinese cultures, including modern scientific, medical, sport and religious practices. In Chinese culture, ‘*qi*’ is understood as air, breath or energy, and is expressed in material and moving forms. With respect to the human body, *qi* is the flow of universal energy moving around and through the body as a substance (ibid: 18). *Gong* literally refers to work, skill or achievement in Chinese; in *qigong*, it refers to the exercise of *qi* (Chen, 2003: 6; Penny, 2012: 5).

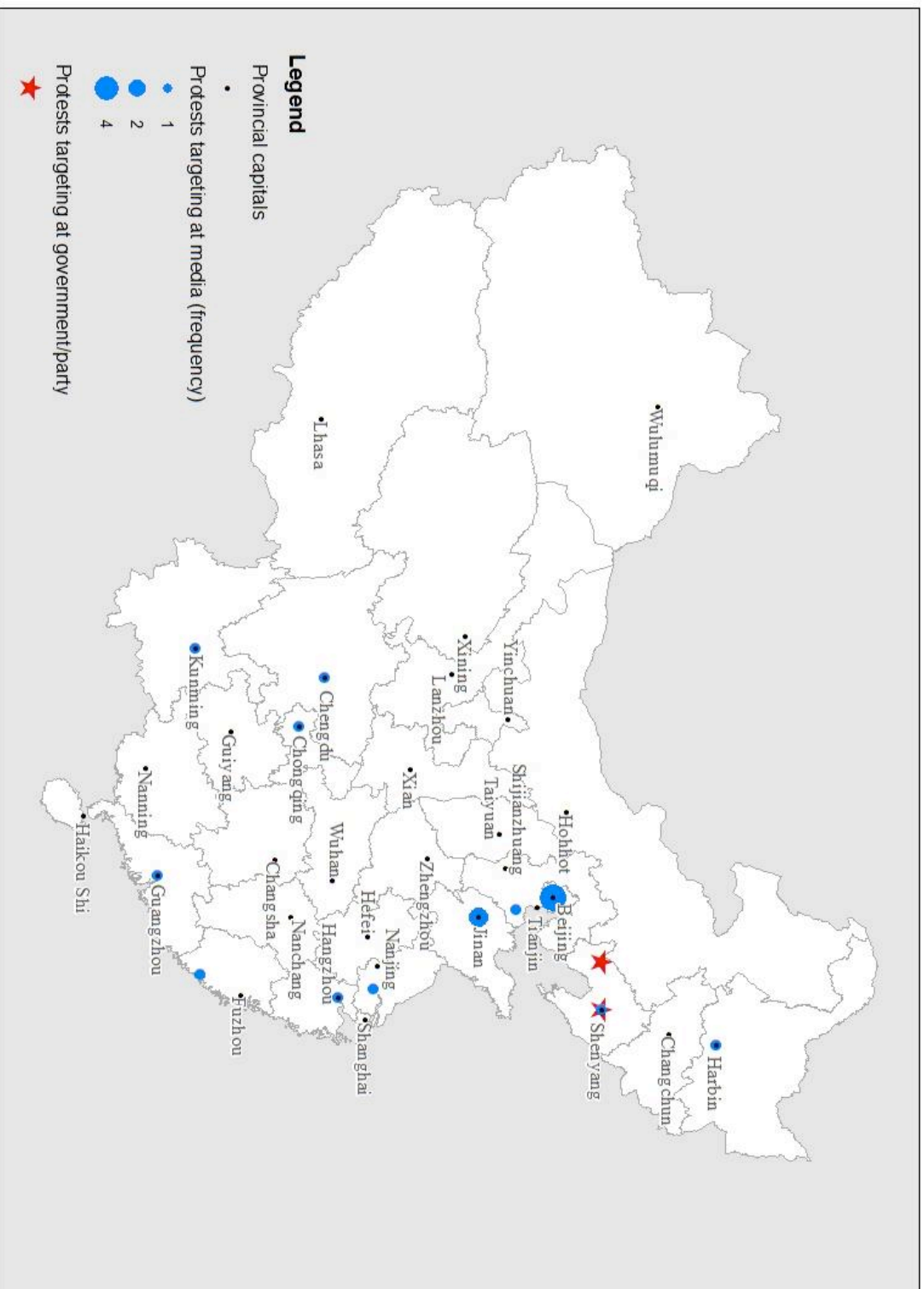
At the later stage of the *qigong* boom, Master Li Hongzhi established the Falun Gong in 1992. He introduced five sets of physical FLG exercise that are thought to activate the energy around and through the body (see Chapter 5). The first book under

Master Li's name was published in 1993, called *China Falun Gong*. This book introduced the FLG to the general public (Penny, 2012: 93). Until 1996, the FLG's membership of the Chinese Association for Research into Qigong Science illustrated the shared characteristics of the FLG with *qigong* (Penny, 2012: 50). However, Master Li later admitted that *China Falun Gong* was written similarly to other low-level writings of *qigong* groups (ibid: 96). Another book originating from Mr. Li's nine lectures in Guangzhou in December 1994, *Zhuan Falun*, was published on 4 January 1995. In *Zhuan Falun*, Li regards Falun Gong cultivation as a higher spiritual practice than normal *qigong* because *fa* is believed to be Buddha law or the fundamental principles of the universe (for further details, see Chapter 4). Thus, the FLG is not considered by Li to be predominantly dedicated to health-improvement, but rather to the refinement and purification of the spiritual and physical self in all aspects of life (ibid: 95, 161; for a further discussion see Chapters 3 and 4). By 1999, when the FLG was banned, it was estimated that China had between 2 and 80 million followers (the lower end of the estimate comes from CCP government sources, cited in Tong (2002: 636) and the higher end by FLG sources, as cited in Penny (2012: 7). In China, FLG followers come from all regions, are cross-class, and include high-level officials of the Chinese Communist Party (Perry, 2001: 170f).

David Palmer (2007) has documented the emergence of an anti-*qigong* wave among Chinese psychiatrists and scientists beginning in the 1980s. Medical professionals began to diagnose 'qigong deviation', psychosis (Chen, 2003: 77f.), or 'qigong psychotic reaction', which they also describe as a 'culture-bound syndrome' (Palmer, 2007: 159). From 1995, Chinese scientists also began to criticise *qigong* as pseudo-science, superstition and as a cult (ibid: 171). In addition to scientists, other scholars have argued that some non-systematic criticisms, which first appeared in local media, were possibly created by the FLG's *qigong* opponents (Schechter, 2001; Zhao,

2003). Some FLG followers responded to these criticisms by engaging in activism (D. Palmer, 2003). For example, on 24 May 1998, the Beijing Television Station broadcasted testimony from FLG followers about the health benefits of the FLG. However, the broadcast included an interview with the well known scientist, He Zuoxiu, who called the FLG an 'evil cult'. Five days later, FLG followers gathered around the Beijing Television Station, resulting in the dismissal of the journalist who interviewed He (Palmer, 2007: 252). Figure 1.1 shows where other similar FLG protests were held from April 1998 to March 1999, before two larger and more important FLG protests took place in April 1999, as discussed in the next paragraph. The earlier protests documented in Figure 1.1 mainly targeted the bias of the official media, with two protests directed at the PRC government and local CCP in Liaoning.

Figure 1.1: FLG Protests from April 1998 to March 1999.
 Data Source: Palmer, 2007: 255.
 Map: Weihsuan Lin.



The most cited FLG protest action began on 23 April 1999, when followers protested in front of an academic institution in Tianjin against He Zuoxiu's article, 'I Do Not Approve of Teenagers Practicing Qigong'. Forty-five followers were arrested (ibid: 267). In the hope of rescuing those imprisoned, FLG followers decided to take their action to a higher level: they went to the central Party compound, Zhongnanhai, in Beijing on 25 April 1999. Their presence resulted in a dramatic counterattack. Less than a month later, on 20 July 1999, the Chinese Communist Party banned the Falun Gong movement. According to Chan (2013: 2), in less than a week, CCP authorities apprehended more than 5,000 followers, ransacked their homes, and put hundreds in jail; some were given prison sentences of 2-18 years and placing many others were placed in detention centres, including 're-education through labour camps' as I discuss in Chapter 2. More than 36,000 followers were detained in that year.³ On 23 January 2001, five people set themselves on fire in Tiananmen Square. The CCP claimed these were members of the FLG and these actions were used as proof that the FLG was an 'evil cult'. The FLG claimed, in contrast, that the self-immolation event was directed by the CCP.

In 2013, as part of UN's Universal Periodic Review of China, the Canadian government asserted that the Chinese government should '[s]top the prosecution and persecution of people for the practice of their religion or belief including Catholics, other Christians, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Falun Gong, and [should] set a date for the visit of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief' (UN Human Rights Council, 2013: 21). The Chinese government responded with 'Not Accepted', stating that the "Falun Gong" is not a religion but an out-and-out cult'; the CCP further defended their ban as being 'in accordance with the law [...] to protect human rights and

³ Chan (2013: 2) notes that while the exact number of FLG followers detained are unknown, she uses the numbers offered by the Hong Kong-based Information Center of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China (as cited in Rosenthal, 1999). She also notes that the PRC has denied these numbers of this centre.

fundamental freedoms of citizens, and uphold the sanctity of the Constitution and laws' (UN Human Rights Council, 2014: 11).

The CCP's ban on the FLG did not prevent FLG followers from continuing their spiritual cultivation practices in private and in public, and both inside and outside China. Most followers residing in China during this period did not emigrate in order to flee persecution because they didn't have access to human trafficking (Ter Haar, 2002); others converted (voluntarily or involuntarily) due to pressure from coercive institutions (Tong, 2009: 210), or continued their public or covert FLG activities inside of China (Tong, 2012). Between 1999 and 2004, the main public activities of FLG followers living inside China were demonstrations, and satellite and cable hacking, activities corresponding with Master Li's (2001e) message of telling the 'truth' to the public that the FLG was not an evil cult. Demonstrations took place mainly in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, which revealed a hope that the Chinese government would terminate its ban (see also Adams et al., 2000).

Whereas the FLG originally only opposed Jiang Zemin and his operatives immediately following the ban (Zhao, 2003: 220), as the repression continued, Li began to criticise the Chinese Communist Party as a whole. As I discuss in Chapter 3, after the publication of *Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party* in 2004, Li claimed that the CCP would collapse, and interpreted natural disasters as evidence of this prophecy. These new scriptures promoted an alternative religious geopolitical discourse. Globally, beginning in 2003, FLG followers started to coordinate sending-out-righteous-thoughts four times daily. After 2005, followers no longer hacked satellite and cable in China, but instead bought satellite channels to broadcast their own New Tang Dynasty Television, based in Taipei and New York. The programme not only tells the 'true' story about the Falun Gong, but also collects news from human rights activists in China and other neutral third parties. Regarding news media, not only do they publish a

newspaper, *The Epoch Times*, online every day, but they also deliver a printed version to various international locations that have a Chinese readership. In addition, after 2004, FLG followers ‘truth-telling’ activities began to include encouraging Chinese citizens to renounce their CCP related memberships. In FLG terms, ‘telling truth’ (講真相) means that FLG followers should tell the world, albeit mainly the Chinese speaking world, that the FLG is not an evil cult. In practice, the ‘truth’ also includes information produced and disseminated by the FLG media, which exposes the CCP’s wrongdoings. New themes also emerged in Li’s writings and cultural activities at this time, for example ‘the Renaissance of Traditional Chinese Culture’, as presented by Shen Yun Performing Arts, literally translated as the ‘Divine Performing Arts Group’. Shen Yun presents an understanding of Chinese culture that predates the time of the CCP. It has toured internationally every year since 2006.

As part of the geography of FLG alternative geopolitics of religion, Hong Kong and Taiwan became important spaces for the FLG’s ‘truth-telling’ activities. As my ethnographic research primarily has focused on FLG cultivators in these two places, I conclude this section by providing a brief overview of their political significance to FLG here. In 1997, the UK returned sovereignty over Hong Kong to China, and the PRC claimed that Hong Kong would function on the principle of ‘one country, two systems’ for fifty years, asserting that ‘its legal system will remain basically unchanged’ (China Internet Information Center, 1984). Following the ban in 1999, the presence of the FLG in Hong Kong served as an indicator of political freedom under the ‘one country, two systems’ (Ter Haar, 2002; Chang, 2004; Palmer, 2007). Hong Kong also became an important place for ‘truth-telling’ through street marches (coordinated every one or two months) and through occupying several busy public spots every day as ‘truth-telling’ sites (discussed in Chapter 6). These two activities are supported by FLG followers mainly from Taiwan, but also from Japan, Singapore and Malaysia, to present

their legal status within the PRC territory to Chinese visitors who travelled from mainland China. Because the FLG has become accepted in the public realm in Hong Kong, its presence is now ‘normalised’ in social media and popular culture. For example, a popular piece of artwork is available from the Local Studio HK Facebook group under the label: ‘Hong Kong is not China’ (Figure 1.2). In it, the group contrast different street banners in China and Hong Kong. For the former, the slogan ‘Love the Communist Party and Country’ is used; for Hong Kong, a familiar FLG street sign is used, which reads ‘God will destroy the Chinese Communist Party’. Here FLG discourse has become a popular symbol that represents Hong Kong’s political freedom within the PRC.

Figure 1.2: A Popular Piece of Artwork Belonging to a Facebook Group in Hong Kong, ‘Hong Kong is not China’ (2015).
Source: Local Studio HK, 2015.



Taiwan, a country with more than 80% ethnic-Chinese population (Maguire, 1998: 103), also is a significant space in the FLG global network. In October 2013, there were 863 FLG physical exercise and *fa*-study sites in Taiwan (Falun Dafa in

Taiwan, 2013). The FLG's New Tang Dynasty Television is based in Taipei (and also New York). More than 80 percent of Taiwanese trace their family tree to seventeenth to nineteenth-century migrants who moved from southeast China to the island. A total of 15% ethnic-Chinese in Taiwan are descendants and immigrants of the Chinese National People's Party, or the *Kuomintang* (KMT) (Maguire, 1998: 103). When the KMT took over Taiwan after Japan lost World War II in 1945, they nonetheless lost the battle against the Communist Chinese Party in mainland China in 1949. Many KMT fled to Taiwan.⁴ Their descendants are often referred to as Mainlanders in Taiwan today. The remaining 5% in Taiwan are descendents of indigenous peoples who have resided in Taiwan for thousands of years (Maguire, 1998: 103).

From 1949 to 1987, the KMT-led government in Taiwan (or Republic of China, ROC) and the CCP-led government in China mutually denied each other's legitimacy. Each claimed sovereignty over China, including Taiwan. During this period, Taiwan insisted in its 'three no's' policy — no contact, no negotiation and no compromise with China. At the same time, however, modern politics in Taiwan have been shaped by the struggle between the Taiwanese and the Mainlanders, the largest two 'sub-ethnic groups' (Garver, 2011: 6). Mainlanders have long occupied the most important governmental positions and resources, and some local Taiwanese has felt oppressed and consequently struggled for more rights and self-determination. The struggle of the local Taiwanese finally led to the democratisation of Taiwan, which has become one of the most democratic countries in Asia. In 2004 and 2008, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won the presidential elections.

Unlike the PRC, the establishment of democracy in Taiwan has meant that religious actors have become active in negotiating with the Taiwanese government to

⁴ Between 1895 and 1945, Taiwan was colonised by the Japanese. After Japan's defeat in World War II, the Allied Leaders, Chiang Kai-shek, Roosevelt and Churchill, agreed that Taiwan was to be handed over to China. In 1945, the KMT officially took over Taiwan from the Japanese. In 1949, the KMT lost its battle against the CCP in Mainland China and retreated to Taiwan, hoping to regain its control over China again (Maguire, 1998: 104).

guard religious freedom and prevent government intervention in their internal affairs. Up to the present day in Taiwan, there have been no special religious regulations adopted to govern religious affairs, apart from two redundant temple regulations. Today, Taiwanese politicians often seek support from religious groups to win elections.

After the lifting of Martial Law in 1987, the Taiwanese government also gradually lifted restrictions on the flow of goods, capital investment, technology and people between Taiwan and the PRC (Department of Information Services, Executive Yuan, 2014). This policy of ‘opening up’ contributed to the import of modern *qigong* practices to Taiwan, including those of the FLG. According to Chen (2010: 15-48), two important moments in which *qigong* was imported from China to Taiwan were when the KMT retreated to Taiwan (from 1945-1950) and when the ban on visiting relatives in the Chinese mainland was lifted in 1987. The FLG was introduced to Taiwan in 1995 by a Taiwanese couple, who experienced a recovery from illness after learning the FLG in China in 1994 (Zhang and Qiao, 1999). In addition, after 2008, Chinese tourist groups were allowed to travel directly to Taiwan; PRC citizens visiting Taiwan had reached 2.84 million in 2013 (Department of Information Services, Executive Yuan, Taiwan, 2014). Thus, many of the tourist ‘hot spots’ in Taiwan for PRC citizens have become important ‘truth-telling’ sites for Taiwanese FLG followers who wish to demonstrate that the FLG is not an evil cult in Taiwan.

1.2 Research Overview and Questions

This study examines the struggle between the conservative geopolitics of the PRC’s Party-State seeking to preserve its power and the challenge of alternative, nonconformist geopolitics as communicated through FLG millennial spiritual discourses and follower’s self-cultivation practices. My work draws upon recent insights from scholars in the subfields of geopolitics (political geography) and

geography and religion (cultural geography). While geopolitics traditionally pays attention to how states strengthen their national security, power and privilege in a system of states, this state-centred version of geopolitics has been challenged by alternative geopolitical imaginaries and practices, what Kearns (2009) terms 'progressive geopolitics'. Other scholars analyse the geopolitics of religious or spiritual groups to pay attention to how religious worldviews, moral systems and practices may transform such perspectives into realities and challenge existing claims by states to sovereignty (Nyroos, 2001; Dijkink, 2006; Yorgason and Robertson, 2006; Dittmer, 2007; Watts, 2007; Habashi, 2013; Sturm, 2013). As anthropologists have also documented, moreover, non-conforming bodies may contest the state's practices of biopolitical sovereignty, whereby not only state powers, but also individuals have the power to choose between life and death over their own bodies, as Hansen and Stepputat's (2006) discussion of hunger strikes and jihadist martyrs illustrate. Bernstein's (2013) analysis of how individual Tibetan Buddhists control their mortality (the 'not deteriorated' body of Itigelov, a Buryat Buddhist lama who died in 1927), mobility and reincarnation (cross-ethnic reincarnation creating transnational lineages) under a repressive Russian regime also demonstrates the power of the challenges made by 'sovereign bodies'.

Building upon these works, the first part of my study examines how the FLG blends subversive and millenarian ideas into its spiritual teachings to confront the seemingly unchallengeable political systems of the CCP within the PRC. Chapters 2 and 3 of the dissertation seek to answer the following questions:

1. How is the PRC's religious regulative framework exercised at different administrative scales and how does PRC use spatial and discursive strategies to suppress unwanted religious practices? In what ways has the Chinese Party-State disciplined, managed and punished internal religious activities

since 1978, and how are FLG followers perceived to be a threat to the Party-State after 1999?

2. How do the FLG's discourses of resistance respond to the Chinese Party-State's persistent religious geopolitics? How do the FLG scriptures and spiritual discourses after 1999 create an alternative geopolitics of religion, one imbued with subversive, other-worldly spatial imaginaries and this-worldly goals of self cultivation?

After examining the structural political problems of the ban on the FLG, I describe how individual FLG followers have been mobilised to confront and challenge the Chinese Party-State. The second half of the dissertation draws upon ethnographic data, examining FLG geopolitics as going beyond the scale of state and group to the scale of the body-self of the individual cultivator. Based upon preliminary fieldwork in Dublin and Taipei, I found out that FLG followers' practices of resistance and noncompliance, what I later came to call 'alternative geopolitics of religion', were based upon a diverse range of individual personal practices of self-cultivation (see Figure 1.3 and discussion below). Shifting from an analysis of discursive practices at the collective level to an ethnographic study at the scale of bodies and selves, Chapters 4-6 examine how individual FLG followers, as both subjects and objects, exercise power to modify and alter themselves, and care for others, as guided by teachings they choose. The second half of the study, then, seeks to answer the following questions:

3. What are the reasons FLG followers join this movement and how do FLG followers exercise diverse individual approaches to cultivate and transform themselves?
4. What does it mean to 'cultivate' the self?
5. How and why do individuals 'tell truth' to others? In what ways do the individual practices of FLG 'truth-telling' (the care of others) merge with the

care of self to produce a geopolitical challenge to the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party?

6. How have horizontal spaces of cooperation among FLG followers developed to facilitate the organising their own traditional and digital media, United Nations Human Rights advocacy and the promotion of Shen Yun performance?

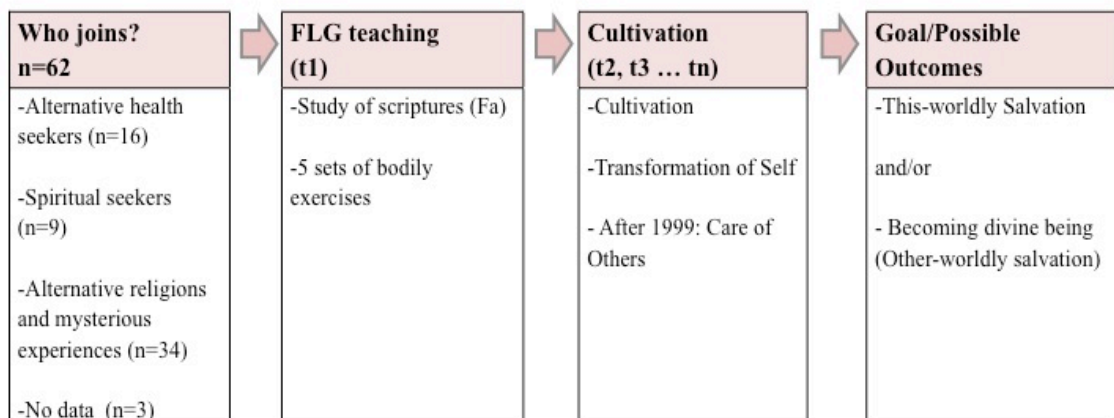
Many Chinese Studies scholars interpret FLG followers as ‘practitioners’ rather than ‘cultivators’ (Schechter, 2001; Ownby, 2003, 2008; S. Palmer, 2003; Chan 2004, for an exception, see Penny, 2012). Many scholars also associate FLG practice with *qigong*, and emphasise bodily exercises (Liu, 2000; Wessinger, 2003; Frank, 2004; McDonald, 2006; Palmer 2007) or understand the FLG as a healing group (Chen, 2003). Another interpretation given by scholars highlights the spiritual dimension of the FLG, referring to it as: a cult-like new religious movement (Chan, 2004), a cult-like quasi-religious movement (Liu, 1999), or a religious system of salvation (Lu, 2005). For example, Hua and Xia (1999) describe the FLG as *qigong* and as a religion with ethical orders. Ackerman (2005) considers the FLG as a spiritual movement that is primarily concerned with the development of mind and body. Susan Palmer (2003) and Lowe (2003) also note three aspects that attract followers to the FLG: healing benefits, moral reform, and spiritual salvation and cultivation. Yet Master Li’s use of 煉 instead of 練 to designate FLG practices in the Chinese version of his scriptures emphasised that the FLG is more than the repeated exercises and training skills (練); it is primarily concerned with transforming the substance, the self (煉).

Moreover, after my fieldwork, I compared the results of coding my field data with the existing academic work about the FLG. I found that the will and power of individuals plays a key role in this research, as it is the core impetus for the individual

cultivation practices of FLG followers who challenge the CCP. In addition, as I describe in Chapter 4, the FLG followers that I interviewed regarded themselves as ‘cultivators’ (*xiulian ren*) rather than practitioners. I understand their self-designation as revealing an important fact about FLG cultivation practices as being tied to the transformation of the self.

I created Figure 1.3 to indicate the more complex characteristics of FLG cultivation. While scholars focused on the above-mentioned themes (shown in the first and second blocks of the figure), the results of my ethnographic research indicated that self-monitoring, the process of transformation and the purification of the self are also important cultivation practices of being a FLG follower (the third block of Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: A Simplified Model of the FLG Cultivation Process.
 Note: ‘n’ refers to the number of participants in this study.



Such cultivation practices are still not fully recognised and/or understood in English-language scholarly research. I discuss this nuance (the third block of Figure 1.3) further in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Drawing upon Foucault’s (1990 [1984], 1992 [1984], 2005, 2007, 2011) discussion of the ‘care of self’ and Eastern understandings of cultivation and the body-subject, I argue that how the FLG geopolitical act of ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ (講真相 救眾生) is integrated to individual cultivation practices in which FLG followers develop the courage to confront the CCP’s geopolitics as whole and they care for the self by caring for others.

1.3 Reflections on Fieldwork

Although a study of existing FLG cultivation in China would be a significant contribution to understanding the contemporary FLG movement, my ethnographic fieldwork took place in Dublin, different places in Taiwan and in Hong Kong from 1 August 2012 through 22 January 2014. In this section, I discuss the reasons why my ethnographic research has focused on FLG cultivators in Taiwan and Hong Kong, after which I provide some additional general reflections on my fieldwork for this study.

Firstly, after a rigorous review by the Social Science Research and Ethics Board at Maynooth University, and in discussions with my committee members, it was decided that it was too risky both for FLG cultivators and for myself to conduct primary research in China. Secondly, after a period of preliminary research in Dublin (1 August 2012 to 30 July 2013), I decided to focus on Taiwan as the main place of my study. In general, I found the FLG group in Dublin to be very small, close-knit and mostly consisting of Chinese migrants. In Dublin city centre, I visited, observed and participated in diverse public activities. All the FLG members knew my role as a PhD student from Taiwan who was interested in understanding more about the FLG. I felt that I was integrated quite well into their public activities, such as delivering FLG newspaper and materials or holding the banner, and I also became a close friend of the main spokesperson and key person in the Dublin FLG community.

However, I had difficulties participating in their spiritual practices, including weekly *fa*-study groups. One woman once said that I could only join their *fa*-study group if I truly wanted cultivation following the FLG. At the same time, I became too close to a gatekeeper who generously sent me information about public activities, but also about the person's own private life. I didn't take any note of this person's private stories, but I soon felt it was very difficult for me to draw a line between private and formal research relationships. In addition, other followers lodged complaints about me

twice. These members stated that when passing out leaflets, I told the curious passers-by that the FLG was a religion; since I was not a FLG follower, they felt, understandably, that I should not speak for them. (The reason why Master Li does not consider the FLG as religion is discussed in Chapter 3 in detail.) As there were some mistrust regarding me from this small FLG circle (around thirty people) in Dublin, I didn't want to exercise any pressure on any individual to either facilitate or participate in my research. At this stage, having already learned a lot about the FLG from this generous group in Dublin and through scholarly readings, I began considering the possibility of conducting field research in Taiwan during the summer of 2013.

Thirdly, in comparison to the small and vulnerable FLG community in Dublin, fieldwork in Taiwan was a lot easier; there are many more FLG practice sites and *fa*-study meetings. There were various public activities and a greater diversity of FLG followers in Taiwan, including: college students, school teachers, several illiterate individuals, university professors, Minnan people (a Taiwanese majority that speak the Minnan dialect), Hakka people (the second largest ethnic group in Taiwan who speak the Hakka dialect), Aborigines, Chinese migrants married to Taiwanese, dentists, housewives, farmers, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, and people from other religious backgrounds. A small number of them refused my interview requests, but most were willing to share their experiences with me. I was able to join different weekly *fa*-study groups after phoning them or being invited by some FLG followers. I was even able to join two regional seasonal *fa*-conferences.⁵

For example, one day, I saw a *fa*-study gathering advertised on the FLG website that was to be held from 2pm to 5pm in Taipei on that day. At 1.30 pm, I made a telephone call and asked for the address. I got the address and walked in directly

⁵ The *fa*-conferences I attended in Taiwan were a bigger sized version of *fa*-study and experience-sharing. They ranged from hundreds to thousands of FLG participants; often these were organised in a hotel or a public school and lasted for two to three days (for details see Chapter 5). In recent years, Master Li usually gave a talk at the annual *fa*-conference in New York, which was published online later as new scriptures.

without informing anybody. That gathering took place in a first floor above a business space run by a FLG follower. After the *fa*-study, I walked away from the place immediately and nobody approached me. After 10 minutes, I decided to return to inform the place owner about my research. The owner was very welcoming and emphasised that ‘the FLG does not have a gate’. The owner further stated: ‘I don’t know many other followers either. Come if you want to come; go if you want to go’. I told him my name, gave him the Maynooth University ethics document and left without further conversation.

During my first set of interviews, many people asked me whether I had gone to a 9-day-class, in which participants watch Master Li’s videos for nine days and learn how to do the bodily exercises correctly. So, I went to one 9-day-class in July 2013. After the class, when I told FLG followers that I had joined it, I felt I was considered to be more of an ‘insider’, although nobody asked me whether I truly wanted to cultivate or not. I was also able to voluntarily work in the kitchen in the NTD TV, after explaining I was a PhD student working on the FLG, because I had undergone a 9-day-class. While working in the kitchen, I wasn’t involved in the news production process but found that, in general, the working environment was not so much different than other private companies in Taiwan. All workers stopped working daily for ‘sending-out-righteous thoughts’ sessions at 12pm and 6pm (see Chapter 3).

Meanwhile, I was even invited to fly with the FLG’s Tianguo Marching Band to Hong Kong in September. I initiated a second trip during the New Year in 2014 to Hong Kong by myself. I was also able to jump around to visit different daily ‘truth-telling’ sites in Hong Kong, and joined followers delivering flyers immediately without the need to introduce myself (I only introduced myself if I wanted to interview them; otherwise, I didn’t want to interrupt their activities). There were far fewer FLG followers in Hong Kong than in Taiwan. As I discuss in Chapter 6, many FLG followers

from Taiwan flew to Hong Kong for a couple of weeks to support their sites and monthly street demonstrations.

Having chosen the locations of my research, I chose to use participant observation and interviews as these qualitative methods were most suited to understand FLG followers' cultivation and their individual geopolitical practices from their own perspective (as described in Chapters 5 and 6). The methods of participant observation and interviews enabled me to collect information about the subjects' doing and also reasoning, i.e. what they do and why they do it (Watson and Till, 2010). Observations also allowed me to witness the emotions, silences and tensions of and between FLG followers, which are not observable through textual analysis. For example, the tender and peaceful tone of one female FLG follower, who migrated from Mainland China to Hong Kong, made me understand how she could easily approach tourists from Mainland China and persuade them to renounce PRC memberships. I was very convinced by her compassionate temperament. In addition to many periods of participant observation, I conducted 62 semi-structured interviews. As the opening pages of this chapter suggest, interviews were also important in gaining an understanding of FLG followers' reflections on their actions, personal development and difficulties throughout their cultivation stages. Almost every FLG follower trusted me fully when I talked to them one to one. I owe each one of them an immense debt. None wanted to achieve anything through me; they were very busy at their own mission, life-saving and cultivation; all of their time spent on me was out of generosity and full trust. They devoutly and nobly cultivated and improved themselves and wanted to save other people's lives following the guidance of FLG scriptures (see Chapters 3 and 6).

In general, the research process used an ethnographic approach which was open-ended and ever-evolving. Hence, new sites and questions emerged throughout the research process (see also Herbert, 2010). I wrote down daily fieldnotes which were

extended into memos. The word count for these interview transcriptions, fieldwork notes and memos is 499,940 words. Using *Nvivo 10* software, the coding of this data was grounded. I then drew upon themes from Foucault's writing of self-care (as discussed in Chapter 4) to interpret these findings, which I present and analyse in Chapters 5 and 6.

In terms of my positionality in relation to the FLG, I have tried to approach various groups and activities as a neutral, but ethical, researcher of Taiwanese background (getting a PhD in Ireland) who conducted research about the FLG, did some voluntary work at FLG TV stations, and attended a 9-day FLG class. When some of my interviewees asked me whether I started to cultivate myself, I always replied with 'no'. The fact that I use FLG followers' experiences as research data for my own career makes me uncomfortable to a certain degree. I always regard the experiences of my interviewees as truthful statements of their world views and personal experiences: how they tell their stories and their subjective perceptions are convincing to me. Third-party accounts are not included in my research, except for the case described by participant YS.

Probably my gender, age, and curious attitude have enabled me to create relations of trust with FLG followers, who have generously shared their stories with me. As a relatively young female and native Taiwanese PhD student, my presence in the field was not threatening nor that noticeable, so I was able to approach FLG followers easily. Secondly, my interviewees may have been comfortable in sharing their private experiences with me because they could discern that I was genuinely interested in their stories. Personally, I am very interested in and fascinated by the spiritual experiences of my Buddhist, Muslim or Christian friends. I admire, and am sometimes surprised by their personal journeys of exploring diverse and rich spiritual worlds within societies that are predominantly materially and profit-oriented.

However, I am more cautious about using information published by FLG media because how data is gathered and interpreted is not publicly shared. A similar attitude was adopted by Ownby (2008), who, when discussing the allegation made by the FLG that the CCP had targeted FLG followers for organ harvesting, stated that: ‘while evidence of the harvesting of Chinese prisoners’ organs seems to be beyond dispute, the scale of the practice is not known’ (p. 226). Statistical data produced by the FLG media may not be accurate from a scholarly perspective, which should be borne in mind when reading such data in this thesis. However, on occasion I have cited FLG publications or online information to depict how their media and data is used to appeal to Chinese and non-Chinese publics.

1.4 Chapter Overviews

An overview of the chapters of this dissertation is provided in Figure 1.4. Each chapter begins with a review of the relevant theoretical and FLG-related scholarly work; I explain why and how my conceptual approach can enrich existing studies about the FLG and how this research can contribute to different streams of geographical knowledge.

Figure 1.4: Chapter Overviews.

Chapter Overviews
Chapter 1: Between State and Body: An Introduction
<p>Chapter 2: The PRC’s Religious Geopolitics after 1978</p> <p>Key concepts: Governmentality (Foucault, 1991, 2007, 2008) and sovereignty (Agamben, 1998 [1995], 2005 [2003]).</p> <p>Key documents analysed: Original legal documents, internally circulated governmental documents published by NGOs, school websites, Chinese academic books, news published by the media outside of China, FLG websites, the U.S. Congress Political Prison Database, and UN human rights’ reports.</p>
<p>Chapter 3: Geopolitics of FLG Scriptures</p> <p>Key concepts: Discursive practices; collective subjectivity formation (Laclau, 1985, 1990, 1996, 2005, Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, 1990, Mouffe, 2000).</p> <p>Key documents analysed: The FLG scriptures <i>Zhuan Falun</i> (1996e) and Master Li Hongzhi’s lectures given after 1999.</p>

Chapter 4: The Power of Individuals Over Their Own Bodies: Foucault’s ‘Care of Self’ and FLG Cultivation

Key concepts: Care of the self (Foucault, 1990 [1984], 1992 [1984], 2005, 2007, 2011).

Key documents analysed: *Zhuan Falun* (1996e); Master Li’s speeches before and after 1999.

Chapter 5: Practices of Individual FLG Followers’ Cultivation

Key concepts: Cultivation.

Key data interpreted: Results of interviews by 62 FLG cultivators, and participant observation of FLG practice sites and study groups in Dublin, regions and cities in Taiwan and Hong Kong (based upon fieldwork in 2013-2014).

Chapter 6: FLG Geopolitical Practices ‘Telling-Truth/Saving-Life’:

When the Care for Others Coincides with the Care of the Self

Key concepts: Progressive geopolitics, horizontal spaces of cooperation and emotional connection.

Key data interpreted: Results of interviews by 62 FLG cultivators; participant observation of FLG practice sites and study groups in Dublin, regions/cities in Taiwan and Hong Kong (based upon fieldwork in 2013-2014).

Few Chinese Studies scholars have considered the subversive discourse present *within FLG teachings before 1999* as the main reason for the Party-State’s crackdown. For example, Chinese Studies scholar Patricia Thornton (2002) lists three incompatibilities between the FLG and the Party-State: 1) FLG’s bodily cultivation practices vs. the hegemonic body politic of the State; 2) the FLG’s cosmology vs. Chinese Communist Party’s ideology; and 3) the FLG’s critique of contemporary Chinese society, for example consumerism. Ming Xiao (2011) also considers FLG teachings a challenge to Marxism and scientism. However, in my reading of FLG teachings *before 1999*, what is provided is rather *alternative* lifestyles and spiritual guidance; only *after 1999* do the FLG teachings criticise the legitimacy of the CCP. The CCP also banned other 14 religious groups between 1983 and 1999 (as discussed in Chapter 2). I therefore agree with political science scholar Maria Hsia Chang (2004) who associates the ban on the FLG with the CCP’s persecution of other faiths. According to Chang: ‘[w]hat Beijing fears is not so much Falun Gong itself, but what it represents—the underlying problems and instability in Chinese society’ (p. 134). The

Party-State's crackdown on the FLG cannot be solely explained by the latter's *teachings before 1999*.

Chapter 2 takes the CCP's 'fear' concerning what the FLG represents, including its ability to organise mass protests and its attractiveness to different social groups in different regions (Liu, 2000; Madsen, 2000; Thomas, 2001; Cheung, 2004; Xiao, 2011), as the starting point to explain the ban in 1999. However, rather than assume that the FLG mass protest at the central Party compound was the main trigger for subsequent repression (Cheung, 2004), I explore the Party-State's 'anxiety' about spirituality in depth from a religious geopolitical perspective. Using secondary literature produced by political and legal scholars, Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the Chinese Communist Party's position in the State. To understand the Chinese government's domestic religious geopolitics and religious regulative framework, original legal documents, internally circulated governmental documents published by NGOs, school websites, Chinese academic books, news published by the media outside of China, FLG websites, the U.S. Congress Political Prison Database, and UN Human Rights Committee reports are analysed. As access to sensitive data relating to the FLG within China is extremely difficult to acquire, the data I have consulted provides only a partial, but representative, overview of the Party-State's domestic religious geopolitics. Whereas the Party-State developed various regulative frameworks to control religious activities within its territory, FLG movements still developed quickly and in unexpected ways outside the official framework. Not only did the FLG attract people from different social classes, its diffusion (briefly discussed in Chapter 4), which was often initiated by individual FLG followers, was also quite efficient and expanded beyond administrative boundaries.

I understand the Chinese Party-State's use of spatial practices to regulate religious activities as an example of how a state dominated by an atheist party manages

sacredness. A similar approach was taken by the Anthropologist Anya Bernstein (2013: 10), who regards Soviet secularisation as an atheist project to expel religion, which the state conceptualised as opium and disease, from both the public space and the body. To understand the Chinese government's domestic religious geopolitics, Chapter 2 examines the PRC's religious regulative framework which reaches through to the smallest administrative scale and to individual bodies. I briefly describe its legislative and spatial practices towards unwanted religious practices, and its discursive practices of labelling the FLG as an 'evil cult'. In my research, the intensive regulation of religions and practices of 'othering' reveal two examples of interconnected forms of power exercised by the Party-State's religious geopolitics: governmentality and sovereignty. Drawing on Foucault (1991 [1978], 2007, 2008) and Agamben (1998 [1995], 2005 [2003]), I argue that the Party-State's governmentality has utilised various finely detailed administrative frameworks and spatial strategies to regulate religious institutions, personnel, activities, spaces, publications and even re-incarnation. To suppress and eliminate non-conforming religious activities, the Party-State also exercises sovereign power through diverse techniques, including criminal law against secret societies and 'evil' religious organisations, establishing new regulations and institutions, such as the 610 Office, and deploying administrative detention powers. The Party-State's 'evil cult' discourse projects negative characteristics onto the FLG, such as mind control, irrationality, violence, illegality and superstition. Thereby, the FLG becomes an unwanted element in Chinese society. At the same time, the 'evil cult' discourse feeds into attempts to construct a model citizenship, whereby citizens' minds and behaviours have been regulated in some depth and detail by the State.

Following on from this discussion of the CCP's religious geopolitics, the next important task is to understand how the FLG can be seen as a non-state actor challenging the Party-State's authority. Instead of categorising the FLG as militant

qigong (Palmer, 2007), popular fundamentalism (Ostergaard, 2004) or as a redemptive society (Ownby, 2008: 25), **Chapter 3** explores how the FLG may be observed discursively, how it constantly (re-) positions itself within its changing social and political contexts, and how it reacts to external pressures by blending some resistant ideas into its teachings following the CCP's repression which began in 1999. Chapter 3 begins with scriptural analysis. Whereas Thornton (2002) and Xiao (2011) consider FLG *teachings before* 1999 as subversive, leading ultimately to the ban, other scholars observe the FLG's development of more revolutionary ideas and the escalation of its media tactics *after* 1999, due to the continued severe governmental repression and dramatic propaganda (Ching, 2001; Perry, 2001; Thomas, 2001; Rahn, 2002; Zhao, 2003; Junker, 2014). Taking this same perspective, Chapter 3 analyses how the FLG is discursively situated in and continually interacts with surrounding cultural, social and political milieu. In particular I discuss how Master Li positioned the FLG in Chinese society before the CCP's ban in 1999, and how, after 1999, Master Li explained the CCP's persecution of the FLG by investing the persecution of FLG cultivators with religious significance. Whereas Rahn (2002) observes the increasingly dualistic discourse of eliminating evil, and Fisher (2003) regards 'forbearance' as an effective teaching of the FLG's resistance, Chapter 3 presents the more diverse and rich discourses that developed in Li's writing between 2001 and 2013, and focuses on the process of collective subject formation and identification. Junker (2014) already highlighted how the FLG's spiritual ideas of 'telling-truth/saving-life' (clarifying-truth and saving-souls in Junker's terms) developed after 2000; I will extend his discussion by analysing the FLG's global 'sending out righteous thoughts' and artistic representation of Shen Yun Performance (Divine Performing Arts).

My discussion draws upon Laclau (1985, 1990, 1996, 2005) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 1990) who state that a subject – here a social or spiritual group – is

constantly absorbing and reorganising new elements, such as social demands or spiritual ideas, to build a *temporarily* coherent subjectivity, the contents of which may change over time. The discursive characteristics of spiritual movements are especially significant in the Chinese context, termed ‘compatible resonance’ by Taiwanese religious scholar Chen (2011a: 79). Another scholar Yang (1961) argues that Chinese religious elements, such as spiritual ideas and ritual practices, are produced and float within and between different religious and social arenas. These spiritual elements, especially those belonging to Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, can be collected and reformulated by different sects or religious movements. This characteristic may be observed within the FLG, which absorbed ideas from other spiritual sources during the 1990s (see also Penny, 2002; Lu, 2005) and developed a system of millenarian ideas after the government’s crackdown. Chapter 3 therefore also contributes to the geographical discussion concerning religious resistance, how a spiritual movement can develop an alternative worldview to challenge the dominant state power. I assess Master Li’s discourse through analysing his most important scripture *Zhuan Falun* (1996e) and his lectures given after 1999 using a ‘directed’ coding approach (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) and Nvivo 10 software.

While Chapter 3 focuses on scriptural analysis, **Chapters 4-6** explore the geopolitical implications that result from individual FLG followers’ practices at the bodily scale. I have already noted that in my research, I draw heavily upon participant observation and fieldwork to understand the perspectives and practices of FLG followers themselves and how these have geopolitical significance. My work thus contributes to scholars studying the FLG who also highlight the necessity to distinguish between academic and FLG followers’ readings of the scriptures (Thornton, 2002), and between Master Li’s teachings and how the followers translate these into lived experience (Burgdoff, 2003). Although some scholars of religion and geography have

already researched bodily domains (Martin and Kryst, 1998; Holloway and Valins, 2002; Holloway, 2003, 2013; Gökarksel, 2009; Maddrell and Dora, 2013), these works pay more attention to how bodies and bodily practices, such as ritual acts, pilgrimage or meditation, signify and sacralise spatial experiences. A combination of these two research streams is explored in my study of the FLG, which concerns the body as both subject and object through which individuals exercise the power to modify themselves and alter the world.

In Chapter 4, I draw upon Foucault's later research on the 'care of self', including in his writings in the *History of Sexuality Volume II* (1992 [1984]), *History of Sexuality Volume III* (1990 [1984]), and his lectures in Paris from 1977-1978 (2007), 1981-1982 (2005) and 1983-1984 (2011). These works provide insights about the ways that an individual objectifies him-/herself and forms him-/herself into a subject. Foucault's writings about care of the self have not attracted much attention from geographers as of yet. I chose not to use a genealogical approach to understand how Foucault develops his ideas of care of the self in specific thematic fields, such as sexuality or diet, as did Stuart Elden (2014). In contrast, I operationalised Foucault's exploration of the 'care of the self' based upon how he made use of materials from Greek, Hellenistic and Roman periods. From this, I develop a research framework that explores different modes of self-care in other cultural contexts or thematic fields, including cultivation by FLG followers. This conceptual framework identifies and analyses diverse techniques and aspect of self-constitution, including: how an individual objectifies and forms him-/herself to become a subject. This power is exercised by individuals not only to subjectify themselves into becoming a believer, but also to come closer to or to become other-worldly divine beings, to challenge and even transform this-worldly geopolitical space(s). Bernauer's (1999) analysis of the role of Cynics and *parrhēsia* in a religious context in Foucault's lecture (28 March 1984) gave me the

inspiration to write about religious resistance as linked to self-care. In Chapter 4, I also examine FLG cultivation as a practice of self-care based upon the analysis of Master Li's scriptures. I explore how individuals can subjectify themselves to approach or become other-worldly divine beings. In Master Li's scriptures, the FLG is characterised by individualised cultivation and opposition to institutionalised forms of religion (mentioned in Chapter 3 and discussed in detail in Chapter 4). I argue that the *ungovernability* of FLG's self-cultivation presents a challenge to the CCP's attempt to govern and control religious activities in details. This argument is supported by my illustration of the FLG's spatial diffusion between 1992 and 1999, which reflects the decentralised, individualised and bottom-up initiated model of the FLG cultivation.

Scholars of the geopolitics of religion have called for the exploration of (bodily) practices, namely how spiritual and religious followers enact and perform their geopolitical understandings and create geopolitical spaces (Dittmer, 2007; Sturm, 2013). The individual body as a cultivation space serves as the main scale for **Chapter 5**. As an exploratory effort, I wrote up my fieldwork data following Foucault's analysis of the 'care of self'. Here, FLG perspectives, including Master Li's cultivation concepts and FLG followers' own interpretations, reasoning and practices, are also carefully presented. Based upon participant observation and interview data, Chapter 5 illustrates how individual FLG followers chose to enter the FLG movement; how they 'resonate' with, interpret and internalise Master Li's message and his scriptures, instead of obeying codified rules; and how they cultivate and transform themselves into what they perceive to be better and 'divine' beings. In addition, my use of participant observation also explores the relationships among FLG followers, which are highly decentralised and non-hierarchical (also Porter, 2005; Ownby, 2008; Junker, 2014). The individualised, bottom-up initiated model of cultivation which exists among FLG followers is not well discussed in the current literature on the FLG. My findings provide

a more active and vivid understanding of individual choice when compared to Tong's (2002) discussion of a 'hierarchical structure' based upon his documentary analysis. My emphasis upon the individual character of FLG practices also differs from sociologist Chris Shun-ching Chan's (2013) stress upon the creation of the FLG as a collectivity. Chan's fieldwork (2013), which was carried out between 1999 and 2000 in both Hong Kong and Chicago, discusses how FLG followers reproduced ideology through mutual communication immediately following the CCP repression.

In **Chapter 6**, I continue to interpret my ethnographic research according to this model, to analyse the FLG geopolitical practice of 'telling-truth/saving-life' at both an individual and collective levels. My data presents an exploration of the mixture of both vertical and horizontal strategies employed by FLG followers, but highlights shared spaces of cooperation and emotional cooperation. Most of the scholarly literature that describe the FLG's strategies of resistance focus on the collective level, including the FLG's media and internet development as a global community (Bell and Boas, 2003; Zhao, 2003; McTernan, 2004; Moses, 2005; Chen et al. 2010; Thornton, 2010). Tong (2012) documents the underground FLG activities in China from 1999 to 2011 using sources from FLG communication websites (which I note in Chapter 6). However, these studies do not explore the link between collective and individual scales. Why and how do individual FLG followers commit themselves to these diverse geopolitical practices?

Scholars who have attempted to address this question include Fisher (2003), who regards the practice of 'forbearance' in the FLG teaching as an effective means by which FLG followers resist the PRC. Thornton (2002: 674) argues that Master Li used subversive messages (mainly before 1999) to deploy 'the bodies of individual practitioners against the hegemonic practices of the state'. Susan Palmer (2003: 356) and Ownby (2008: 211) assert that Master Li's message can advocate martyrdom. While important, these studies offer only a limited explanation and do not consider Li's

evolving discourse after 1999. They also ignore individual FLG followers' subjectivities, distinct interpretations of these teachings, and experiences of cultivation. Junker (2014) analyses Li's 'truth-telling' discourse, as developed after 1999, and describes how FLG followers' 'clarifying truth' was 'a form of self-cultivation' (p. 17) based upon data collected through semi-structured interviews in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Tokyo, Kyoto, and Taipei between 2006 and 2014. However, he did not explain 'self-cultivation' and how 'clarifying truth' and 'self-cultivation' were linked to each other, a theme I will explore in this chapter. Based upon my participant observation and interviews, Chapter 6 presents the complexity of the FLG's geopolitical project of 'truth-telling' at both individual and collective levels. These practices are not only collective and missionary, but also individual and personal.

Regarding the FLG's practices at national and global levels (Chapter 6), I examine other scholarly research and UN reports to understand the UN Human Rights mechanisms, its promotional functions and its inability to enforce regulations (or directives) on states in general, specifically for the case of the FLG. I also use the FLG's on-line resources to understand their collective activities. In comparison to the weak top-down ordering power of the UN's Human Rights mechanisms, FLG followers present a strong global horizontal networking ability. They do not rely on the UN, but rather initiate their own projects and globally coordinate amongst themselves in order to disseminate information to PRC citizens within and throughout the world. Through an extension from the individual to the world, FLG religious practice attempts a geopolitical reordering that multiplies the points of conflict between themselves and the Chinese Party-State, so much so that the latter is only barely able to eliminate the former's activities. Chapter 6 therefore also contributes to a network-based understanding of religious geopolitics, whereby activities are organised globally to transcend national boundaries (Watson and Till, 2010).

1.5 Response to Critiques Leveled at the FLG

Although my focus in this dissertation is about the subjectivity of FLG cultivators, it is important to mention and address briefly scholarly analyses that are critical of the FLG. In particular there are three general areas of criticism regarding: (1) Master Li's powerful role in the organisation, (2) the questionable claims to health and the group's rejection of Western medicine, and (3) the alleged encouragement of martyrdom. To begin with, most scholarly critiques focus on Master Li's authority (Rahn, 2000; Ostergaard, 2004; Palmer, 2007; Ownby, 2008). For example, Palmer (2007: 236) points out the the problem of exclusivity that is characteristic of Master Li's exercises and writings. He asserts that FLG followers are forbidden to mix other *qigong* methods or religious teachings with their practice, even though FLG teachings are based upon a combination of various Buddhist and Taoist ideas. Li does position the FLG as superior to and distinct from other spiritual practices, as I describe in Chapter 3 and as illustrated in Figure 3.2. However, this exclusivity in religious discourse does not necessarily translate to how individuals practice religion.

In Chapter 3, I discuss how 'wandering among religions' (Chen, 2011a: 84) is commonplace for individuals living in Asian societies that grow up in cultures with many religions and smaller spiritual groups. This means that if FLG followers decide they want to follow other *qigong* or religious teachings, they simply leave the FLG whenever they wish without any problems or 'penalties'. They can return at a later date if they so choose. For example, four FLG cultivators I interviewed recommenced their cultivation after leaving FLG for a couple of years. If they want to walk on the path of FLG cultivation, it is understandable that they only follow FLG teachings, as is expected of many other religious followers and their respective religions. Yet if one practices FLG and at the same time engages with other religious practices, that person is

not ‘punished’ by the FLG community. As my field research further shows (Section 5.4), some FLG cultivators continue to carry out ancestor worship rituals as part of their social responsibility within the family, even though these religious rituals are discouraged in the FLG scriptures. Furthermore, although the FLG discourages their followers from practicing other *qigong*, *taijiquan* or religions, as I analyse in Chapter 3, Master Li never completely denied these spiritual practices. According to him, other Buddhist and Taoist teachings can also lead to salvation; these *qigong* practices are different from and inferior to FLG cultivation. For Li, non-FLG practices can be considered damaging if their masters are pursuing self-interest, for example, fame or material gain, rather than spirituality.

Palmer (2007: 241, 244) further criticises the FLG for its centralisation of power, thought and finance by Master Li. Firstly, Palmer asserts that leadership within local groups is not permitted. However, unlike Catholic Church, an institutional religion with a very strong hierarchical and exclusive system of power, the structural relations of power are relatively flat for the FLG. The Catholic Church has a patriarchal geopolitical system of power, constituted with the Pope at its apex who runs the Vatican, a geopolitical state located in Rome. Vatican officials appoint bishops to govern local churches, often without consultation with them. These bishops are responsible for ensuring that pastors, seminary professors and other church members comply with teachings of the Pope. If Vatican directives are not obeyed, even a bishop can be expelled (Reese, 1996: 3). In many Catholic countries, the Church is intricately interwoven within local geographical communities through the parish structure. Within such settings and through educational and social institutions, many adults raise their children as Catholics that include regular pastoral care and rituals, such as going to mass and receiving the Holy Sacraments. Tithing to the Church, or financial contributions as a percentage of one’s income, is also expected, although this may vary depending on if

a social welfare state taxation system includes organised religions as part of their social service system. Italians, for example, can decide whether they want to pay 0.8% of their income tax to Catholic Church, to other churches in Italy or to state programs (Reese, 1996: 205).

In comparison, while Master Li's central position is not questioned as the spiritual leader within the FLG, the system of power is not nearly as regulated or controlled as the Catholic Church's exclusive hierarchy of leaders. Moreover, FLG members do not expect or follow the pastoral care and advice administered by parish priests. My field research shows that each FLG follower is expected to be the expert and guide of their own FLG teachings and cultivation. No further (spiritual) leadership is required, as the core spiritual relationship of FLG cultivation is the resonance between Master Li, scriptures and followers (see Chapters 4 and 5, and Figure 5.13).

Secondly, regarding the claim that there is a centralisation of thought within the FLG, as I have indicated above and discuss in this dissertation, FLG followers have quite different interpretations and understandings of Master Li's scriptures: all of these are allowed and considered valid. There is further no standard or unified path for FLG cultivation.

Thirdly, in contradistinction to Palmer's (2007: 244) claim regarding the centralisation of money within the FLG, my field data supports Ownby's (2008: 137) findings that wealthier FLG followers disproportionately share more expenses when voluntarily organising FLG activities. My research reveals that the money contributed by FLG followers is used locally (in Dublin, in different cities in Taiwan or in Hong Kong separately) for printing truth-telling materials, renting spaces or running media. Unlike the expectation of tithing for some organised institutional religions as described above, the financial contribution to 'truth-telling' projects is voluntary and is not praised in scriptures. These financial resources are used for local expenses and do not directly

contribute to Master Li's authority. However, I did not find published sources regarding Master Li's income, which would be a possible project for future research.

In addition to money, I regard time as another precious resource that the FLG demands from their followers. They are expected to not only cultivate themselves, but also to commit themselves to various 'truth-telling' projects, including promoting Shen Yun, and 'Sending Out Righteous Thoughts' four times a day (Chapter 6). This requirement makes being a FLG follower more difficult than being merely a *qigong* practitioner. The time that FLG followers invest in various projects is not something they contribute directly to the authority of Master Li, but rather to the development of and awareness about the FLG as a whole.

In addition to critiques about the central role Master Li plays in the FLG, a second main area of criticism are the FLG claims to mysterious healing effects and its related rejection of Western medicine (Palmer, 2007: 244; Rahn, 2000; see also Chinese official sources discussed in Chapter 2). Although such analyses are valid, the larger cultural and historical contexts for such critiques need to be clarified. Western readers need to bear in mind that the healing functions of Chinese spiritual practices are not distinctive or 'new' to the FLG. Similar claims were commonly made in ancient China, for example, during the Ching Dynasty (1644-1912) (Chiu, 2007), and continue to be made in modern Chinese societies (Chen, 2003, 2010; Chang, 2009), as evidenced in recent years when the CCP advocated similar claims during the *qigong* boom (Palmer, 2007: 17). Thus FLG followers' understandings and attitudes towards sickness should be contextualised within this cultural context. Although this was not the focus of my study (and again merits future research), based upon my research, overall I found that FLG followers had different attitudes to well-being. FLG followers do get sick or contract illnesses after starting FLG cultivation; Master Li does not guarantee absolute health or promise salvation. Many made personal decisions whether or not to take

Western medicines or agree to medical procedures. In this respect, I agree with McDonald (2006) who notes that the ‘healing effects’ of the FLG should not be regarded as extraordinary, but as compensation to what cultivators perceive to be the limits of modern science (McDonald, 2006: 155).

A third general criticism of FLG followers was regarding the ‘militant activism’, as demonstrated in their public activities (Palmer, 2007: 252), and Master Li’s ‘encouragement’ to martyrdom (Ownby, 2008: 211, 213). Owen (2008) further denounces some of Master Li’s messages as putting the personal safety of followers at risk. Based upon my research about the FLG and as discussed in Chapter 6, I present an alternative understanding of FLG followers’ public activism as a form of *parrhēsia*. In this interpretation, a person chooses to speak the truth about oneself freely and conducts oneself following the truth that he/she expresses, thereby becoming a speaking subject of truth. According to Foucault (2011: 331), an extreme form of *parrhēsia* is martyrdom when facing persecution. I agree with Palmer (2007) that FLG activism may be the main cause of CCP repression. At the same time, if it is the case that Master Li’s teachings or the FLG’s mobilisation is so dangerous and provoking, then why does this repression of the group and demonisation of the group as an ‘evil cult’ only happen in China, not in Taiwan and in the rest of the world?

Chapter 2: The PRC's Religious Geopolitics after 1978

Following the PRC's economic reform or neoliberalisation (Harvey, 2014: x) after 1978, the government has attempted to manage its population through administrative, scientific and technocratic rationality in economically relevant domains, such as education, employment and health. This process, which is discussed by Jeffreys and Sigley in *China's Governmentalities* (2011), aims at creating autonomous and economically competitive citizens. Unlike the violent and devastating repression experienced throughout the Cultural Revolution (1966-1979), hostility towards religion has waned since 1978 (Yang, 2012: 74). The officially atheist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) acknowledged that atheism and religion could co-exist and recognised the religious diversity of society in Document No. 19 issued by the CCP Central Committee in 1982. However, despite the increasing autonomy offered to its citizens following the Reform Era which began in 1978, the PRC Constitution (1982) indicates the degree to which the Party continues to manage the citizen. While the Constitution states that power 'belongs to the people',⁶ the state organs, including the National People's Congress (NPC) and local congresses, are ultimately administered by the Party. The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party over the people is also emphasised in the Constitutions' preamble.⁷ In contrast to western liberal and democratic states, all facets of the PRC's government are penetrated by the CCP, which scholars call the 'Party-

⁶ 'Article 2. All power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the people. The organs through which the people exercise state power are the National People's Congress and the local people's congresses at different levels. The people administer state affairs and manage economic, cultural and social affairs through various channels and in various ways in accordance with the law' (translation from the People's Daily, 2004).

⁷ 'Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, the Chinese people of all nationalities will continue to adhere to the people's democratic dictatorship and follow the socialist road, steadily improve socialist institutions, develop socialist democracy, improve the socialist legal system and work hard and self-reliantly to modernize industry, agriculture, national defence and science and technology step by step to turn China into a socialist country with a high level of culture and democracy' (translation from the People's Daily, 2004).

State’ (Shambaugh, 2000; Thornton, 2002; Ying, 2006). Thus, although the Party-State has exercised administrative rationality to promote autonomous citizenship, the Chinese Communist Party continues to maintain its sovereignty over society.

Unlike employment, education and health, religion remains an important domain that the PRC Government has not yet been willing to decentralise or privatise (Jeffreys and Sigley, 2011). Religion can offer radical, utopian or millenarian geopolitical discourses that challenge existing politics, as I discuss in Chapter 3. The Chinese government has actively managed religious activities through regulating religious institutions, spaces, activities, personnel and publications, while also acting to suppress nonconforming religious activities and resistances to the State. As the Anthropologist Mayfair Mei-hui Yang suggests: ‘any discussion of modernity and Chinese religiosity cannot ignore an inquiry into Chinese *sovereign power*’ (2011: 24, italics in original). Potter (2003: 335) acknowledges that ‘the government promises tolerance for the compliant’, that is, those who adhere to officially-authorized religious practices, but ‘repression for the resistant’.

By way of comparison, the current religious landscape in Taiwan offers a different *laissez-faire* model. Following the lifting of Martial Law and the beginning of democratisation in 1987, no special state religious regulations were adopted to govern religious affairs in Taiwan.⁸ The Taiwanese government hasn’t abandoned its attempts to regulate religious affairs, as evidenced by the continual drafting of new legislation for religious regulation. However, the Taiwanese government encounters diverse opinions about those regulations, including strong opposition from different religious groups. Religious groups in Taiwan, unlike those in Mainland China, have become active civil

⁸ Two outdated regulations, ‘The Regulation for the Management of Temples’ (監督寺廟條例) (1929) and ‘Rules for the Registration of Temples’ (寺廟登記條例) (1936) were adopted in China and applied to Taiwan by the KMT. These two regulations didn’t have real practical authority in Taiwan and only existed nominally (Chiu, 2007: 155).

society actors and have played a role in negotiating religious affairs with the government, as previously mentioned in Chapter 1.

This chapter explores how the Party-State of the PRC manages the religious practices of its population. I understand the Chinese Party-State's religious geopolitics as guaranteeing and regulating citizen's spiritual welfare, but only if these beliefs and activities do not challenge the CCP's legitimacy and sovereignty. This corresponds with Kearns' arguments that '[t]he techniques by which states regulate life are both spatial and geopolitical' (2014: 762) and that '[t]he sovereign appropriation of Truth is an attempt to censor counter-discourses and to block counter-conducts' (2007: 209). Similarly, in the introduction to *Rethinking Geopolitics* (1998), Tuathail and Dalby argue that geopolitics is not only concerned with international space, which is its traditional focus, but also with domestic space. Geopolitics examines a broad range of social and cultural practices, from the knowledge of officials to the everyday 'constructions of identity, security and danger', and the creation of 'the right disposition of things' within society through diverse techniques (Tuathail and Dalby, 1998: 5, 7).

I understand the State's use of geopolitical practices to regulate religious activities as 'religious geopolitics'. Here I adopt a similar, but distinct perspective from Sturm's (2013) understanding of the concept. Sturm refers to religious geopolitics as 'secular geopolitical discourse and action [...] that nevertheless can be seen to employ political-theological vocabularies, symbols and action' (p. 135), which is further based on 'the well-known formulation of the German political and legal theorist Carl Schmitt that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts"' (1985: 36, cited in Sturm, 2013: 135). Examples of this approach are Wallace's (2006) analysis of the Christian geopolitical worldview by the Bush administration; Sidorov's (2006) exploration of how Russian geopolitical discourse is legitimised by the Russian Orthodox Church; Dijkink's (2006) focus on the holy land,

holy war and millennialism in Christianity and Islam; Agnew's (2006) work on the intersection between religions (mainly Judaism, Christianity and Islam), and global political and economic concerns; and Gregory and Pred's edited volume, *Violent Geographies* (2007), which examines various aspects of the War on Terror and the 'othering' of Islam/Muslims. Whereas Sturm and other geographical studies examine how states (mainly Western states that have roots in Christianity) use theological concepts to deal with secular issues, in my research I explore how a state dominated by an atheist party manages sacredness, an approach similar to Bernstein's (2013) study of Soviet secularisation.

To understand the Chinese government's domestic religious geopolitics, this chapter will examine: 1) the PRC's religious regulative framework that reaches through to the smallest administrative scale and to individual bodies; 2) its legislative and spatial practices towards unwanted religious practices; and 3) its discursive practices, specifically that of labelling the FLG as an 'evil cult'. In contrast to the abundant geographical literature available on religious conflicts according to inter-faith and inter-ethnicity 'otherness', the CCP's 'evil cult' discourse in relation to FLG is a dramatic example of the 'othering' of its own, mostly ethnic Chinese, citizens. The construction of dangerous 'evil' is projected as emanating from *inside* the territory of the PRC and is depicted as threatening the CCP's project of building a socialist harmonious society (Cooke, 2011: 126).

In my research, the intensive regulation of religions and practices of 'othering' reveal two examples of interconnected forms of power exercised by the Party-State's religious geopolitics: governmentality and sovereignty. Drawing on Foucault and Agamben, Section 2.1 provides a theoretical discussion of how governmentality, sovereignty and discourse influence and shape individuals' lives. Section 2.2 introduces the Chinese Communist Party's sovereign position in the People's Republic of China,

which offers a platform to better understand the context of the PRC's governmentality and sovereignty in the field of its religious geopolitics, which I discuss in Sections 2.3 and 2.4. In Section 2.5, I analyse some examples of the official discourse about the FLG as an 'evil cult'. This discourse not only shapes the PRC citizen's understandings of the FLG but also construct the citizen's subject position as a rational and scientific individual.

2.1 Theoretical Discussion: Governmentality and Sovereignty

Political geographers have paid close attention to the ways in which the powers of governmentality and sovereignty are interwoven. Sparke (2006) examines the border-crossing practices between U.S. and Canada to explore the relationship between neoliberalism and the exclusionary spaces of exception. Kearns (2014) observes how geopolitical security and sovereignty remain the central concerns of the global interstate system with respect to state bankruptcy, war and colonialism. Similar to these studies, in this section I discuss the concepts of governmentality, sovereignty and discourse drawing upon Foucault and Agamben to describe how diverse power mechanisms are intertwined and can influence, shape and determine individual lives in the modern era.

Governmentality, for Foucault (1991, 2007, 2008), is the deployment of rational tactics for convenient ends, such as to improve the prosperity of individuals and to perfect the disposition of things. Governmentality operates in multiple fields, including: parents managing children in a household; teachers managing students in schools; doctors managing patients in health institutions; and spiritual leaders managing followers in religious orders (Foucault, 1991). At the scale of the state, Foucault refers to governmentality as the management of the population in a number of his lectures, including *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*

(2007) and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979* (2008). Foucault further distinguishes between two modes of state governmentality: 1) the governmentality of politics through the police, which is characterised by regulation and discipline; and 2) the governmentality of economics which regulates the population as a whole with freedom (Foucault, 2007: 348, 353). The differences between these two modes of governmentality are compared by Foucault as the contrast between two different methods of dealing with plague and smallpox respectively. To manage plague, the state imposed a 'partitioning grid on the regions and town struck by plague' that regulated time, space and the activities of inhabitants, and required the household to open itself to inspectors (Foucault, 2007: 10). This mode of governmentality is hierarchical; it supervises and regulates the details of different aspects of individuals' lives in a progressive way for the good of the people, which is comparable to the mechanism of the police. Foucault illustrates this using the example of Delamare's *Traité de la police* (1705), which asserted that the police need to protect a citizen's religion, morals and health to ensure that they have a good life (Foucault, 2007: 334). In *Traité de la police*, the police were supposed to make sure that people in France at that time practiced a sanctioned version of Roman Catholicism (Collins, 1995: 185).

Foucault compares the second mode of governmentality of economics to the methods used to manage smallpox in the eighteenth century. The possibility of infection and the rate of mortality were statistically calculated, whereby the entire population was under examination and might receive vaccination. This mode of governmentality manages the population as a whole to ensure and continually increase its quality, including its wealth and health, which, in turn, increases the state's strength (Foucault, 2007: 69, 105). For example, mercantilism treated the population as a productive force; neo-liberalism contemplates individuals as human capital (Foucault, 2008: 228). Using statistics as an important technique of governmentality, the state can manage different

aspects of the population, including birth rates, education, fertility, mobility, health, economic activities, tax and even public opinion (Foucault, 2007: 105, 272).

Geographical research on forms of state governmentality has focused on the spatial rationality of the workhouse, the asylum, the regulation of urban behaviours, mapping and housing (see Huxley, 2007). Legg (2005) explores governmentality in the context of population geography and Kearns (2007) has discussed how governmentality influences the way that state agencies understand and deal with disease. However, religion as an object of state governmentality has not been sufficiently analysed by geographers. In China, religious governmentality was discussed by Cooke (2011), but little attention was given to the spatial dimension of the government's religious regulation or the differences between the two modes of governmentality. This chapter fills this gap in the literature. I examine how the Chinese government continually regulates religious institutions, personnel, spaces, and even reincarnation (Section 2.2). The Party-State regulations deploy the first mode of the governmentality of police, using the spatial strategy of the 'grid'; control is imposed on the smallest non-official administrative unit and individual bodies, through the Party-State's gaze at local religious activities. The second mode of governmentality, namely the promotion of healthy and capable citizens, is discussed through an examination of the Chinese government's prevention of its population from committing to 'dangerous' or 'evil' religious practices through an anti-cult and pro-science campaign within the space of the school (Section 2.5).

For Foucault (1982, 1998 [1976]), individuals in the modern era were the objects not only of governments who cared for their welfare and prosperity, but also of discourses that turned individuals into subjects. Discourses are statements and practices that describe, explain and categorise the characteristics of individuals in various domains, such as psychology, sexuality, morality or spirituality. Non-state authorities,

such as medical, religious and educational professionals, are also involved in supporting the 'good' conduct of individuals through producing expert discourses. Thus, discourses may be deployed as a form of power that 'categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him' (Foucault, 1982: 781). Johnston (2009) defines this geography of exclusion as a discursive process wherein some bodies are socially constituted as 'others', 'polluted' or 'deviants' that are marginalised spatially on various scales and in various contexts. An example would be the classification of a person as a madman or a homosexual. Geographers have also examined how gender politics and discourses shape bodies, such as through the politics of abortion, pregnancy, prostitution, birth control and heterosexual marriage (Nast and Pile, 1998).

Foucault compares governmentality with Machiavellian sovereignty, whereby the latter is defined as the maintenance of a ruler's control over a territory rather than with the welfare of its inhabitants (Foucault, 1991). The goal of Machiavellian sovereignty is to retain and continue its sovereign position against internal and external challenges. The sovereign acquires the ruling position from inheritance or conquest. Consequently, claims to legitimacy are constantly under threat from external enemies or internal dissatisfaction, and need to be protected and strengthened by the manipulation of all kinds of forces, including through the use of violence and killing (Foucault, 1991). The relationship between governmentality and Machiavellian sovereignty is explained by Foucault in a genealogical way: in the seventeenth century the development of government was blocked by the exercise of sovereignty in Europe. In the eighteenth century, the art of government was freed from this constrained situation and began to expand, although sovereignty did not disappear.

In comparison to Foucault's emphasis on governmentality as the prevailing form of contemporary state force, Agamben highlights sovereignty as the fundamental characteristic of state power in the modern era (Agamben, 1998 [1995], 2005 [2003]). Agamben's discussion of sovereignty is understood as the power to suspend the juridical order through the executive power to proclaim states of exception. Drawing upon Carl Schmitt's *'Politische Theologie'* (1922), Agamben underlines the emergence of sovereign power through the 'state of exception', whereby executive and legislative powers are no longer distinguishable: 'the words of the Führer have the force of law [*Gesetzeskraft*])' (2005 [2003]: 38). By suspending the law through proclaiming states of exception, sovereign power can arbitrarily take away a citizen's political rights which were originally protected by the law. Agamben argues that the state not only governs life and produces discursive subjects, but it can also deprive them of all social elements, including rights, care and even life. The state can transform citizens into 'bare life' and threaten them with death (Agamben, 1998 [1995]).

Drawing upon Agamben's state of exception and bare life, geographers have analysed the spatialities of states of exception by focusing mainly on fixed sites, including 'the camp' (Minca, 2006, 2007). Gregory (2006), for example, focuses on Guantánamo Bay and Abu Graib as extra-territorialized sites of exceptionalism. Mountz (2013) also reviews different geographical works about exceptional sites, including prisons, islands, the sea, bodies and borders, that sovereign states attempt to gain control over. However, Belcher et al. (2008) draw attention to the topological, unlocalisable, emergent and potential aspects of states of exception. They argue that states of exception are constantly 'spatializing' in a process of transformation and emergence and is not finally 'spatialized' (Belcher et al., 2008: 501, italics in original). The potentiality of the sovereignty of state is also enabled through discursive power, namely, the sovereign's capacity to arbitrarily signify, brand and subsequently detain individuals as

‘dangerous’, ‘enemy’ or ‘terrorist’ during a time of war or a threat to the state’s security. Gregory (2006) highlights the performative aspect of this discursive power by exploring the boundary that distinguishes bare life from politically qualified life, concluding that the ‘space of exception’ is not merely a legal space through which laws are suspended, but rather a space of cultural discourse through which ‘otherness’ and ‘the enemy’ are produced. Accordingly, this boundary between citizen and terrorist is mobile and oscillating, thereby making individual lives precarious. Butler (2004) moves beyond the discussion of suspending the law to argue that the state can manipulate the law arbitrarily through discourses to serve its objectives. Drawing upon Gregory and Butler, sovereignty may be understood as exercised not only through territorial strategies but also through the ‘formulation, interpretation and application’ of law (Gregory, 2006: 420).

As I discuss below, in China, the Party-State has struggled to uphold its sovereign position in society on the one hand, while also adopting strategies of governmentality to produce ‘both docile labourers and active entrepreneurial citizens’ in global capitalist systems on the other (Jeffreys and Sigley, 2011: 10). Section 2.2 will briefly introduce the CCP’s sovereign position in the PRC. In Section 2.3, I discuss China’s governmentalities in the context of the religious geopolitics. The governmentality of religious affairs in the PRC has become increasingly more thorough and more finely detailed, involving greater control at the local and micro-scales, including the body. The PRC’s sovereign power is integral to its legal structure; thus, it not only emerges through the ‘state of exception’, but also through, as Flora Sapio (2010: 22) has termed it, the ‘zone of exception’. However, as a spatial metaphor, the term ‘zone of exception’ is misleading as the PRC’s sovereign power is not fixed. Instead, it acts topologically to find and create spaces in which it can exercise sovereign power over vulnerable citizens. In Section 2.4, I will demonstrate how the Party-State’s sovereign power is exercised in

a multitude of ways legally and spatially when expressing its religious geopolitical concerns. It creates the law and transforms Party decisions into legislation without checks-and-balances. It exercises sovereignty by interpreting the law and by passing judgement. Furthermore, the Party-State also utilises cultural discourses to suppress potential religious opposition. One example is its discourse about the FLG as an ‘evil cult’ and its application in schools and villages, which corresponds to the second mode of governmentality of promoting capable citizens. In China, the anti-cult and pro-science discourses in the space of the school attempt to prevent the population from committing ‘dangerous’ or ‘evil’ religious practices, thereby producing ‘rational’ citizens (Section 2.5).

2.2 Understanding the CCP’s Sovereign Position in the PRC

Since the Reform Era after 1978, the CCP has remained the sole dominant political player in the PRC’s political system. It exercises a decisive influence over the state and society through governmental administrations, including the *nomenklatura*, the *xitong*, security measures, the legal system, and administrative detention powers. In this section, I briefly outline the first four mechanisms as the context for the CCP’s religious geopolitics, whereas the CCP’s administrative detention power will be discussed in much greater detail in Section 2.4.

The *nomenklatura* serves as the CCP’s sphere of influence within the Party-State’s administrative organ. It includes all CCP-appointed personnel who have leading positions in the Party, governmental organs, educational institutions, judicial system, enterprise, research institutions, and even religious organisations (Potter, 1999; Shambaugh, 2000; Lieberthal, 2004). The *nomenklatura* not only reinforces the appointed position holders’ loyalty to the CCP, but also exercises power over decision-making, law and regulation-drafting (Shirk, 2007; Lawrence and Martin, 2013).

The Party and the State have separate, but parallel, administrative hierarchies from central to local levels, known as the *xitong*. The *xitong* is an inter-organisational entity that coordinates the relationships between administrative units so that they are consistent with the Party's direction and influence. The *xitong* groups several bureaucracies together to manage the broad tasks of a project at multiple administrative levels (Shambaugh, 2000; Lieberthal, 2004). The result is that a State bureaucratic organ is simultaneously under the control of the territorial Party committee at the same administrative level, and the corresponding State bureaucratic organ at a higher administrative level (Saich, 2004).

In addition to the CCP's controlling mechanism over the State, the Party-State has increased governmental expenditures on internal and public security budgets to maintain control over its populations in recent years (Xie, 2013). In 2013, the internal security apparatus was comprised of three main parts: 1) 800,000 police directed by the Ministry of Public Security; 2) 1.5 million members of the People's Armed Police reporting to the Party's Central Military Commission and the State Council; and 3) 2.25 million members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) which is also responsible for domestic stability. The latter was implicated in the 1989 Tibetan and Tiananmen repressions (Lawrence and Martin, 2013: 3). The budget spent on these public securities, including the court and prison system, exceeded military spending since 2012: 701.8 billion Yuan on internal security not including the PLA, and 670.3 billion Yuan on defence in 2012. In 2013, these totals were 769.1 and 740.6 billion Yuan respectively (Chen, 2014).

Regarding the legal system, to ensure the proper functioning of the market economy by protecting property and contract relations, Deng Xiaoping in 1978 advocated a socialist democracy to be 'institutionalised and written into law', 'laws [that] must be observed and strictly enforced' (Biddulph, 2007: 44, see also Potter,

1999; Peerenboom, 2002; Liang, 2008). The Criminal Law and the Criminal Procedure Law, passed in 1979, for example, represented a legislative step towards a formal and administrative model of criminal justice; the law-making process was regulated by the Legislation Law (Peerenboom, 2002; Biddulph, 2007). The term ‘law’ in Chinese, *falü* 法律, refers to the statutes of the state’s National People’s Congress and its Standing Committee (NPC-SC) (Keller, 1989). However, membership of the NPC-SC is approved by the Party’s Politburo (Potter, 1999). The review and approval of draft laws generally goes through the Party’s Politburo, its Standing Committee and influential Party elders (Keller, 1989; Potter, 1999; Liang, 2008). The former head of the NPC, Qiao Shi, tried to strengthen the role of the NPC-SC and the supremacy of the rule of law during his tenure from 1993-1998, but was removed following a dispute with Jiang Zemin, who insisted on Party leadership over law-making (Saich, 2004).

Peerenboom (2002) noted that China’s efforts to transition toward the ‘rule of law’ has resulted in a clearer and more standardised legal framework.⁹ At the same time, Peerenboom remains critical of China’s administrative law regime that, together with a weak civil society, includes a faulty and ineffective judiciary system, whereby judges and lawyers are poorly trained and influenced by patron-client relationship through the *nomenklatura*. Not only is the rule of law underdeveloped, Peerenboom further argues that the absence of public participation in the law-making process contributes towards the ruling Party’s ability to pass laws in its own favour. Thus, the State Council and its subordinate departments can also promulgate ‘administrative regulations’¹⁰ which have the status of law in China (Keller, 1989). The PRC’s legislation is thus characterised by

⁹ According to the World Bank’s (2013) definition of the rule of law, the following criteria apply: ‘a formally independent and impartial judiciary; laws that are public; the absence of laws that apply only to particular individuals or classes; the absence of retroactive laws; and provisions for judicial review of government action.’

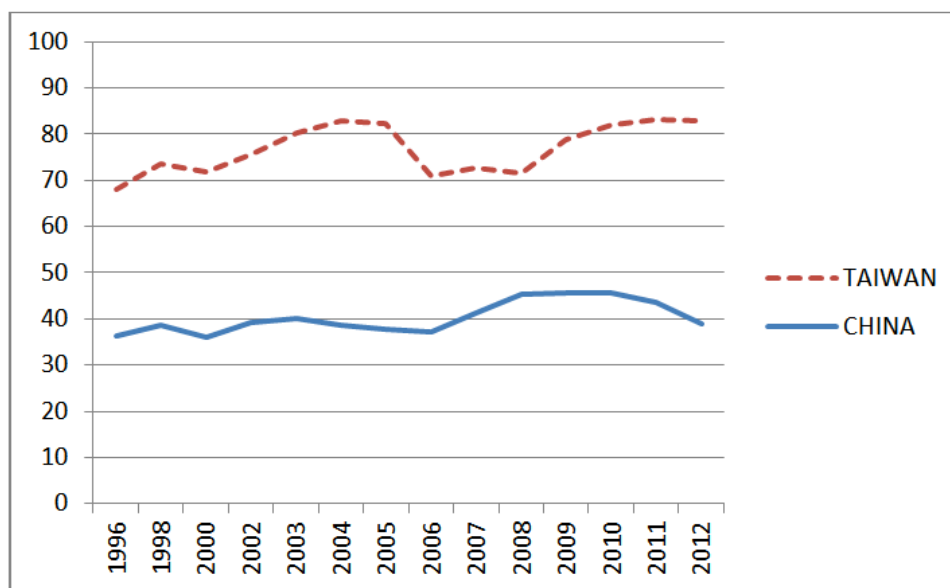
¹⁰ Known as *xingzheng fagui* 行政法规, ‘administrative regulations’ cover all aspects of state administration, such as political, social, economic and educational matters, but exclude military affairs (Keller, 1989: 670).

a low quality ‘rule of law’, as revealed by high levels of arbitrary decision making and the prioritisation of political decisions over norms. Figure 2.1 compares China’s ranking according to the Rule of Law Index, which is relatively low compared to that of Taiwan for 1996-2012.

Figure 2.1: Rule of Law Index.

Note: Percentile rank among all countries ranging from 0 as lowest to 100 as highest.

Source: World Bank, 2013.



For this reason, numerous scholars describe China’s legal system as ‘*rule by law*’ rather than ‘*rule through law*’ because laws have and continue to serve as instruments for the Party-State to regulate society in China (Keller, 1989; Lubman, 1994; Potter, 1999; Shambaugh, 2000; Biddulph, 2007; Liang, 2008). In addition, martial law, which may be considered as a ‘state of exception’ using Agamben’s concept above, may be declared not only by the Chinese State Council, but also by provincial governments (Sapio, 2010: 43f.). When unrest or rebellions arise in any part of any province, martial law may be proclaimed and the area of insurgency may be subjected to military and/or public security control, such as was the case during Lhasa rebellion in 1959, and Tibetan unrest and the Tiananmen student movement in 1989 (Sapio, 2010: 45).

To summarise, the Chinese Communist Party enjoys a monopoly over the legislative, judicial and administrative systems, a monopoly that, with military support,

is too powerful to be challenged by its citizens. The Party-State has an almost absolute centralised control of political power and society (Keith, 1994; Potter, 1995, 1999; Liang, 2008). While individual citizens may ‘enjoy’ the ‘care’ of the government, they are also vulnerable to having their rights taken away by the very power that supports their ‘rights’. In this way, the Party-State has been successful in suppressing potential revolutionary forces and has, until now, eliminated internal conflicts and sustained its authority by deploying diverse strategies, including governmentality and sovereignty as part of its domestic religious geopolitics.

2.3 Governmentality in the PRC’s Religious Geopolitics

In response to the Cultural Revolution, Document No. 19 ‘The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country’s Socialist Period’ (1982) officially recognised the long tradition of the five major religions in China and the existence of their adherents within the PRC: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.¹¹ Document No. 19 (1982) announced the beginning of religious governmentality as part of the CCP’s sovereign project to institutionalise and normalise religious activities in the PRC, and promote patriotism. The following paragraphs outline the development of the PRC’s religious governmentality in the fields of institutions, spaces, activities, religious personnel and publications.

¹¹ ‘II. The Religions of China: There are many religions in China. Buddhism has a history of nearly 2,000 years in China, Daoism one of over 1,700 years, and Islam over 1,300 years, while Roman Catholicism and Protestantism achieved most of their development following the Opium Wars. As for the numbers of religious adherents, at Liberation there were about 8,000,000 Muslims, while today there are about 10,000,000 (the chief reason for this is growth in population among the ten Islamic minorities). At Liberation there were 2,700,000 Catholics; today there are over 3,000,000. Protestants numbered 700,000 in 1949 and are now at 3,000,000. Buddhism (including Lamaism) numbers almost the entire populations of the ethnic minorities of Tibet, Mongolia, and Liao Ning among its adherents. Among the Han race, Buddhism and Daoism still exercise considerable influence at present’ (Document No. 19, 1982, translation from Center on Religion and Chinese Society, 2014).

After 1978, religious affairs have been managed by the Party's organ, the United Front Work Department (UFWD), and the State's Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) (later renamed the State Administration of Religious Affairs in 1998 (SARA)). UFWD has been in charge of promoting patriotism among non-communists since 1945. After 1978, official religious institutions were formally reinstated and religious leaders of these institutions were expected to exercise influence over believers in accordance with the UFWD and the Party's policies (Goossaert and Palmer, 2011). The State's RAB/SARA include central to county-level religious administrative units that manage policy development, enforcement, surveillance and education (Cooke, 2011). The various levels of the administrative units of the PRC are listed in Figure 2.2, which I discuss later in this section regarding the spatial strategies of the PRC's regulation of religion. Instead of drafting religious laws that require approval from the State's National People's Congress, the RABs/SARAs have approached administrative 'regulation' and 'provisions' at national and provincial levels. These regulations define 'obligations' for religious actors, venues, activities and finances that are more 'duty-oriented' than rights-oriented (Wang, 1989, cited in Ying, 2006: 352). The heads of the State's RAB/SARA from 1984 to 2009 have all served in the Party's United Front Work Department, which reveals the intertwining relationship between the Party and State in practice.¹²

¹² According to the Chinese Political Elites Database (Center for China Studies, Taiwan, accessed 27 April 2014), Ren Wuzhi, who was head of the CCP's Central Committee UFWD in 1984, was put in charge of the RAB from 1984 to 1992. He also had official work experience in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Zhang Shengzuo in Xinjiang. His successor, from 1992-1995, was Zhang Shengzuo, former head of the UFWD's division of religious and ethnic affairs and vice-deputy of UFWD between 1988 and 1999. Zhang's successor was Ye Xiaowen, who first led the UFWD's division of religious and ethnic affairs from 1991 to 1995, and then became the head of the RAB (later SARA) from 1995 to 2009. The experiences of two of the three leaders of these organisations reflects the state's geopolitical concerns.

Figure 2.2: The Levels of Administrative Units of the PRC.

Sources: Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2005, Laurance and Martin, 2013: 9f.

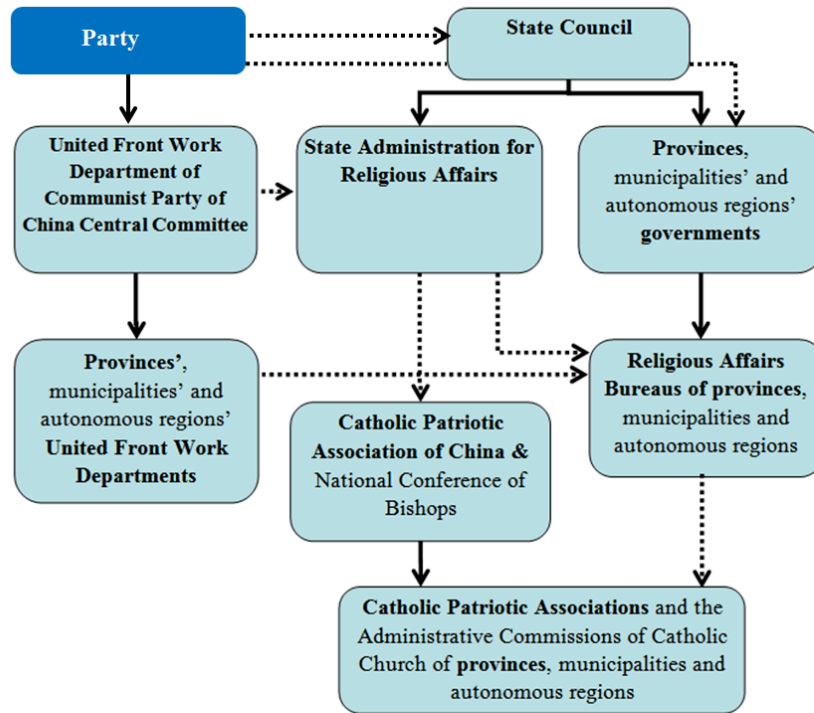
Formal Administration Unit
Provincial-level governments
Prefectural-level administrative units (incl. City)
County-level administrative units (incl. City)
Townships/Towns and Sub-district Office
Self-management at the grass-root level
Village

In addition to the formal Party-State institutions, five national religious associations were re-established in 1980: the Buddhist Association of China, the Islamic Association of China, the Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement of China, the Daoist Association of China and the Catholic Patriotic Association of China (Yang, 2012). Although these five associations are not technically part of the formal State apparatus, the RABs/SARAs exercise an active influence upon them. The Buddhist Association of China (BAC), for example, was officially organised to institutionalise and centralise Buddhists since the beginning of the Reform Era. Before the twentieth century, Buddhist practices were loosely organised around lineages or local communities and were never as centralised as the Christian Churches (Ji, 2008). Figure 2.3 demonstrates the interlocking relationships between the Party, the State and its religious associations, using the example of the Catholic Patriotic Association of China. This activity, whereby the government influences leadership designation and internal matters in these organisations, has been described as GONGO (Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization) (Lieberthal, 2004: 300) and as ‘state corporatism’ (Ji, 2008: 248f.).

Figure 2.3: The Structure of Religious Administration in the PRC, using the Example of the Catholic Patriotic Association of China.

Note: Arrows with solid lines indicate subordinate relationship; arrows with dashed lines indicate the instruction of policies. I have put the ‘Party’ in white, which I discuss in Section 2.3 and 2.4, as a modification to Lin’s diagram.

Source: Lin, 2003: 2.



These patriotic religious associations have the authority to disqualify religious actors or activities that do not fit into their agendas, as stated in Article 8 of the ‘Measures for Putting Religious Personnel on File’ (2006), which forbids any religious personnel from performing religious activities without certification issued by the patriotic religious associations (State Administration for Religious Affairs, PRC, 2007b). In 1982, for example, the officially recognised Protestant Guangzhou Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the Canton Christian Council declared Pastor Lin Xiangao of an underground house-church an ‘outlaw’ and accused him of allowing some ‘foreign missionaries to carry out religious activities in his home without the agreement of our China Christian Council’ (Morrison, 1984: 249). The GONGOs can also criticise other non-State-sanctioned (or non-State-authorized) groups. In 1998, for example, several Buddhists magazines and Buddhists from the Buddhist Association of China began to

criticise the FLG as an ‘evil cult’ and accused it of failing to adhere to orthodoxy (Ji, 2008; Palmer, 2008).

In addition to the five patriotic religious associations, the Party-State began to re-establish and open new religious academies and seminaries: the China Buddhist Academy, the China Islamic Academy, the Nanjing Theological Seminary, the China Catholic Seminary, and other local academies (Goossaert and Palmer, 2011). Here, religious training is less spiritual. Instead, clerics are provided with academic and social capital within the religious academies. By the 2000s, the important religious leadership positions were held by clerics with academic degrees who held good relationships with officials, rather than by ones with spiritual qualities (Birnbaum, 2003; Goossaert and Palmer, 2011).

Since 1991, the governmentality of religious affairs in the PRC has become increasingly more thorough and more finely detailed. Ye Xiaowen, the head of the RAB described the aim of governmental religious work in 1996 as not about ‘registration for its own sake, but [...] control over places for religious activities as well as over all religious activities themselves’ (quoted in Human Rights Watch, 1997). Similar to Foucault’s spatial analogy between the grid of regulation imposed on the regions struck by plague and the governmentality of the police, the PRC also uses grids of management, control and surveillance to deal with its domestic religious activities. Document 6 (1991) extends the administrative units in charge of religious affairs down to township level.¹³ In the same year, the Measure on Registration and Management of Religious Organizations (1991) granted the national and local RABs the authority to examine and approve the registration of national and/or local religious organisations. Accordingly, the religious organisations were required to submit their sutras, religious

¹³ ‘Those townships facing the task of handling religious affairs should have someone in charge of such work, on a full-time basis if the task is a serious one’ (Document 6, Issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the State Council on Some Problems Concerning Further Improving Work on Religion, 1991, cited in Britsch, 1995: 391).

doctrines and canons to make sure these were ‘not in breach of the regulation’ (translation from the Center on Religion and Chinese Society, 2014). Three years later, the government attempted to regulate activities and persons within registered religious sites through the ‘Regulation Governing Venues for Religious Activities’ (passed by the State Council in 1994). Article 4 outlined what activities were not permitted, including activities ‘which harm national unity, ethnic unity, or the social order, harm citizens’ health or obstruct the national educational system’, and required that these activities not ‘be controlled by persons or organizations outside China’. Article 5 required residents at religious sites to be registered at the household level. Article 11 regulated the management of building, services, exhibitions, and making films (translation from the Center on Religion and Chinese Society, 2014). Two years later, in 1996, the ‘Measures for the Annual Inspection of Places of Religious Activities’ (passed by the RAB of the State Council in 1996) required all registered sites to be inspected and approved annually by officials. Before application for inspection, the religious site should acquire the agreement of the Township People's Governments or the Sub-district Offices. Upon failing an inspection, for example breaking laws and administrative regulations, the religious site can be ordered to close down.¹⁴

Religious sites thus are open to active examination (and/or also surveillance) by their local neighbours down to the urban sub-district level, the lowest formal administrative level (see Figure 2.2). In practice, religious governmentality that aims at

¹⁴ ‘Article 10. Places of religious activity involved in any one of the following situations shall be classified as having failed the annual inspection: a. Breaking the law, regulations or relevant policy regulations; b. Conducting religious or foreign-related activity which is illegal or against the rules; c. Conducting activity which is not in accordance with the rules and regulations in existence at the place of religious activity; d. Breaking the relevant financial regulations; e. Not having gone through the formalities of putting on record any changes in registration and establishments; f. Important activities lacking democratic procedures; g. Not accepting annual inspection within the specified time limit without reasonable excuse; h. Falsification in the annual inspection; i. Breaking other relevant regulations.[...]

Article 14. Where the situation is especially serious, the department may ask the People's Government at (the appropriate) level to close down the place in accordance with the law’ (Article 14 of Measures for the Annual Inspection of Places of Religious Activities, 1996, translation from the Center on Religion and Chinese Society, 2014).

residents' surveillance reaches to the lowest spatial administrative level, the village (a theoretically self-managing level), at a time when more younger people and party members were becoming religious believers (Chinese Law and Religion Monitor, 2005b). For example, according to an internal document from a city government in the Anhui province in 2002, the offices of its villages should assign an official to collect information concerning local religious activities and report to Village Committees every season (Chinese Law and Religion Monitor, 2005a).

Finally, the PRC's religious governmentality also operates at the scale of the body in that the government attempts to regulate and supervise the activities of religious personnel (see the discussion of the governmentality of politics through the police in Section 2.1). Article 27 of the 'Regulations on Religious Affairs' (issued in 2004 and adopted by the State Council in 2005) gives the patriotic religious associations the authority to 'qualify and confirm' religious personnel.¹⁵ This Article 27 was further refined by two other governmental measures. First, the 'Measures for Putting Religious Personnel on File' (2006) forbids any uncertified religious personnel from practicing their religious activities. As a result, the regulation of religious personnel has become centralised by the patriotic religious associations. Secondly, 'Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism' was adopted in 2007. It would seem that even the prefectural-level city government has been

¹⁵ 'Article 27. Religious personnel who are determined qualified as such by a religious body and reported for the record to the religious affairs department of the people's government at or above the county level may engage in professional religious activities.

The succession of living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism shall be conducted under the guidance of Buddhist bodies and in accordance with the religious rites and rituals and historical conventions, and be reported for approval to the religious affairs department of the people's government at or above the level of a city divided into districts, or to the people's government at or above the level of a city divided into districts. With respect to Catholic bishops, the matter shall be reported for the record by the national religious body of the Catholic Church to the religious affairs department of the State Council.' (Regulations on Religious Affairs, 2004, translation from Center on Religion and Chinese Society, 2014). See also Ying's (2006: 347) discussion.

granted the divine right to permit and reject the reincarnation of Tibetan Buddhists.¹⁶ As Kindopp and Hamrin (2004) noted in a different context, it is as if Caesar has seized power from the gods.

Finally, a 1994 provision decreed that all domestically printed bibles require official approval before they can be distributed to officially approved organisations. Thus, this form of religious regulation has constrained religious publications in China.¹⁷ In 2004, Article 7 of the ‘Regulations on Religious Affairs’ censored those press publications, which were considered to have: jeopardized the harmonious co-existence between religious and non-religious citizens; propagated religious extremism; and contravened the principle of independence and self-governance in respect of religions (Regulations on Religious Affairs, 2004, translation from SARA, 2014a). Managing the distribution of religious publications reflects the CCP’s belief that foreign and autonomous religious leaderships pose threats to its sovereignty.

2.4 Sovereignty in the PRC’s Religious Geopolitics

Alongside the government’s attempts to govern religious matters concerning institutions, spaces, personnel and publications, the Party-State also exercises its sovereignty regarding non-conforming religious activities through criminal law, executive power, and administrative detention power.

¹⁶ Article 4. Applicants to be reincarnating living Buddhas who have any of the following conditions may not be reincarnated: (1) Reincarnations which are not regulated by the religious doctrine of Tibetan Buddhism; (2) Those in city-level people’s governments and above with delineated districts, which ordered no reincarnations to be permitted’ (Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism, 2007, translation from Congressional Executive Commission on China, US, 2007). For the original version in Chinese see: State Administration for Religious Affairs, PRC (2007a).

¹⁷ 1. Responsibility for the domestic printing of Bible texts is assigned to the national religious organizations. The printing must receive approval from the State Council Religious Affairs Bureau and be distributed internally within the church. [...] 3. In principle, contracting the printing of Chinese language or Chinese-foreign language editions of Bible texts from outside the borders is not allowed. If there is a special need, this must be reported to the State Council Religious Affairs Bureau for approval’ (Provisions Regarding the Administration of Contracts to Print Bible Texts, 1994, translation from Congressional Executive Commission on China, US, 2005). For the original version in Chinese see: State Administration for Religious Affairs, PRC (2010).

Firstly, the Party-State's sovereign power is embedded in its criminal law. Christian, Tibetan Buddhists and Muslims are especially vulnerable to criminal codes pertaining to 'crimes of counterrevolution', and 'colluding' or 'plotting' with foreign states to jeopardise China's security, sovereignty or security.¹⁸ The US Congress' Political Prisoner Database noted that more than 100 followers of Tibetan Buddhism were charged with violating Article 102 or 103 of the Criminal Law (1997) after the introduction of this law (Congressional Executive Commission on China, US, 2013).¹⁹ The same database also shows that more than 30 Protestants and 300 Falun Gong followers have been charged with violating Article 300 of the Criminal Law. According to Article 300:

Whoever organizes or uses superstitious sects or secret societies or evil religious organizations, or uses feudal superstition to undermine enforcement of the state's laws or administrative regulations shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than three years and not more than seven years (Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, revised in 1997, translation from China Internet Information Center, 2014).

The interpretation and definition of what constitutes 'superstitious sects' or 'evil religious organizations' in Article 300 is arbitrary and fully under the control of administrative organs, including the United Front Departments, RABs and the Ministry of Public Security (Yang, 2012). Article 300 allows the Party-State to exercise

¹⁸ See Articles 90, 91, 92 and 102 of the Criminal Law (adopted in 1979), and Articles 102, 103 and 111 of the Criminal Law (revised in 1997).

¹⁹ 'Article 102. Whoever colludes with a foreign state in jeopardizing the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of the People's Republic of China shall be sentenced to life imprisonment or fixed-term imprisonment of not less than ten years. Whoever colludes with an agency or organization or individual outside China and commits the crime stipulated in the preceding paragraph shall be punished according to the provisions of the preceding paragraph.

Article 103. Ringleaders who organize, scheme for or carry out dismembering the state and undermining the unification of the state and those whose crimes are severe shall be sentenced to life imprisonment or fixed-term imprisonment of not less than ten years. Active participants shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than three years and not more than ten years. Other participants shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not more than three years, criminal detention, public surveillance or deprivation of political rights. Whoever incites dismembering the state and undermining the unification of the state shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not more than five years, criminal detention, public surveillance or deprivation of political rights. Ringleaders or those whose crimes are severe shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than five years [...]' (Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, revised in 1997, translation from China Internet Information Center, 2014).

discursive power and to signify certain religious groups as evil religious organisations. In comparison to Taiwan, where no religious groups have been banned following the lifting of Martial Law in 1978,²⁰ the government of the PRC has continually suppressed non-authorised spiritual groups since 1978. According to Yang (2012: 102f.), at least sixteen Christian-related groups have been banned in China since 1979. Figure 2.4 shows fourteen ‘evil cults’ that are related to Christianity or Buddhism and which were listed in an internally circulated document by the Ministry for Public Security (2001).

Figure 2.4: Fourteen ‘Evil Cults’ listed in an Internally Circulated Document (Ministry of Public Security, 2001).

Source: Internal official document by the Ministry for Public Security (2001), cited in Committee for Investigation on Persecution of Religion in China (2002) and information from Yang (2012: 103ff). Relevant dates and places are cited in both sources.

Name	Name in Chinese Pinyin	Origin	Year founded/spread	Year banned
Shouters	<i>Huhan pai</i>	U.S.A.	1960s-1970s	1983
All Scoped Church	<i>Quanfanwei jiaohui</i>	China	1984	1988
Disciples Sect	<i>Mentu hui</i>	China	1989	1990
Lingling Sect	<i>Linling jiao</i>	China	1983	1991
Established King	<i>Beili wang</i>	China	1988	1992
New Testament Church	<i>Xinyue jiaohui</i>	Taiwan	1964/1988	1995
Children of God	<i>Tianfu de ernü</i>	U.S.A.	1968	1995
True Buddha School	<i>Zhenfo zong</i>	U.S.A.	1979	1995
Dami Evangelism Association	<i>Dami xuanjiaohui</i>	South Korea	1988	1995
Supreme Master	<i>Guanyin famen</i>	Taiwan	1988	1995
Lord God Sect	<i>Zhushen jiao</i>	China	1993	1995
World Elijah Evangelism Association	<i>Shijie yiliya fuyin xuanjiaohui</i>	South Korea	1980	1996
Unification Church	<i>Tongyi jiao</i>	Korea	1954	1997
Three Ranks of Servants	<i>Sanban puren pai</i>	China	1980s	1999

In addition to these religious groups, some *qigong* and various other breathing exercises combined with spiritual elements, were banned. *Qigong* masters have also been incarcerated during several anti-*qigong* waves in the early 1990s (Palmer, 2007; Yang,

²⁰ ‘The action is itself illegal when [the Taiwan] government declares a religion illegal, because there is no legal basis’ (Chiu, 2006b: 163).

2012), even though the state itself was one of the main forces behind the ‘qigong fever’ (see Palmer, 2007).

In addition to using Article 300 of the Criminal Law to suppress the FLG, the government established an additional political organ on 10 June 1999 to deal with the FLG, called the 610 Office. Known as the ‘Leading Group for Handling the Falun Gong Problem’, 610 Offices are composed of Party officials and officials from law enforcement institutions, forming part of provincial, prefecture, county, and even township level government agencies (Tong, 2009: 152; Sapio, 2010: 67). Tong also found reports of special agencies dealing with the FLG established by the Party committee in many universities, a street block and one machinery factory (2009: 152f.). Whereas SARA is the organisation directly ‘under’ the State Council, the 610 Office is a functional office ‘of’ the State Council and is also a unit which operates just under the Party’s Central Committee (Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2014). The top authorities of the 610 Office have higher status than SARA (Yang, 2012: 81); a member of the Party’s Politburo, Luo Gan, was instructed to head the 610 Office (Tong, 2009: 134). According to Sapio’s (2010: 67f.) and Tong’s (2009: 64) analyses of official documents, the local 610 Offices collect personal information on suspected and actual members of so-called ‘evil cults’ as well as monitor their activities on a regular basis. The government also created a new regulation to deal specifically with the FLG, entitled ‘Legislative Resolution on Banning Heretic Cults’, adopted on 30 October 1999. It is within this piece of legislation that *qigong* is explicitly classified as a potential category of heretic cult.²¹ This resolution enables courts, procuratorates, public security, national security and judicial administrative agencies to ban the FLG.

²¹ ‘Heretic cults, operating under the guise of religion, Qigong or other illicit forms, which disturb social order and jeopardize people's life and property, must be banned according to law and punished resolutely’ (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, 1999).

A further sovereign technique of the Party-State is the administrative detention power deployed by police, civil administration and labour departments. Individuals can be incarcerated for up to three years according to laws or administrative regulations without going through the criminal process (Fu, 2005). Administrative detention powers find their spatial expression through ‘re-education through labour’ camps (*laojiaosuo*), which incarcerate those defined as guilty of minor offences according to administrative regulations issued by the State Council and the Ministry of Public Security. Figure 2.5 illustrates the relative increase in the number of *laojiaosuo* from 1984 to 1999. *Laojiaosuo* are different than the prison system’s ‘reform through labour’ spaces, in that the latter are designed for convicted criminals (Zou, 2001; Biddulph, 2007; Sapio, 2010). For *laojiaosuo*, in contrast, Public Security organs are the main authorities who issue, re-examine and alter decisions regarding potential inmates. Their decisions are not subject to third-party control.

Originally *laojiaosuo* were designed for counter-revolutionaries and other unwanted members of society in 1955 (Biddulph, 2007). The number of individuals sent to the *laojiaosuo* declined from 1961 to the end of the Cultural Revolution, but increased after 1979 (Figure 2.6). After 1978, administrative detention powers expanded with a larger range of targeted populations and an overall increase in the number of inmates. In 1979, *laojiaosuo* was designed for urban populations, so that such citizens could be re-educated for the workforce. Gradually, this detention institution also expanded to include rural areas (Pan, 2006). Pan (2006) observes the arbitrariness and the expansion of *laojiaosuo*’s target groups, which included drug-abusers after 1990 and prostitutes after 1991. *Laojiaosuo* have recently functioned as units for: crime control for the punishment of minor offences or immoral acts; drug control; investigative detention; and the political control of dissidents, such as supporters of the student

movement in 1989, FLG followers since 1999, and Uyghurs and Tibetans seeking autonomy from the State (Biddulph, 2007).

Figure 2.5: Number of Chinese ‘Re-Education Through Labour’ Camps (*Laojiaosuo*), 1984-1999.

Source: Data collected from Fu (2005: 822).

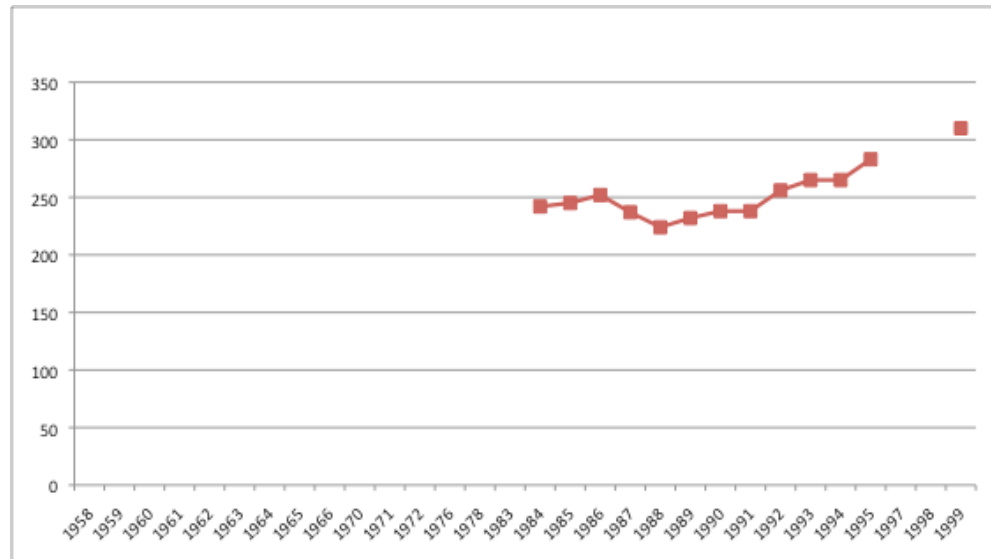
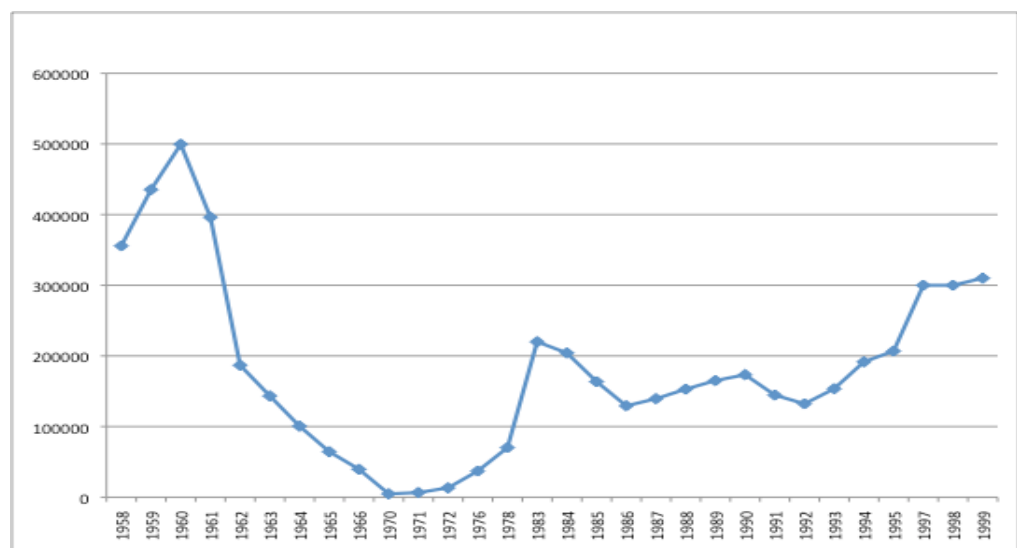


Figure 2.6: Number of *Laojiaosuo* Inmates, 1958-1999.

Source: Data collected from Fu (2005: 822), see also Pan (2006: 9).



Laojiaosuo are not the only type of space used to detain religious believers. According to one FLG website, FLG believers are also sent to mental hospitals, drug rehabilitation centres and re-education centres. Figure 2.7 shows the locations of *laojiaosuo* where 10,282 FLG followers were imprisoned as of 19th November, 2014.

Some provinces, mostly in the North, used *laojiaosuos* to incarcerate FLG followers, including in Heilongjiang, Jilin, Hebei, Beijing, Tianjing, Shandong, Henan and Guangdong. FLG followers were also sent to *laojiaosuos* in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia. Figure 2.8 shows 1,346 FLG followers being held in other types of detention institutions (Global Mission to Rescue Persecuted Falun Gong Practitioners, 2014). For example, drug rehabilitation centres were used to detain FLG followers in Beijing, Heilongjiang, Liaoning, Jiangxi, Guangdong and Gangsu. Liaoning has the highest incidence of incarcerating FLG followers in other types of detention centres (ibid)

The use of ‘psychiatric’ diagnoses of ‘political deviancy’ during the Reform Era is also well-documented by Robin Munro (2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c), a London-based expert who researches human rights abuses in the PRC. According to Munro’s 2002 report, twenty Ankang hospitals were established in the country to treat the ‘mentally ill’ individuals, who were deemed to pose a danger to public order (Munro, 2002a: 13). Munro further reported that some individuals were diagnosed as ‘schizophrenic’ and/or ‘paranoid psychosis’, because they had been involved in ‘sending ‘reactionary letters’, ‘petitioning and litigating’, ‘shouting reactionary slogans’, ‘writing reactionary slogans’ or ‘spreading rumours to delude the masses’ (Munro, 2002a: 15).

Figure 2.7: Number of FLG Followers Imprisoned in *Laojiaosuo* as of 19 Nov, 2014.

Source: Global Mission to Rescue Persecuted Falun Gong Practitioners (2014). This website is organised by FLG followers. The data is updated on a daily basis.

Map Author: Weihuan Lin.

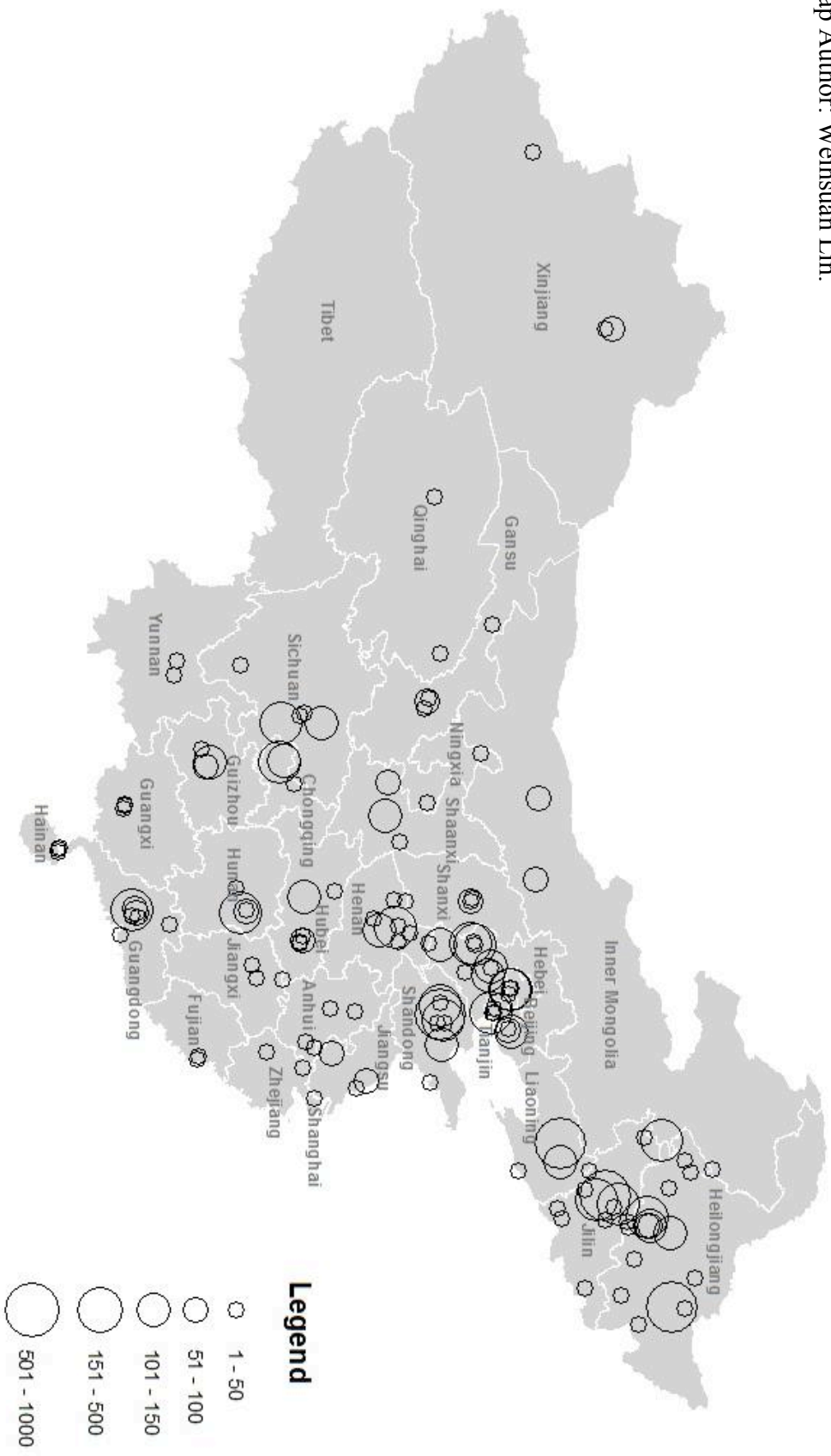
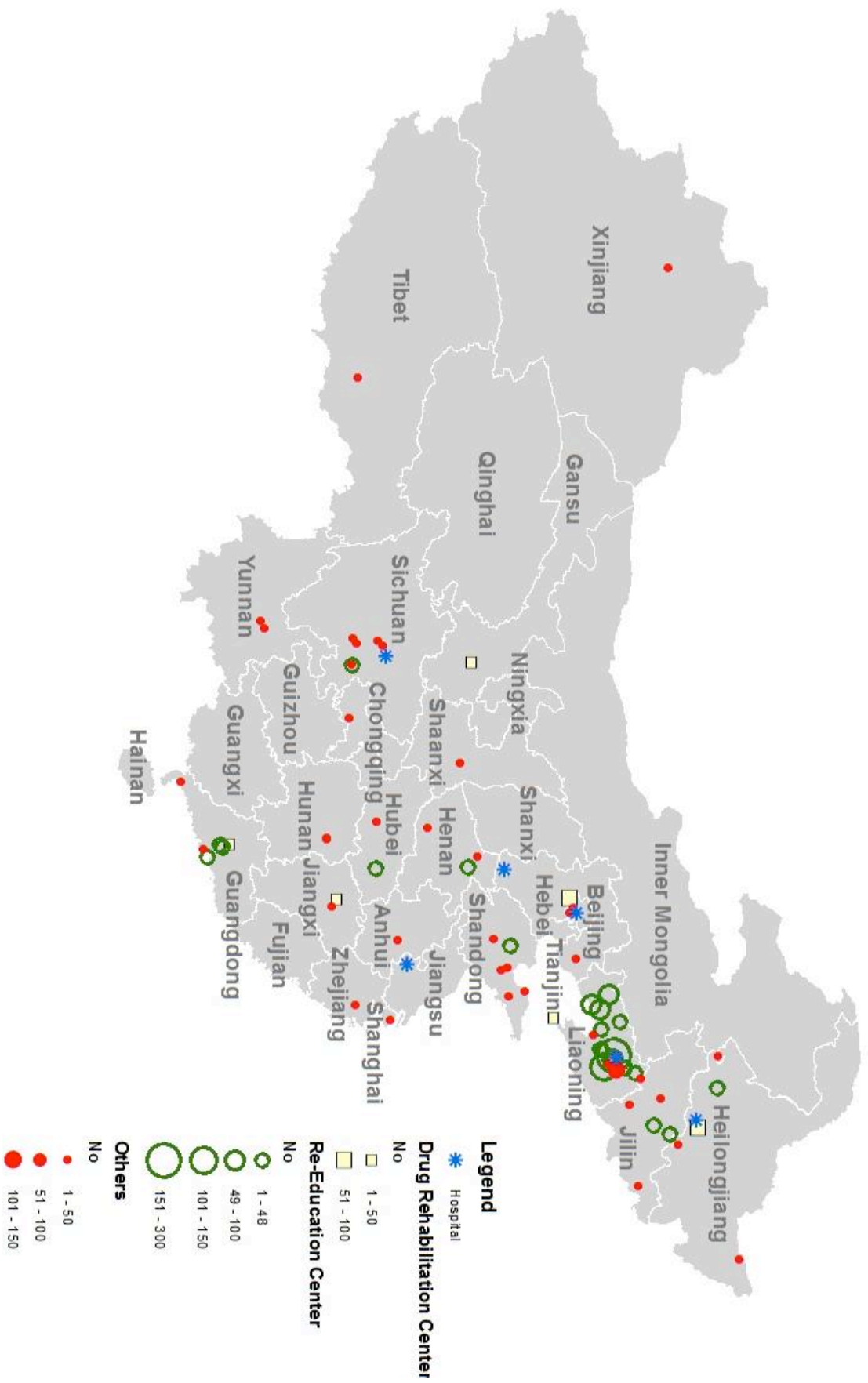


Figure 2.8: Number of FLG Followers in Other Detention Institutions, 19 Nov, 2014.
 Source: Global Mission to Rescue Persecuted Falun Gong Practitioners (2014).
 Map Author: Weihuan Lin.



The same view is held by legal scholars Jerome Cohen and Margaret Lewis (2013), as well as NGOs and the UN Commission on Human Rights. Human Rights Watch (1992), for example, described the case of a 70-year old professor in Hunan Province who supported the democratic movement in 1989 and was detained on psychiatric grounds. In 2005, the UN special rapporteur, Manfred Nowak, interviewed Liu Xinjian, who had been sent to the Minghang Psychiatric Hospital in 2003, after filing a petition against the illegal demolition of her house (UN Commission on Human Rights, 2006: 57). Although the professionalism of psychiatric practice in the PRC is defended by Lee and Kleinman (2002), they also acknowledge the influence of corruption and pressure from the police, and the abuses in psychiatric practice for political purposes.

Within these detention institutions, the government deploys various conversion programmes to ‘cure’ the FLG followers, including obligatory viewing of anti-FLG television programs, study sessions on materialisms, and physical and psychological torture (Tong, 2009: 102f.). Official data reveals high conversion rates of FLG followers in detention institutions, ranging from 29.3% in Qinghai Province in 2001, to 98.7% in Inner Mongolia in 2003 (Tong, 2009: 210).

The abolition of the *laojiaosuo* was adopted by the State in a resolution in December 2013 (Xinhua, 2013). However, without changing the Party-State political system, questions remain about how the Party will deal with dissidents in the future. As my discussion has shown, sovereign power is not spatialised in just one kind of site, but continually spatialises, taking diverse forms and moving locations.

2.5 Discursive Governmentality: the Falun Gong as an ‘Evil Cult’

In addition to the use of administrative regulations, criminal law, executive power and detention spaces, the Party-State effectively uses discursive strategies to manage the actions of its citizens, including protecting the Chinese body-politic from so-called ‘evil cults’. As noted in Chapter 1, since 1999, the FLG has been classified as a ‘cult’ and is represented as a threat to social stability. Tong (2009: 78f.) regards the Party-State’s anti-FLG media campaign as the most severe propaganda war on a domestic issue in the Reform Era: over 100 programming hours denouncing the FLG was aired by the China Central Television Corporation within four weeks of the official ban and around 120 titles of anti-FLG books published by the official presses. This section will examine the scientific and rational discourse concerning the FLG as an ‘evil cult’ and how this discourse developed out of the Party-State’s techniques of governmentality and sovereignty. Below I first explore Chinese academic representations of the group to understand how the FLG is portrayed as an ‘evil cult’ by academic professionals. I then discuss the ways in which this discourse has been disseminated to citizens, especially to students.

One of the most important events that triggered the conflict between the FLG and the CCP was the publication of a journal article in 1999 by a Chinese scientist, He Zuoxiu, in which he castigated the FLG. He argued that the solution to this ‘societal problem’ is scientific education. Academic works examining the FLG in China represent the dichotomy of scientific rationality (considered to be positive) versus superstition (perceived as negative or lacking rationality). The academic discourses of science and cults were strategically used to represent the FLG as a deviant group and to legitimate the CCP’s legal and juridical sanctions against them. In 2011, an edited book entitled ‘*Research on the Protection and the Action Against Evil Cults in Chinese Higher Education*’ was published by the scholarly China Social Sciences Press. The

book proposed possible actions that could be taken to oppose the spread of cults in Chinese universities. Firstly, the book analysed new religious movements that are directly associated with violence, such as the U.S.-born Peoples Temple and the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo. By conflating so-called Chinese ‘evil cults’ with these violent religious movements, the former was represented as brutal:

There are all kinds of evil cults in China. Since they are evil cults, they are all characterised by the same qualities and characteristics of evil cults. They are not different from the notorious, Western, evil cult organisations, like the Peoples Temple, The Family (Children of God), and the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth). In sum, these characteristics are anti-human, anti-social, anti-government and anti-science (Z. Yang, 2011: 99, my own translation).

Secondly, this book presented mental control as a characteristic of the FLG:

Mind control: [...] Master Li asks Falun Gong followers to transcribe and memorise his “teaching manual” repeatedly. In this process of transcribing and memorising, individuals are caught in the chain of absolute obedience to Li Hongzhi unconsciously, and they finally become the infatuated and the sacrificial object of the FLG (He, 2011: 146, my own translation).

Although He (2011) defines the practice of memorising Master Li’s scriptures as ‘mind control’, I understand this practice to be part of individual FLG followers’ cultivation processes, which I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5. The third point highlighted by this book is the need to promote the ‘spirit of science’ in Chinese higher education to prevent students from believing in ‘evil cults’, particularly the FLG (Zhang, 2011: 254).²²

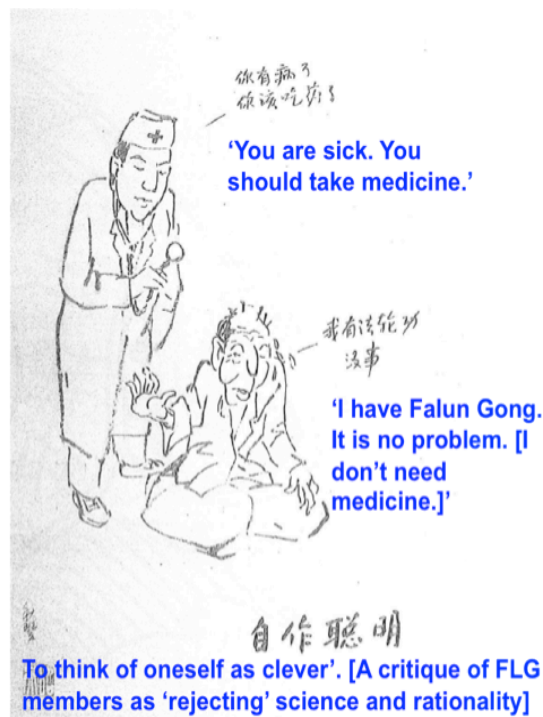
The promotion of ‘scientific rationality’ over ‘superstition’ has been reinforced through the establishment of Anti-Cult associations. The China Anti-Cult Association (CACA) was founded by He Zuoxiu on 13 November 2000 (Edelman and Richardson, 2005). A large number of the members of CACA have science degrees and professional backgrounds associated with technical rationality, such as aerodynamic engineering and hydroelectric engineering (Edelman and Richardson, 2005). There are also other anti-

²² ‘Education in the spirit of science must be continuously worked on. [...] Some lecturers at the university, scientists, PhD and Master students believe in the FLG. This fact proves that it is not enough to have only scientific knowledge, the spirit of science is needed’ (Zhang, 2011: 254, my own translation).

cult associations at provincial and city levels, for example the Fujian Anti-Cult Association and the Shanghai Anti-Cult Association.²³ The political cartoon in Figure 2.9, published by the Zhejiang Anti-Cult Association and the Hangzhou City Anti-Cult Association in 2007, depicts a Falun Gong member as irrational for declining medicine from a medical professional. We see here how a FLG follower is portrayed as an irrational individual denying modern medicine. The diversity of Chinese citizen's health options has been simplified into the dual category of either accepting or denying modern medicine.

Figure 2.9: A Visual Critique of the FLG.

Source: Li, Z. 2007, with my own translation of original texts in cartoon.



Academic institutions and the Anti-Cult associations are not alone in their dissemination of these 'evil cult' discourses. Local governments, village officials and schools continually reiterate these discourses to farmers, community residents and students. One city government in Shanxi province, for example, organised the 'Anti-Cult' Warning Education Leading Group. This was comprised of members from the

²³ the Fujian Anti-Cult Association: <http://www.fjfxj.org/>; the Shanghai Anti-Cult Association: <http://www.zhanlu.org.cn/>.

Organization Department of the City Party Committee, the City Civilisation Office, the City Education Bureau, the City Public Security Bureau, the City Agriculture Bureau, the City Communist Youth League, the City Association for Science and Technology and the 610 Office of the City Party Committee (Chinese Law and Religion Monitor, 2005c: 3). This group promoted four ‘legitimate’ *qigong* exercises as outlined by the General Administration of Sport (Ibid: 4). The leading group’s slogan is ‘Honor science, care for families, treasure life and boycott cults’ (Ibid: 5). Another city in Hubei province asked villagers to sign a document which states that: 1) the head of a household is responsible for any family member who believes in evil cults; and 2) every family should dedicate itself to learning technology and moving towards a materially prosperous life (Chinese Law and Religion Monitor, 2005d: 24). Or, for example, a school in Guangzhou created a powerpoint presentation (shown in Figure 2.10) in 2008 to ‘teach’ students the five characteristics of the FLG. Moving counter-clockwise, the figures can be roughly translated as: 1) Sects and cults plagiarising religions; 2) I [Master Li] put off the explosion of the earth; 3) Illegal organisation; 4) I [Master Li] am a god; (5) [Master Li and] mind control; (6) [Master Li as a] financial and sexual swindler. In the same school, students were expected to inform teachers if they received contact from FLG members. Another slide of this powerpoint also associated the FLG with the Aum Shinrikyo and the People’s Temple (see Figure 2.11). Figures 2.12 and 2.13 also show the anti-cult and pro-science educational strategies deployed by two different schools in Zhejiang province (2014) and Beijing (2013).

Figure 2.10: Anti-Cult Education Powerpoint Slide. The images depict, moving counter-clockwise: 1) Sects and cults plagiarising religions; 2) I [Master Li] postpone the explosion of the earth; 3) Illegal organisation; 4) I [Master Li] am a god; 5) [Master Li and] mind control; (6) [Master Li as a] financial and sexual swindler. Source: Nanhai Middle School (2008).



Figure 2.12: Anti-Cult Education (2013). The LED board reads: 'Honor science, boycott cults, promote education'. Source: Qiaozhi Middle School, Beijing (2013).



Figure 2.11: Anti-Cult Education Powerpoint Slide. From left to the right, the individuals represented are from the: FLG, Aum Shinrikyo, and Peoples Temple. Source: Nanhai Middle School (2008).



Figure 2.13: Anti-Cult Education (2014). Words on the black board read: 'Honor science, boycott cults'. Source: Jingning Nationality Middle School, Zhejiang (2014).



2.6 Conclusion

In the People’s Republic of China, religious geopolitics has been and continues to be an important domain wherein the Party-State exercises its governmentality and sovereignty

to manage and repress groups and individuals that are thought to threaten its control over power. The Party-State has utilised various finely detailed administrative frameworks and spatial strategies to regulate religious institutions, personnel, activities, spaces, publications and even reincarnation. To suppress and eliminate non-conforming religious activities, the Party-State exercises sovereign power through diverse techniques, including: criminal laws against secret societies and ‘evil’ religious organisations; the establishment of new regulations and institutions, such as the 610 Office; and the deployment of administrative detention powers to incarcerate FLG members in *laojiaosuo* or mental hospitals. Sovereign power is exercised through the arbitrary and discursive classification of legal/illegal activities.

I have also demonstrated how media and educational discourses presenting the FLG as an ‘evil cult’ reflect the Party-State’s technique of both harmful and productive powers. Discourse can be destructive when it creates injurious effects through hate speech (Butler, 1997). The Party-State’s ‘evil cult’ discourse projects negative characteristics, such as mind control, irrationality, violence, illegality and superstition, onto FLG followers. The FLG, thereby, becomes an unwanted element in Chinese society, where even a school student is obliged to denounce any FLG follower to a teacher. At the same time, discourse may be constructive when it is used to produce individual subject positions. As Butler (1997: 25) writes, ‘the act of recognition becomes an act of constitution: the address animates the subject into existence’. In the context of China, the ‘evil cult’ discourse not only ‘others’ the FLG; it is also used to construct a model Chinese citizen. Academic publications and anti-cult teachings ‘instruct’ citizens what is appropriate behaviour, which includes honouring science and working for materially prosperous life.

These examples demonstrate how citizens’ minds and behaviours have been regulated in some depth and detail by the state. Officially, the minds of the PRC’s

citizens are expected to be occupied by rationality rather than superstition and by material prosperity rather than spirituality. Citizens are expected to accept professional medical care rather than manage their bodies in alternative ways. They are also urged to practice the four arts of *qigong* only as described by the official sports authority, rather than by unauthorized and non-State *qigong* masters.

In February, 2014, the cross on the top of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement church in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province was forcibly removed by the local government (China Aid Association, 2014a; Jiang, 2014). In the same province in April 2014, another larger Three-Self Patriotic Movement church in Wenzhou City – the Sanjiang Church – was threatened with the removal of its cross and even the demolition of the whole building (China Aid Association, 2014b). Despite thousands of Christians protesting and forming a human shield in front of the Sanjiang Church (Figure 2.14), it was finally demolished by officials at the end of the month (Figure 2.15).

Figure 2.14: Christians from Wenzhou Stand Guard in front of Sanjiang Church, 4 April 2014.

Source: China Aid Association (2014b).



Figure 2.15: The demolition of Sanjiang Church, 28 April 2014.

Source: Photographs sent to *Telegraph* and posted on social media (Telegraph, 2014).



Local believers held that the provincial Party Secretary Xia Baolong was the main driving force behind the demolition of the cross. During his local inspection in January, Xia commented that the cross on the church was far too extravagant (China Aid

Association, 2014a; Jiang, 2014). Here we see that even the words of the provincial Party secretary have the force of the law. Again, this case reveals the extent of the Party-State's sovereign power over religious activities; it has the ability to arbitrarily destroy and outlaw even that which it had previously deemed legal.

As Foucault (2007: 390) argues, '(p)olitics is no more or less than that which is born with resistance to governmentality, the first uprising, the first confrontation'. The 2014 demolition of Zhejiang church has resulted in some Protestant Christians interpreting these political events as omens of the apocalypse (McLeister, 2015). I consider such interpretations as a form of resistance. In this light, the next chapter explores religious resistance, in particular the FLG's geopolitical discourses, as a challenge to the Party-State's sovereignty.

Chapter 3: The Geopolitics of FLG Scriptures

In the last chapter I examined different forms of religious geopolitics that have been and continue to be important domains for the Party-State to exercise its governmentality and sovereignty as a means of managing and repressing groups and individuals. However, despite the CCP's attempts to regulate religious activities, different forms of religious non-conformity exist. They take the forms of peaceful dialogue, underground or hidden activities, disguise, open confrontation or violent acts. For instance, although unregistered underground Christian churches are considered illegal in China, Autry (2013) observes that in practice the boundaries between these house-churches and officially registered churches are blurred. One member of an unregistered church described their members as 'stars, invisible when the weather is cloudy' (Feuchtwang, 2000: 167). Similarly, despite the existence of the legally recognised 'orthodox' Buddhist Association of China, some Chinese in the PRC prefer to follow new Buddhist groups, including Supreme Master (*guanyin famen*), established in Taiwan in 1988 and banned as a cult by the CCP in 1995. More significant forms of overt and extreme religious resistance have come from members of Tibetan Buddhism, Xinjiang Muslims and FLG followers. In the first two cases these also involve ethnic, cultural, social and territorial factors.

This chapter focuses on the FLG's resistance to the CCP, using Sturm's (2013: 135) concept of the 'geopolitics of religion'. I pay attention to the ways in which the FLG articulates its worldviews, moral systems and religious practices as different from, or in contradiction to, the conventional worldviews promoted by the Party-State and dominant religious institutions. This chapter contributes to recent discussions in political geography about how various forms of religious resistance challenge dominant worldviews or state powers. Nyroos (2001) discusses the religeopolitics of Palestinian

Hamas' and Kach of the Jewish Defence League's territorial claims in the name of God over the 'Holy Land'. Habashi (2013) studies Palestinian children's Islamic religious expression as resistance to Israeli oppression. Dijkink (2006) presents a historical review of the role of religion in international relations and critical geopolitics, with a focus on Christianity and Islam. Watts (2007) also understands different political Islamic movements as revolutionary and resistant forces that challenge state legitimacy, the 'American empire' or neoliberalism. Megoran (2006) explores how the Church of England presented a geopolitical imagination immediately after 9/11 that allied itself with the US. He further examines activists' readings of 'Revelation' as alternative and radical geopolitics (Megoran, 2013). Sturm (2006) analyses Evangelist Mark Hitchcock's geopolitical 'Others' of Russia and the 'Islamic alliance'. Yorgason and Robertson (2006) discuss how the eschatological geopolitics of Salt Lake City Mormonism has lost its central role over the past twenty years.

Other scholars underline the fact that religions are situated in and continually interact with, their surrounding cultural, social, and political circumstances. For example, interpretations of sacred texts, such as the Bible, vary across time and space (Wallace, 2006). Some Islamist movements have struggled to achieve earthly justice during the second half of the twentieth century (Secor, 2001). Sociologist David Bromley (2002) focuses on the development of relationships between religious movements and social orders, referring to violent acts committed by certain religious movements, such as the Branch Davidians in the U.S. or the Solar Temple founded in Geneva. However, Bromley also argues that it isn't enough to merely focus on the inherent characteristics or warning signs of such religious groups because non-violent and violent religious groups often share similar characteristics. He further argues that very few new religious movements result in violence; instead, he describes conflict

escalation between new religious movements and existing social orders as ‘an interactive, contingent process’ (2002: 12).

These scholars understand religious thoughts and activities as situated in, interacting with, and responding to specific spatial, temporal and cultural contexts. These investigations also highlight the discursive perspectives of various religious movements, and their diverse interpretations of the spiritual scriptures and practices. Following these perspectives, I analyse the geopolitics of FLG scriptures to understand how it motivates and empowers individuals to continually challenge state power. Drawing upon Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) concept of discourse, discussed in Section 3.1, I understand collective subjectivities, such as social or spiritual movements, as not given or fixed, but discursively constituted through a continual blending of new ideas and needs. Depending on the relationships towards their social and political circumstances, these subjectivities may develop into forms of resistance that focus on antagonistic ‘us-them’ discourses.

After a review of key theoretical concepts of collective subjectivity formation and discursive practices, I briefly mention the syncretic nature of religions in Chinese culture. In Section 3.2, the discursive characteristics of Chinese religious movements and their geopolitical potential challenging dominant worldviews and political powers will be introduced, so the context of the FLG’s ideas and its geopolitics that challenge the PRC’s Party-State can be better understood. I conduct a discourse analysis, comparing Master Li’s scriptures before and after the CCP’s ban in Sections 3.3 and 3.4. Before 1999, Master Li positioned the FLG in a spiritual landscape with diverse practices and theological teachings, but following the CCP’s ban, new lectures by Master Li described a millennial process of ‘*fā*-rectification’ whereby heavenly demons, embodied in CCP officials, must be challenged by FLG followers.

In this chapter, my discussion of the FLG geopolitical discursive strategies is primarily based upon a textual analysis of Master Li's scriptures. In Chapters 5 and 6, I discuss how this geopolitical discourse is transformed into practices by individual followers – a theme which remains underexplored by geographers researching geopolitics of religion.

3.1 Theoretical Discussion

Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) ideas on discourse and discursive practice provide a conceptual framework to understand how social and religious groups position themselves in their social and political surroundings. Laclau (2005: 68) defines discourse as 'the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity', whereby objectivity is constituted 'through its differential relations to something else'. Discourses create structured relationships between different collective subjects, such as a social movement or a state party, that organise and blend different elements, such as demands or spiritual ideas, into their temporarily coherent subjectivities. Through discursive practices, collective subjectivities constantly articulate different social demands or other ideas into their projects and group subjectivities in relation to other collective subjects. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 105), discursive practices refer to the process of how an object is constituted through discourse. Discursive practices take place both in linguistic and material domains, through speeches, manifestos, social institutions and other collective activities (ibid: 109; Howarth, 2000: 10).

For Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the formation of a collective identity is not predefined according to a fixed category, such as 'peasant' or 'working class', but is an unstable 'political type of relation' among subject groups. Accordingly, a collective force, either as a movement, a social or political group or a state, is always emerging; it wins wider popular support through absorbing a broad range of social demands, views

and attitudes into its subjectivity (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Torfing, 1999; Howarth, 2010). The subjectivity of a collective force and its subject position therefore evolves in relation to other social and political subjects in particular geographical and historical contexts.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) underline the incompleteness of the relationships between the subject positions of different collective forces and the dispersed nature of diverse elements. An element is understood as any difference that is not discursively articulated by groups (ibid: 105), such as social demands or spiritual ideas. At any time, the identities and contents of temporarily coherent subjectivities can reorganise, and include or exclude elements, thereby altering the positions of collective subjectivities to each other. In addition, an emerging social or political force may attempt to modify existing social formations and hegemonic discourses. Through communicating urgent social demands or new ideas as part of their subjectivities, this group or movement may successfully win wider popular support, and can possibly shape and even reform existing social rules, norms or institutions (Laclau, 1996; Torfing, 1999). For example, ‘black consciousness’ was articulated and formed by writers and activists during the late 1960s and early 1970s in South Africa. This discourse challenged and reversed the White dominant apartheid, which began to fall apart in the following decade (Howarth, 1997). Or, for example, as I discuss in Section 3.2, diverse Chinese religious movements also present discursive characteristics, whereby different religious elements from Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and *qigong* have been blended and re-blended into different combinations, which results in the emergence of new religious subjectivities.

Laclau (2005) describes how a shared social subjectivity can be created despite the diversity of numerous individuals through the deployment of two discursive strategies – the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence (see also Mouffe, 2000):

So we have two ways of constructing the social: either through the assertion of a particularity – in our case, a particularity of demands – whose only links to other particularities are of a differential nature (as we have seen: no positive terms, only differences); or through a partial surrender of particularity, stressing what all particularities have, equivalentially, in common. The second mode of construction of the social involves, as we know, the drawing of an antagonistic frontier; the first does not. I have called the first mode of constructing the social *logic of difference*, and the second, *logic of equivalence* (Laclau, 2005: 77f., italics in original).

In the first mode of social construction, the logic of difference, a social group constructs a coherent identity by asserting that their particular demands are different than the claims made by other groups. As I discuss below, in the case of the FLG discourses before 1999, the FLG differentiated itself from and prioritised itself over Buddhist and Taoist ritual practices in temples by emphasising the importance of cultivation within ordinary society.

In the second mode of social construction, the logic of equivalence, shared qualities of the collectivity are emphasised by the creation of an antagonistic relationship between the ‘self’ and ‘other’. For example, when the existence of the ‘others’ prevents me or us from being fully myself or ourselves, a boundary can be drawn discursively to distinguish between ‘us’ and external ‘others’, including different ethnic groups, dominant political powers, or foreign enemies (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 125f.). In this way, a shared subjectivity can be delimited, despite the divergent and rich particularities that may exist within this collective. The heterogeneous elements inside the group now share the same or ‘equivalent’ status, that, when taken together, opposes the ‘other’ (hence the term logic of equivalence). For example, the myth perpetuated by Nazism about the purity of the Aryan race through discourses of eliminationist Anti-Semitism can be described as creating a temporarily coherent understanding of Germanness built upon a metaphorical structure of spiritual ideas (the thousand year Reich) that projected an idea of a new social order. This myth of Aryan supremacy was

a radical racist and national project that developed out of extreme and antagonistic ‘us’ and ‘them’ discourses (Laclau, 1990; Friedländer, 1997; Torfing, 1999).

Both ways of constructing coherent collective social subjectivities, either through the logic of difference or the logic of equivalence, create an ‘us’ as distinctive to others. Yet this process of social formation through creating difference or sameness is always unstable, as previously stated, because groups continuously absorb new elements into their subjectivities discursively (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Any collective subjectivity, therefore, can absorb more elements into itself, and the content of this subjectivity can become pluralised. Depending on their relationships with other social groups and institutions, and their political circumstances at any given moment, collectivities may strategically deploy antagonistic ‘us-them’ discourses and become a political force that challenges the status quo. As described by Foucault (2007: 390) at the end of the last chapter, the primary cause of political acts is to resist or to re-shape the dominant social strategy (see also Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 1996; Torfing, 1999). Existing social rules and political parties are always challenged by resistances or counter-discourses.

In the rest of this chapter, I discuss how religious movements in the Chinese context absorb and/or exclude various social demands or spiritual ideas into their groups. Radical and even rebellious spiritual ideas, such as millenarianism and subversive worldviews, can be discursively blended with existing religious doctrines to create new interpretations at particular temporal moments. Millenarian belief is one of the most radical discourses that turns the world upside down, and fulfils the fantasies of retaliation and revenge (Scott, 1990). When spiritual leaders articulate followers’ utopian aspirations and millenarian beliefs, these discourses radically challenge dominant political or orthodox religious systems.

3.2 Chinese Religiosities

Research in Chinese history and contemporary Chinese societies, including China and Taiwan, reveals a rich and syncretic religious environment, whereby religion and new religious movements constantly re-configure different spiritual ideas and practices into their teachings. Based upon historical materials, Yang (1961: 294) distinguished between institutional and diffuse religions. Institutional religions, such as Buddhism or Taoism, refer to religious systems that have: (1) an independent theological or cosmic interpretation of the other-worldly and this-worldly matters; (2) an independent system of symbols and rituals; and (3) an independent organisation of personnel to facilitate (1) and (2). Yang further argues that in the case of diffuse religious systems, theological ideas or rituals, such as ancestor and community deity-worship or political cults, are spread across diverse social institutions and customs. Diffuse religions depend on institutional ones to provide mythical and theological symbols, ideas, and practices; institutional religions may, in return, rely on diffuse religions for support and recognition (*ibid*). In other words, in the case Chinese religions, spiritual ideas and ritual practices are produced and float within and between different religious and social arenas.

Syncretic religious activities have occurred since the pre-modern era in China, including the White Lotus Sects, Yiguandao, Boxer and Eight Trigrams (Naquin, 1976; Wakeman, 1977). Taiwanese society has also been characterised by a rich and syncretic religious environment that includes practices brought by Chinese immigrants beginning at least in the seventeenth century (Jordan and Overmyer, 1986; Ding, 2004; Weller, 2007; Chen, 2011a, 2011b). Masters of different sects or religious movements collected and reformulated the surrounding ideas and practices, especially those belonging to Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. They then creatively organised these spiritual elements into coherent systems, which Chen (2011a: 79) describes as ‘compatible

resonance’ (合緣共振) (see also Ding, 2004: 18). Chen (1996: 250) describes this religious phenomenon as ‘a hundred schools of thought’ that emerged as new religious movements formed following the lifting of Martial Law in 1987 in Taiwan. These included *qigong* groups, such as the Mahayana Zen-Gong Institute (大乘禪功學會) by Master Peng Jingquan; the Falun Gong by Master Li Hongzhi; and Buddhist groups, including the ROC Zen Association (中華民國禪定協會), the Zen Buddhist Association (印心禪定學會) by Master Miaotian Zen Master, the Modern Zen Buddhist Sangha Buddha (佛教現代禪菩薩僧團) and the Ten Thousand Buddha Association (萬佛會) (Chen, 2011a, 2011b). The doctrines of these new Taiwanese groups, which are based upon syncretism, fusion, and reinterpretation, have been described as being less logical and thoughtful (Ding, 2004: 372) and are considered as relatively ‘superficial’ (Chen, 2011a: 81), when compared to longer-standing institutionalised religions. As distinct from sophisticated, elite and institutionalised religions, these new movements nonetheless simplify the path to traditional religiosity and offer divine experiences for a wider public (Ding, 2004: 331, 372). Ding (2004: 18f.) also argues that new religious movements in Chinese societies are less likely to fall into the trap of binary oppositions, as they are less exclusive to each other, a trend I discuss regarding FLG discourse before their ban in 1999 in Section 3.3.

Chinese religious movements, moreover, are typically characterised by the individual follower’s flexibility and freedom of choice, participation, and practice in these religious belief systems, and even by mystical experiences. For example, in contemporary Taiwanese society, many people believe in retribution, reincarnation, fate, and the power of *qigong* as illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Spiritual Belief of Taiwanese Citizens.

Source: Taiwan Social Change Survey, Period 2, No. 5 (1994), cited in Chiu (2006b: 14).

	Believe	Disbelieve	No Ideas
That one can be a President must be predestined.	52	36	11
Spirits can reincarnate into next lives.	52	24	24
Fate is already determined in the previous life or lives.	70	21	9
<i>Qigong</i> can heal illness.	57	20	24

Not only do masters of new movements reorganise religious elements when they establish new groups, individuals who are familiar with syncretic spiritual cultures and share similar belief systems may more easily ‘resonate’ with at least some of the teachings of a given master. This process is called ‘wandering among religions’ (遊宗) by Chen (2011a: 84), and is an experience not commonly practiced by individuals in Western Christian traditions. Familiarity with different religious elements offers followers the feeling of being connected to diverse existing traditions (Jordan and Overmyer, 1986). If individuals don’t identify with a new system initially or after a period of commitment, they may choose a different one and connect with it or not. In other words, individuals may selectively choose a master, religious system, and/or spiritual practice that suits them best. As a result of religious syncretism, individuals and even religious masters may have different and diverse embodied religious experiences (Chen, 2011a: 208), a common pattern I observed among the FLG cultivators whom I interviewed in Taiwan.

Ultimately, it is not only the master’s charisma which makes a religious movement work. Rather, the followers must resonate with the master and his/her system, agree with him/her, and commit to the practice. If they are not connected with or commit to the religious system, they will turn to other options, or may even turn away from religious activities altogether, points to which I return in Chapter 5.

Religious movements may develop or articulate various spiritual elements into their teachings, doctrines or *fa* (Buddha Law), including ideas and practices of salvationism and millenarianism that can develop into radical political and social critique (Harrel and Perry, 1982). The Eastern concept that is similar to, but also differs from millenarianism, is the idea of *kalpas*, which means vast periods of time with successive transformations of the world (ibid: 290). In the Chinese context, *kalpas* are understood as historical time periods; a *kalpa* presided over by a Buddha will change and turn into a subsequent time period reigned over by another Buddha. Since the sixth century, the Buddha Maitreya has been expected to come in Chinese millenarianism, whereby the faithful would survive and the nonbelievers would be destroyed (ibid). Belief in *kalpas*, therefore, may be perceived as subversive when it is thought to encourage change and to replace earthly political and social orders by other-worldly powers and orders. Millenarianism may also be linked to a salvationism that concerns religious followers. Harrel and Perry (1982: 289) refer to salvationism in the historical Chinese context as a belief in a rebirth into paradise. In comparison, Chen's (2011a: 147f.) understanding of salvationism as survival through the event of a *kalpa* turn or a natural catastrophe is more appropriate for this research as I discuss in Section 3.4.

Chen further distinguishes between salvation achieved through gods and Buddhas (仙佛救劫), masters (明師救劫), and the self (自性救劫), whereby the latter, salvation through the self, is a special phenomenon of Eastern religious culture (ibid: 151). The existence of supernatural beings and masters are believed to not only help individuals be saved; these spiritual guides are also believed to enable individuals to become masters or supernatural beings themselves. Subsequently, the individual's practices and actions can achieve salvation (ibid: 160). The belief in salvation by the self empowers individuals to ascend from the bodily scale, to the scale of social and political activities, and even to the scale of the other-worldly as supernatural beings.

This is a powerful element in forming religious resistance, especially in the case of the FLG.

In sum, Chinese religions have the discursive characteristics of syncretism, whereby individual masters can incorporate diverse, yet familiar, spiritual ideas and practices into their religious systems. Salvationism and millenarianism can be also understood as religious elements that can be discursively absorbed into religious teaching and practices. Religious movements may become a political force and pose a type of spiritual resistance to existing institutions depending on their particular relationships to the state, social bases, environments, sectarian organisations, and so on at any given moment in time. In this study, I focus on the political tensions between religions and their surrounding environments. In the democratic era in Taiwan, religious resistance is less observable than is the case for China, as different religious groups can negotiate with, lobby, and even pressure politicians and the government in Taiwan to change, as previously mentioned in the last two chapters. In contrast, in the PRC, religious activities resisting different forms of power deployed by the Chinese Party-State have appeared in diverse and even in extreme forms. As I discuss below and in subsequent chapters, in the case of the FLG, millennial ideas have been developed in Master Li's recent scriptures, especially after 1999. These discourses are also communicated and enacted in Sheng Yun Performances, and have further evolved and spread among FLG followers, as illustrated in the case of the alleged witnessing of the eyes of the Lion Head mountain in Hong Kong turning red, which was believed to indicate the coming fall of the CCP (Zhen, 2014).

3.3 The FLG's Discourse Before 1999

To understand how FLG discursive strategies shifted before and after political harassment in 1999, I ask the following questions: 1) How did Master Li position the

FLG in Chinese society as a new religious practice before 1999 in a cultural environment that had relatively little state repression? (Section 3.3); 2) How did Master Li explain the CCP's persecution of the FLG following the ban? (Section 3.4); and 3) How specifically did Master Li imbue the persecution of FLG cultivators with religious significance? (Section 3.4). To answer these questions, I analyse Master Li's most important scripture for FLG followers, the *Zhuan Falun* (ZFL) (轉法輪) (1996e).²⁴ *Zhuan Falun*, was first published on 4 January 1995, originating from Li's nine lectures in Guangzhou in December 1994. Master Li asserts that reading this scripture has the same effect as listening to him directly, whereby the bodies of those in the audience would be transformed by Master Li and prepared for cultivation.²⁵

My discourse analysis of these texts below will focus on how the FLG positioned itself within the PRC before 1999, and articulated its relationship with other religious and spiritual actors, such as Buddhists, Taoists and other *qigong* groups. My discussion first outlines FLG spiritual discourse in a environment without state oppression, which I then contrast with more dualistic and antagonistic discourses after 1999 in Section 3.4. In that section, I analyse Master Li's lectures given after 1999.²⁶

²⁴ The English translation of *Zhuan Falun* was published in 2000. The publication of *Zhuan Falun* before the ban is discussed in Tong (2002). *Zhuan Falun* is now printed in Taiwan and can be downloaded from the FLG website: <http://gb.falundafa.org/falun-dafa-books.html>. Given my questions above, I chose only to focus on the ZFL and did not include Master Li's first book, *China Falun Gong* (1993), because differences between these two texts are relatively minor in comparison to those between ZFL and Master Li's speeches after 1999. See Penny's (2012) analysis of *China Falun Gong* (1993) and *Zhuan Falun* (1996).

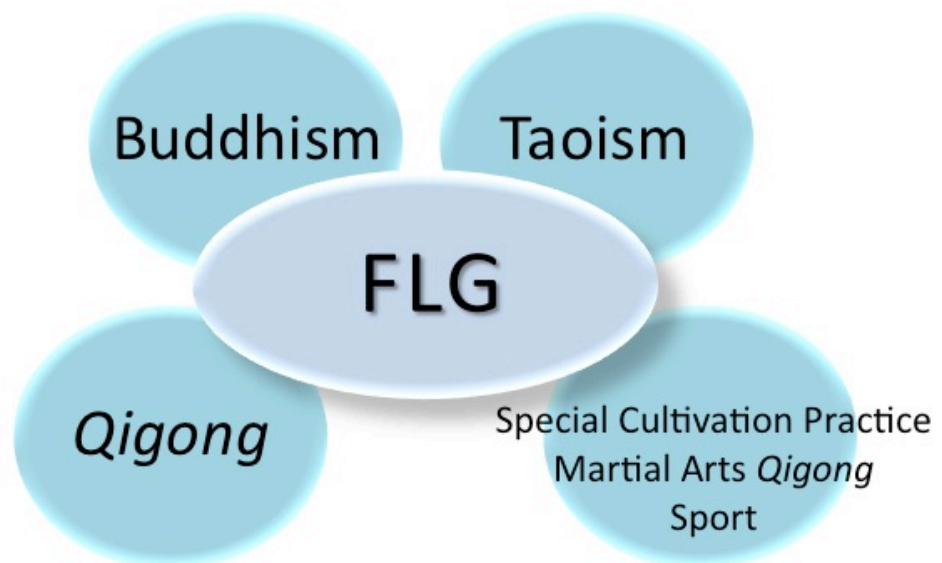
²⁵ Before discussing these texts, a brief note about my use of citations. When citing the ZFL in this dissertation, I refer first to page numbers of the original Chinese version (1996e), which are followed by the equivalent page in the English translation (2000d). In addition to the ZFL, the majority of other FLG scriptures are also polished texts based upon Master Li's speeches. In my analysis in this chapter and in Chapter 4, I mainly cite the English translation of these scriptures. However, when the nuance of the Chinese language needs to be highlighted or there is no English translation of particular speeches, I use the original Chinese texts. In these cases, I cite the year of Li's speech, not the year it appears in an English translation, because the transcripts of Master Li's speeches in the Chinese are uploaded online in the same year his speech is delivered. These texts are made available for the global readership of FLG followers, who are mainly ethnic Chinese. Citing the year of a speech offers a more precise timeline of how FLG discourses evolve.

²⁶ Master Li's lectures have also been published in Taiwan and can be downloaded from the FLG website: <http://gb.falundafa.org/falun-dafa-books.html>.

After 2000, when Master Li was beginning a phase of *fa*-rectification, FLG practice included challenging heavenly demons embodied in CCP activities.

Before the 1999 ban, one of the *Zhuan Falun*'s most important discursive strategies was to prioritise the FLG over other spiritual or physical practices, including Buddhism, Taoism, *qigong* and other cultivation and physical training methods (Figure 3.2). In so doing, Master Li created strong relationships between the FLG and these established religious, spiritual and training practices to legitimise itself, an approach that follows the logic of difference, to use Laclau's terms. Yet at the same time, he also differentiated the FLG from those very practices, underlining the FLG's unique dimensions, such as cultivation in ordinary society, as being advantageous and superior to the others.

Figure 3.2: Prioritisation of the FLG over Other Spiritual or Physical Practices in the *Zhuan Falun* (1996e).



At the very beginning of the ZFL, Master Li first associated FLG beliefs with Buddhism. The ZFL states: “‘The Buddha Fa’ is most profound; among all the theories in the world, it is the most intricate and extraordinary science’ (Li, 1996e: no pagination, 2000d: i). He explains this connection later in the ZFL stating:

The Dharma in Buddhism is only a tiny part of the Buddha Fa. There are still many kinds of great high-level Fa. Different levels also have different Fa. Sakyamuni said that there were eighty-four thousand cultivation ways. The Buddhist religion includes only a few cultivation ways. It only has Tiantai, Huayan, Zen Buddhism, Pure Land, Tantrism, etc. They do not even account for a small number! Therefore, Buddhism cannot represent the entire Buddha Fa, and it is only a tiny part of the Buddha Fa. Our Falun Dafa is also one of the eighty-four thousand cultivation ways in the Buddha School, and it has nothing to do with the original Buddhism or Buddhism in the Dharma-ending Period; neither is it related to modern religions (Li, 1996e: 83, 2000d: 48).

In this passage, Li defines the ‘*fa*’ of the FLG, or Falun *Dafa*, as one among 84,000 cultivation disciplines of Buddha Law (Buddha *fa*). Whereas Enlightened Beings of Buddhist cultivation disciplines have their own heavenly kingdoms, the FLG has one Falun Paradise in the heavens (Li, 1996e: 87, 2000d: 50). Li thereby creates a distinct position for FLG followers and practice among diverse Buddhist principles.

The FLG also positions itself discursively in relationship with Taoism, which can be seen in the FLG’s symbol (Figure 3.3), which contains a left-facing swastika, associated with Buddhism, and the Taiji symbol associated with Taoism (Li, 1996e: 158f., 2000d: 93). According to Li, the Buddha Law ‘is also what the Tao School calls the “Tao”’ (Li, 1996e: no pagination, 2000d: i). The core essence of both Buddha Law and Taoism are the most fundamental natures of the universe: *zhen*, *shan* and *ren* (truth, compassion and forbearance) (Li, 1996e: 12, 2000d: 7).

Figure 3.3: The Emblem of Falun Gong.
Source: Minghui.org, 2007.



Specifically, *zhen* 真 refers to truth and truthfulness; *shan* 善 refers to compassion, benevolence and kindness; and *ren* 忍 refers to forbearance, tolerance and endurance (Li, 2000d, ii). FLG followers are expected to cultivate themselves according to these standards of truth, compassion and forbearance in this life to reach higher levels.

According to the ZFL, when divine beings lose sight of these standards, they drop down to the level of ordinary people on the earth. Thus one goal of the FLG cultivation is to reach back and up to the original status of truth, compassion and forbearance in cosmic space (Li, 1996e: 60f., 2000d: 35). Although this can be achieved through diverse cultivation practices (not only through those of the FLG), the FLG differentiates itself from and prioritises itself over Buddhist and Taoist ritualised practices in temples, by emphasising the importance of cultivation within ordinary society. Cultivators need not go to spatially isolated areas, such as monasteries or mountains, because isolated places ‘force’ cultivators to give up aspects of material life and desires. Cultivation without external pressure and surveillance within ordinary society requires greater self-control, and thus is more efficient, challenging and superior than cultivation in isolation.

Master Li also regards the FLG as drawing upon the ancient cultivation practices of *qigong*. Li dates *qigong* back to pre-historic cultures; Li believes that some *qigong* masters have already cultivated back to heaven (Li, 1996e: 141, 2000d: 82). However, Master Li claims that most *qigong* practices that became popular around the 1980s and 1990s were at relatively low levels of healing and fitness, and that only the FLG practice can bring people to higher levels (Li, 1996e: 1, 2000d: 1). An example of this is illustrated by Master Li’s discussion of illness. Illness for Li is caused by *karma*; the elimination of personal *karma* and thus illness relies mainly upon personal cultivation (Li, 1996e: 251, 255, 2000d: 145, 147). Most *qigong* masters can indeed heal illness,

but only temporarily; they only defer the illness until later as the *karma* is not really removed (Li, 1996e: 258, 2000d: 148).

Buddhism, Taoism and *qigong* are the three main domains with which FLG associates itself with and from which it distances itself. In the ZFL, Master Li also briefly discusses FLG as different than: 1) special cultivation practices, which can only be transmitted to a single selected person over a long period of time;²⁷ 2) martial arts *qigong* (considered to be the lowest level of internal cultivation practices);²⁸ and 3) physical training and sports that improve health but do not extend life or bring people to higher cultivation levels (Li, 1996e, 2000d).²⁹

When discussing other negative spiritual practices (Figure 3.4), including fake *qigong* masters, fake Buddha statues, ‘evil’ religions and ‘evil’ practices, Master Li uses a very strong vocabulary to distance the FLG and himself. Master Li repeatedly discusses fake *qigong* masters in the ZFL, who he represents as being possessed by spirits. Not only do they falsely teach, but their intentions are impure. They use *qigong* and its healing functions to pursue money, personal gain and fame (Li, 1996e: 105, 2000d: 61). In addition, Master Li considers it dangerous when worshippers pray for money or other material things in front of Buddha statues. Such thoughts of desire are believed to generate negative energy and may even form a fake Buddha statue in another dimension. This fake Buddha statue might give these worshippers what they

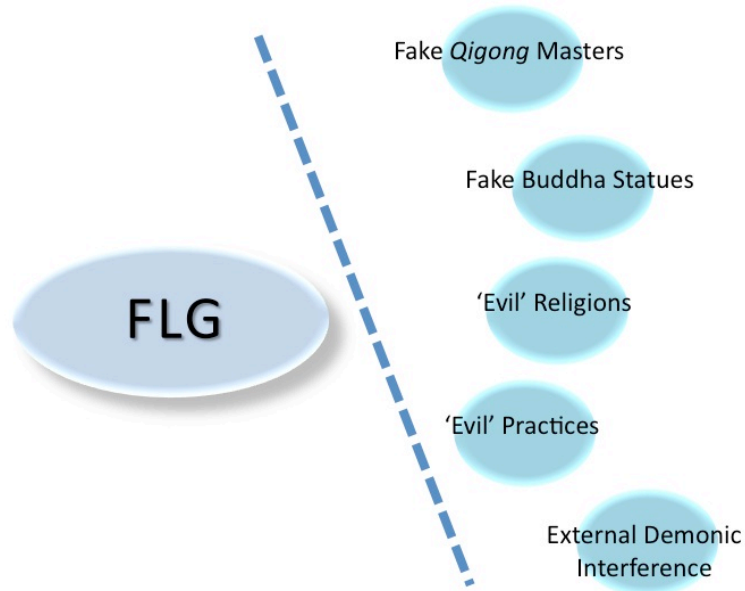
²⁷ ‘Special cultivation practices’ (奇門功法 or 奇門修煉) are not specifically discussed in the ZFL; they refer to cultivation practices that are not from Buddha or Tao schools and are not made public. This kind of cultivation practice is not as popular as Buddhist ones. It is believed that the cultivators of these kinds of practices will not have their own heavenly kingdoms but become wandering gods or roaming Immortals (see Li, 1996e: 163, 2000d: 95f.).

²⁸ Martial arts is practiced in motion and does not achieve a state of tranquillity or transform the body, so according to the ZFL it does not bring people to a higher cultivation level (see Li, 1996e: 222, 2000d: 129).

²⁹ Master Li maintains that unlike *qigong*, athletics can intensify metabolism and can therefore speed up the aging process in the long run. By contrast, *qigong* practices emphasise a more ‘gentle, slow, and curved’ and ‘motionless and still’ approach, hence it slows down cell activities and can extend life (see Li, 1996e: 295f., 2000d: 171).

pray for, but only in exchange for some of energy they have accumulated through practices of self-cultivation (Li, 1996e: 176f., 2000d: 103).

Figure 3.4: Other Negative Spiritual Practices Mentioned in the *Zhuan Falun* (1996e, 2000d).



In the ZFL, Li mentions 'evil' religions only very briefly: 'Even if they do not harm people, they are still evil practices because they have interfered with people's faith in orthodox religions. Orthodox religions can save people, but they ['evil' religion] cannot' (Li, 1996e: 87, 2000d: 50). 'Evil' cultivation is referred to by Master Li as either using cultivation practices for fame, personal gain or money (Li, 1996e: 163f., 2000d: 96f.), or as practicing cultivation with negative emotions in mind, such as anger and worry relating to personal, family or even state matters (Li, 1996e: 166, 2000d: 97). Finally, elsewhere in the ZFL, Master Li briefly describes how one's cultivation can also be obscured by external demonic interference as a result of *karma* retribution or repayment for bad deeds the cultivator did in his/her previous life (Li, 1996e: 195, 2000d: 114).

The ZFL also contains descriptions of FLG millennial beliefs. These writings become more pronounced *after* 1999. The idea of *kalpas* was adopted by Master Li in the ZFL, whereby Sakyamuni ‘succeeded in cultivation practice many hundred millions of *kapla (jie)* ago’ and one kalpa is hundreds of millions of years (Li, 1996e: 18f., 2000d: 10). Master Li further illustrated a cyclical human history, whereby human beings have experienced almost complete annihilation with the survival of few people and re-civilisation already eighty-one times (Li, 1996e: 18, 2000d: 10). Li describes the current-day universe as undergoing a great change: the explosion and destruction of the old universe is happening alongside the reconstruction of the new universe by enlightened beings at higher levels. Almost all materials and lives will be destroyed by the explosion except for the heavenly demons (Li, 1996e: 165, 2000d: 97). For Li, these demons are not really harmful to human beings; they merely follow the principles of the old universe. Aging, illness and death are also considered forms of the heavenly demons. While the ZFL only briefly mentions heavenly demons, Master Li expanded this concept after 1999 as I discuss below.

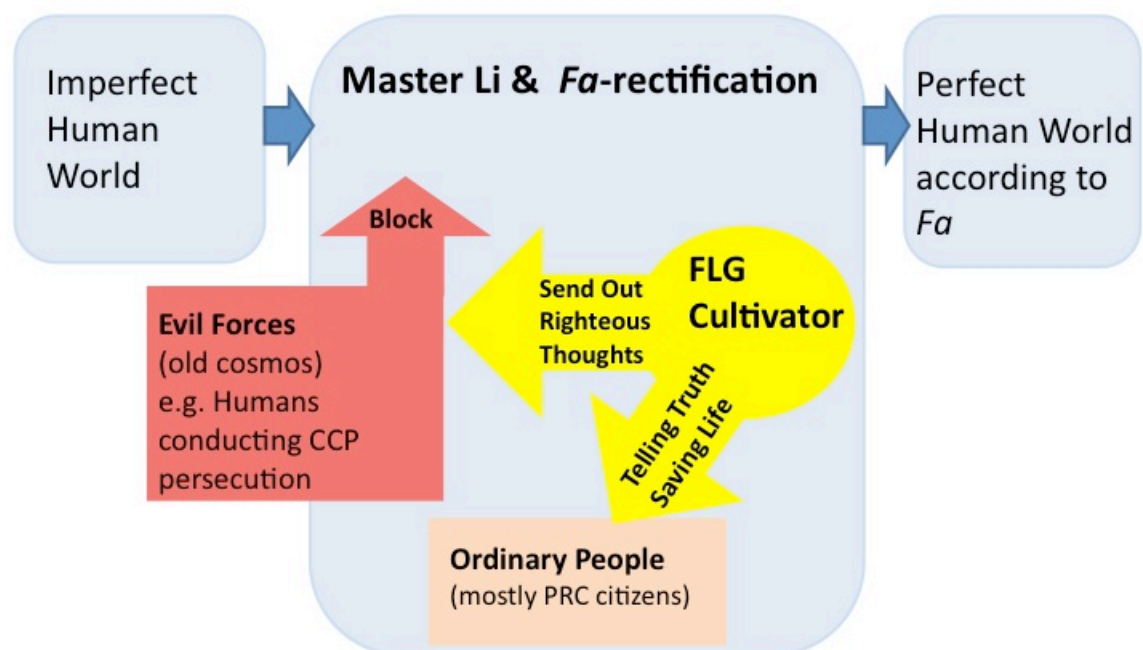
My brief overview of the *Zhuan Falun* (1996e, 2000d) reveals a spiritual cultivation landscape that contains diverse spiritual possibilities, including Buddhist, Taoist, *qigong* and other special practices. What Master Li strongly criticised in the ZFL was not the theological perspectives of other practices per se, but the desire for fame and gain held by some of their religious personnel and cultivators. A cultivator who follows the right teachings in Buddhism, for example, might also simultaneously practice evil cultivation, if he/she desires fame or has negative emotions during cultivation processes. In contrast, after the FLG were banned by the CCP in 1999, Master Li’s writing shifts from an emphasis of the movement’s relationships to diverse Chinese spiritual cultivation practices to millennial descriptions of a dualistic combat

between the heavenly demons suppressing a new order and the FLG’s attempt to bring that new moral order into being.

3.4 The FLG’s Discourse After 1999

More than a year after the ban, in October 2000, Master Li delivered a long speech in San Francisco in which he outlined the basic relationship between the CCP, the ongoing persecution of the FLG, *fa* (Buddha Law), himself, and the FLG cultivator in spiritual and cosmological terms (Li, 2000d). In later years, Li’s speeches added more details to this relationship, which I depict in Figure 3.5 and explain below.

Figure 3.5: Schematised Depiction of FLG Discourse after 1999.



In 2000, Master Li asserted that human history was cyclical wherein a new era would follow an old one. He described the FLG as being at a moment of transformation into a new era, in which ‘Fa rectifies the human world’ (Li, 2001f). In Figure 3.5, three blue areas represent three different time periods. According to Li, through the process of *fa*-rectification (*zhengfa* 正法), the current degenerated human world would transform

to a perfect condition in the near future (Li, 2002c). Master Li asserted that the *fa*-rectification of the cosmos, which was started by him, was happening at a level beyond the human world, because its energy was so immense that *fa*-rectification could destroy human society entirely (Li, 2003a). Master Li stated that the current-day ‘Fa-rectification period’ would take up to ten years (Li, 2001f), after which, the cosmos would become more pure and perfect in the period of ‘Fa rectifies the human world’ (Li, 2001c, 2001f). However, some heavenly demons from the old cosmos, or so-called ‘old forces’, sought to obstruct *fa*-rectification, because these deviant beings did not want to be eliminated in the new era (see the red area in Figure 3.5). These evil forces from the old cosmos entered this world and influenced individuals (Li, 2003a). If a FLG follower doesn’t cultivate him-/herself righteously according to *fa*, the evil forces could ‘exploit your gaps’, which would result in illness or encountering difficulties (Li, 2003b). FLG followers not only had to battle evil forces in the form of sickness and day to day challenges. They had to battle supernatural cosmic beings, or heavenly demons, from the old universe at higher levels that now take the form of the CCP. By using human forms to conduct CCP persecution of the FLG and its followers, they work to prevent *fa*-rectification (Li, 2003c). These CCP officials are only the ‘human skin’ of the heavenly demons. FLG followers, therefore, believe that they are engaging in a battle with beings from higher cosmic levels beyond the human world who are trying to prevent a new social order. To use Laclau’s (2005) terms, after 1999, Li created a strong antagonistic frontier between the CCP and the FLG in his discussion of this new moment and possible future.

Master Li defined current FLG followers as ‘*Fa*-Rectification Period Dafa Disciples’, meaning that they not only needed to cultivate themselves, but that they must also dedicate themselves to safeguarding the FLG and help the Master to rectify and validate *fa* (Li, 2004a). To this end, three tasks were required of the FLG disciples:

1) to study *fa* and learn Master Li's scriptures well; 2) to transmit the 'truth' to the public that the FLG is not an evil cult; and 3) to send out righteous thoughts to eliminate evil forces (Li, 2001e, 2002c). I discuss the first task in more detail in subsequent chapters. Here I discuss the second task of 'truth-telling' and the third task of sending out righteous thoughts.

To tell people the 'truth' about the FLG is considered a way of saving from divine retribution those who hate or misunderstand the FLG (Li, 2000b). According to Li, those who have hatred toward the FLG are against *fa*, which is held to be the fundamental origin of cosmic matters. These individuals, according to Master Li, will be weeded out in the period of 'Fa rectifies the human world', because they do not conform to *fa* (Li, 2000c). In 2002, Master Li re-iterated this belief that to tell the 'truth' is to save a life (Li, 2002b). 'Telling-truth/saving-life' was discursively associated by Master Li with epidemics and natural disasters, such as the 2002-2003 SARS outbreak in China (Li, 2003b). The SARS victims are believed to be individuals who could not be saved.

Whereas the FLG originally only opposed Jiang Zemin and his operatives in the period immediately following the ban (Zhao, 2003: 220), as the repression continued the FLG began to criticise the whole Chinese Communist Party with the 2004 publication of *Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party* in the FLG newspaper *Epoch Times*. Both the *Nine Commentaries* and Master Li's speeches stressed the belief that the CCP will soon experience a demise similar to the fate of the collapse of Chinese dynasties or the Soviet Union. Accordingly, Chinese citizens should disassociate themselves from the CCP as soon as possible, so they will not be part of the CCP's future misfortune; in this way, their lives can be saved. As of 3 December 2004, FLG followers began to persuade Chinese citizens to renounce their membership or previous membership of the CCP or other relevant associations, such as the Communist Youth

League of China or Young Pioneers of China, so that they could dissociate themselves from the CCP. To renounce their CCP membership, FLG followers ask Chinese citizens to either use their real names or a pseudonym. Based upon my own field observations in Dublin, Taiwan and Hong Kong in 2012-2014, I noted that FLG followers wrote down a name or a pseudonym (in most cases), when an individual said yes or nodded their consent to renouncing their CCP related memberships. FLG followers then uploaded the name or pseudonym of the renouncers on a website. According to one of Master Li's lectures (2005b), the number of the CCP related memberships renouncements was around 20,000 per day, totalling to around 5.3 million since December 2004, when the FLG started the CCP memberships renouncement movement. The daily number of the CCP membership renouncements has since increased according to the *Epoch Times*: on 11 August 2014, 104,201 people renounced their CCP related memberships, with a reported total number at 173,980,629 by 12 August 2014 (*Epoch Times*, 2014b). I discuss 'truth-telling' activities in more detail from a cultivators perspective in Chapter 6. Although, the practices of party membership renouncement on the ground were very strict and rigorous, these Chinese citizens do not need to officially renounce their memberships through formal administrative procedures. For FLG followers, such individuals may still keep these CCP related memberships formally, if they choose to dissociate themselves from the CCP at a personal level/in their hearts. This FLG understanding of party renouncement helps, in part, to explain the puzzling fact that both the number of Party membership renouncements and the total number of CCP members increased in 2014. At the same time, as noted in Chapter 1, I am cautious about how the FLG media gather and interpret its data.

FLG followers pursue the third task of *fa*-rectification, 'sending out righteous thoughts', by first quietening their minds, clearing out bad thoughts and concentrating their minds to eliminate evil forces (Li, 2001e). They should do this by using the two-

hand bodily positions for sending forth righteous thoughts, as depicted in Figure 3.6, and recite the following formula in their mind: ‘*Fazheng qiankun; xie e quanmie. Fazheng tiandi; xianshi xianbao*’ (Li, 2001b).³⁰ This means: The *Fa* rectifies the cosmos; the evil is completely eliminated. And the *Fa* rectifies Heaven and Earth; immediate retribution in this life time (Li, 2001g). According to Master Li (2002a), this activity has such a powerful effect that ‘one righteous thought itself subdues a hundred evil things’. To support *fa*-rectification, the Minghui Website has attempted to coordinate ‘Sending Out Righteous Thoughts’ globally since 2001. As of 26 October 2003, it listed specific times that FLG followers should send out of righteous thoughts on a daily basis for most global cities: these are all coordinated at 6am, 12am, 6pm and 12pm Beijing Time. According to my field observations in Dublin, Hong Kong and Taiwan (2012-14), the process ‘sending out righteous thoughts’ usually took 15 minutes each time in private or public spaces, and was practiced individually or collectively. Thus, the FLG’s geopolitics against the old evil forces behind the CCP is ritualistically exercised at a global level on a daily basis by individual FLG followers.

Figure 3.6: The Two Hand Positions for Sending Out Righteous Thoughts.

Note: In the image on the left, the follower holds one palm erect; in the image on the right, the lotus hand position is illustrated.

Source: Li, 2001b.

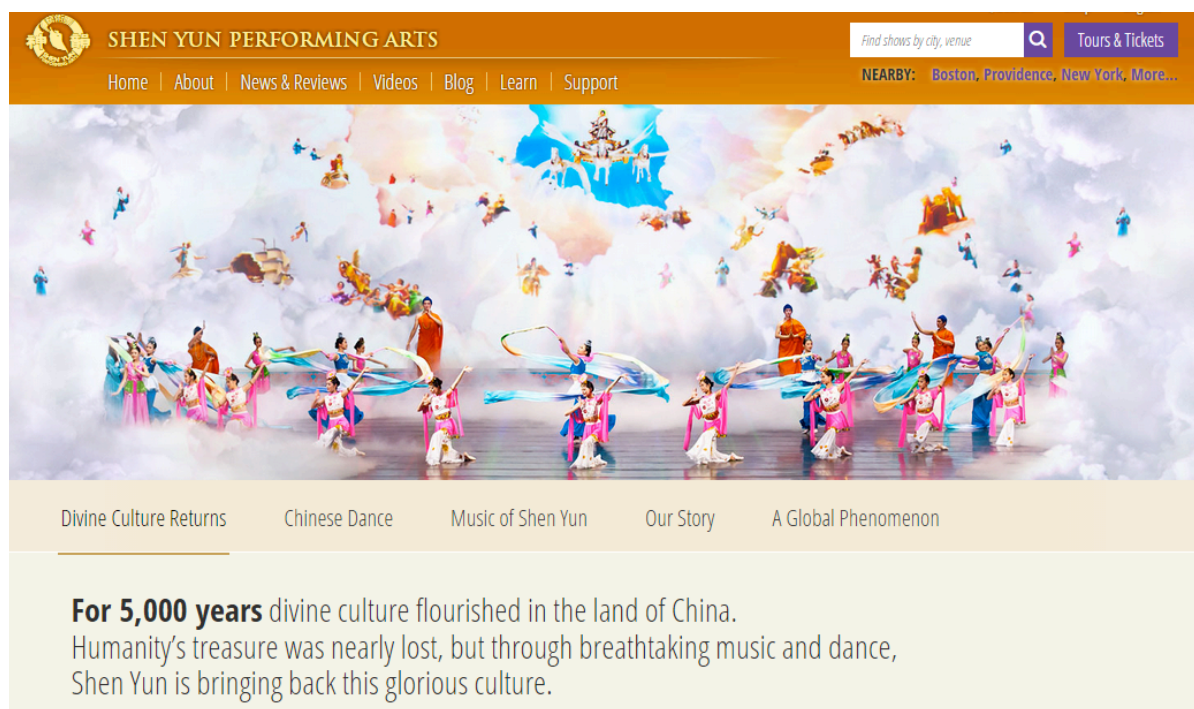


³⁰ 法正乾坤 邪恶全灭 法正天地 现世现报.

In addition to the polarised discourse between the CCP and the FLG in Master Li's writings and speeches after 2000, FLG subjectivities have been enriched by promoting traditional Chinese culture through Shen Yun Performance, or the Divine Performing Arts Group, which tours internationally. As I describe in further detail in Chapter 6, the Shen Yun Performance has developed as a way to 'tell the truth' publicly after 2006 and to express the creative aesthetic of 'truth, compassion and forbearance' through the means of theatrical and dance performance to a worldwide bourgeoisie audience (see Figure 3.7). According to Master Li (2011), Shen Yun is helped by divine beings and can radiate the energy of 'truth, compassion and forbearance'. The dance and music should be performed magnificently to impress audience. Once the audience has experienced the brilliant and moving performance of Shen Yun, Li suggests that they will not have hostile attitude towards the FLG and, thus, 'can be saved' in the future.

According to Master Li's 2007 lecture, traditional Chinese culture has a five thousand year old history and is therefore a rich resource for Shen Yun Performance. Its slogan 'reviving five thousand years of civilization' (Shen Yun Performing Arts, 2015) suggests not only an enrichment of FLG subjectivity, but also a scale-jumping in its discursive geopolitics. For Master Li, Shen Yun can lead to the renaissance of traditional Chinese culture without the influence of Chinese Communist Party, which purged traditional Chinese ideas during the Cultural Revolution. Through this cultural interpretation of what it means to be Chinese, the FLG now presents itself as a rival to the Chinese Communist Party, that is, through the logic of equivalence. No longer an excluded 'part' of the People's Republic of China or merely as an oppressed minority, the FLG has the right and ability to write and represent what it considers to be orthodox Chinese culture and tradition.

Figure 3.7: Shen Yun Performing Arts.
Source: Shen Yun Performing Arts official website, 2015.



3.5 Conclusion

My analysis of FLG discursive practices, including scriptures and teachings, cultivators' spiritual tasks and the importance of cultural performances, demonstrates how a new spiritual and religious movement dynamically responds to its changing social and political surroundings, and can engage in critical forms of geopolitical resistance. Before 1999, the FLG created a space among already existing diverse spiritual and cultivation practices, and legitimised itself mainly based upon the logic of difference. It defined similar, yet distinct, relationships with other spiritual practices, in particular Buddhism, Taoism and *qigong*, to position its own subjectivity within the PRC. In this respect, the FLG was not particularly different from other new religious movements in either China or Taiwan. At this stage, the FLG also distanced itself against the evil and demonic practices associated with negative intentions or emotions, such as greed or hatred, regardless of the spiritual teachings.

However, following the ban of the FLG in 1999, I have demonstrated how Master Li's teaching shifted, as well as how FLG followers were expected to combat the old evil forces of the universe which took the form of CCP persecution in the human world. In addition to the antagonistic relationship between the CCP and the FLG based upon millennial narratives and through the logic of equivalence, Li also emphasised the new relationship between each FLG follower, the citizens of the PRC and 'telling-truth/saving-life' practices, which was absent in publications and scriptures before 1999 (Figure 3.5). Moreover, to react to the Party-State's repression, FLG geopolitical discourses have equipped and enriched its individual and group practices not only with spiritual importances, including 'telling-truth/ saving-life' and 'sending out righteous thoughts', but also cultural and aesthetic significances, such as promoting the Shen Yun Performance.

As I have demonstrated, the FLG discourse is not static. Other-worldly spiritual views changed in relation to their interactions with the social and political surroundings. The FLG demonstrates how subversive and millenarian ideas can be successfully blended into the teachings and practices that resist and challenge existing dominant ideologies and seemingly unchallengeable political systems. While this chapter offered a scriptural analysis of the FLG's geopolitical discourses before and after the CCP persecution, the practice of this alternative geopolitics of religion at individual and group levels, in particular through 'telling-truth/saving-life', will be examined in further detail in Chapter 6. In the following chapters, I examine FLG followers' cultivation practices to understand how FLG followers transform Master Li's scriptures into their personal spiritual cultivation. Using examples from Taiwan and Hong Kong, Chapters 5 and 6 will also provide a deeper understanding about the diverse ways that individual followers exercise FLG geopolitics as part of their own uniquely personal cultivation.

Chapter 4: The Power of Individuals Over Their Own Bodies: Foucault's 'Care of Self' and FLG Cultivation

As discussed in Chapter 3, geographers examining the geopolitics of religion in different countries and societies have analysed: scriptural texts according to millennial, eschatological and mythic narratives according to geopolitical worldviews; and different religious followers' understandings and interpretations about god/s and revelations according to social and political issues in the contemporary world. However, in my view, the study of religion needs to expand beyond conceptualising religion as 'a way of seeing the world and a way of identifying others at a cognitive level' (Sturm, 2013: 139) and address, in addition, religion as bodily practices. Dittmer (2007) similarly calls for research in political geography that explores how spiritual and religious followers enact and perform geopolitical understandings and thereby create geopolitical spaces.

In this and the next chapters I take up this embodied understanding of religion to examine the FLG practices of self-cultivation. This research perspective should enrich the current scholarly discussion of religion and geography by focusing upon bodies and bodily practices. To date, research work has largely focused on how embodied experiences signify and create sacred spaces, such as with ritual acts, pilgrimage, and meditation (Holloway and Valins, 2002). Holloway's (2003) study of New Age spiritual seekers reveals how bodily spiritual practices can transform the mundane into sacred space-time. He also suggests that ritual and performances, which might be affected by hope, can strengthen faith (Holloway, 2013). Martin and Kryst (1998) explore how pilgrims ritualised their bodies in order to connect with Mary at various apparition sites, whereas Maddrell and Dora (2013) study the perception and experiences of Christian pilgrimage practices on the Isle of Man and in Greece. Gökarıksel (2009) explores the

veiling practices of Muslim women in Turkey as an embodied and enacted performance of belief and belonging.

Combining the strengths of the geopolitics of religion and of cultural geography by focusing upon the bodily practices of religion, in this and the following chapters I move from the scales of the state and of the social/spiritual movement to the scale of the body itself. Exploring bodily practices of cultivation can explain how individuals in a decentralised group transform geopolitical ideas into practices and how they activate themselves to continually confront the Party-State system. However, my focus goes beyond *experiencing* the self, whether that be through emotions, cultures, sacred texts, spaces or performance, to examining how individuals *constitute* and *transform* the self. The care of self and self-cultivation underline an individual's active subjectivity to break with his or her past or given identity, as formed by social discourses. Individuals are actively searching for guidance to (re-)form and (re-)construct their own subjectivity into an ideal self in the future. It is not so much about enacting, expressing, embodying or constructing meaningful symbolic systems, but more about advancing the self towards a better or perfect self.

The processes of self-transformation and the care of the self are intrinsic to Foucault's understanding of the formation of a subject. Foucault's earlier and later writings have been taken as referring to 'two *distinct* phenomena', whereby the first, as discussed in Chapter 2, focused on how external power and knowledge mechanisms '*fabricate* subjects', and the second, as discussed in this and the following chapters, explored how 'subjects *constitute* themselves' (Harrer, 2005: 76, italics in original). Individuals can exercise technologies of the self 'on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault, 1988: 18).

Geographers have started to pay attention to Foucault's concept of self-care. For example, Parr (2002) casts light on individuals as medically competent and active subjects who are capable of forming themselves into a self-defined healthy body (see also Brown and Duncan, 2000). In addition to a healthy body, some ex-smokers are observed by Thompson et al. (2007) as abstinent and responsible subjects that exercise their own forms of biopower upon themselves. Barnett et al. (2005) explore ethical consumers as self-conscious individuals, whose efforts regarding the governance of the consuming-self and constructing a moral-self is interpreted as 'a project of self-cultivation' (p. 31; see also Popke, 2006). However, these works do not elaborate upon Foucault's writings in detail, which is the task of the first part of this chapter. Moreover, 'self-care' can be exercised not only for health or ethical, but also for spiritual reasons, or for 'immortality' (Foucault, 1988: 18). My work contributes to other scholars who have begun to notice the importance of spiritual and religious directions, practices and faith in Foucault's discussion of 'self-care' and 'self-constitution' (Flynn, 2004; Bernauer and Mahon, 2005). According to Foucault (2005: 76): 'Knowing oneself, knowing the divine, and seeing the divine in oneself are, I think, fundamental in the Platonic and Neo-Platonist form of the care of the self'.

The importance of studying the process of self-formation and the perfection of self is highlighted by Lawrence (1998), one scholar of religion, who remarked that the 'power of internal transformation' (p. 346) is believed to open up individuals' potential as divine sources in themselves; the divine source(s) empower individuals to break, resist or transform the bonds of social identification or categorisation. This power of transformation is believed to enable individuals to transcend, either from this world to another one or from a weaker self to a stronger one (ibid). However, Foucault's self-care is rarely discussed in relation to Eastern religions (but see Chen, 2003: 17). I suspect that the centering of sex in Foucault's *History of Sexuality II and III* may

distance scholars of Eastern religions from adopting Foucault's self-care into a sacred context. For example, when I told a FLG follower, who had a PhD in literature from an university in the U.S., about using Foucault's approach in my thesis, she replied suspiciously that Foucault was a genius but that he was also a homosexual, as if that made him suspect in some manner or other. In another case, White (2014) discusses Foucault's self-care in the context of 'secular or non-theistic spirituality' (p. 489). In this chapter, I will analyse Foucault's self-care in both secular and sacred contexts, using not only the *History of Sexuality Volume II* (1992 [1984]) and *III* (1990 [1984]), but also his more-recently-published lectures.

When analysing FLG cultivation as a practice of self-care, it is important to acknowledge that the body-mind-spirit is understood as ontologically interrelated for FLG cultivators and many followers of Eastern religious traditions. Previous research and my own field studies (2013, 2014) suggest that FLG followers begin cultivation to improve their health, mental tranquillity or for other-worldly salvation (see Chapter 5). I argue that this power of self-care can be exercised by individuals not only to subjectify themselves into becoming spiritual followers and self-carers, but also to approach or become other-worldly divine beings in ways that may challenge and even transform this-worldly geopolitical space(s).

Self-care has another important political implication. The FLG's individualised cultivation and Master Li's opposition to institutionalised forms of religion (mentioned in Chapter 3 and discussed in detail in Section 4.3) presents a challenge to the CCP's religious governmentality. Master Li's withdrawal from the Chinese Association for Research into Qigong Science in 1995, the FLG's popularisation initiated by individual FLG followers (Section 4.4), and FLG cultivation based upon individuals' own understandings, will and strength, all demonstrate a characteristic of *ungovernability* which resists the CCP's attempt to exert 'control over

places for religious activities as well as over all religious activities themselves' (Human Rights Watch, 1997). As Foucault understands the struggle between the Christian Church and the Reformation as 'undoubtedly much more a great pastoral battle than a great doctrinal battle', I highlight the ungovernability of the FLG's self-cultivation as a challenge to the CCP's political control of religion.

In Section 4.1, I introduce Foucault's notion of care of self, focusing on what Foucault terms the practices between the self and self. I draw upon Foucault's later writings on the 'care of self', *The Use of Pleasure* (1992 [1984]), *The Care of the Self* (1990 [1984]), as well as his lectures in Paris, *Security, Territory, Population* (2007), *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005) and *The Courage of Truth* (2011), as a conceptual framework, illuminating how an individual objectifies and forms him-/herself to become a subject. Although Foucault takes materials from Greek, Hellenistic and Roman periods to illustrate his notion of the care of self, the practices of self-care can also be found in the FLG practices. In Section 4.3, I examine FLG cultivation practices in Master Li's scriptures. In Section 4.4, I illustrate the FLG's spatial diffusion between 1992 and 1999, which follows the individualistic logic of the FLG practices and presents a model of ungovernability challenging the CCP's governmentality. The data is based upon the FLG and anti-FLG sources. This chapter develops Foucault's arguments in a novel and relevant context by extending them to the study of Eastern religions. I further extend my discussion of different modes of self-care to analyse the mode of FLG followers' cultivation in Chapter 5; in Chapter 6, I discuss FLG followers' 'telling-truth/saving-life' activities.

4.1 Foucault's Notion of the Care of Self

In Chapter 2, I used Foucault's discussion of governmentality to discuss how individuals in China are influenced and disciplined by Chinese Party-State's official

institutions and managed by other social institutions, including religious associations and schools. In his later writings, Foucault shifted his focus from analyses of institutional discourses to a discussion of the individual's transformation and domination of the self. He asserts in his lectures of 17 February 1982, that 'there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself'; and that 'the analysis of governmentality – that is to say, of power as a set of reversible relationships – must refer to an ethics of the subject defined by the relationship of self to self' (Foucault, 2005: 252). Here Foucault's focus is upon how an individual governs him-/herself.

Foucault contrasts the care of the self with pastoral power as practised in the Christian Church and in modern governmentality. In Chapter 2, I discussed governmentality at the scale of the state; here I briefly discuss governmentality at a micro scale, in particular at the level of the family, wherein the child's body is situated within complex power relationships with parents and medical experts (Foucault, 1998 [1976], 2003: 231f.). In the bourgeois domestic space of nineteenth century Europe, children's sexuality, such as masturbation, became an object to be monitored and managed in depth and detail for the good of the child's health and the family's future. In contrast, children's masturbation was not relevant for free citizens in classical Greek and Roman culture (Foucault, 1990: 10). Under the modern European order, parents, along with external medical authorities, were responsible for allowable forms of touching, that is, for the surveillance of the child's behaviours. The self became an object of discourse; extracted details from the object were accumulated into knowledge owned and managed by specialists. The scientific discourse about sex also established expertise, whereby only a limited number of professionals had access to knowledge about sexuality and the authority to research, write, and discuss it in society, as well as give advice to non-experts. Causality between different kinds of 'illnesses', such as old

age and children's masturbation, were randomly established (Foucault, 2003: 241). In this way, the doctor, who possessed more advanced knowledge, supervised and penetrated the private family space, and indirectly managed the behaviour of family members (ibid: 250f.). Those non-experts who had relatively less knowledge were open to investigation, whereby the children must confess to their doctor (ibid). In sum, in the mode of governmentality, individuals are captured within power relationships, such as institutions or codified rules and laws; they become objects of experts' surveillance, gaze and investigation; their behaviors are regulated and controlled; their subjectivities are defined and classified by institutions constituted of specialised knowledge.

In contrast to this pastoral model, in the mode of self-care, individuals are not objects of an external gaze. Rather than being investigated, regulated and surveilled, individuals are supposed to have the authority to stylise their own subjectivities and modify their own beings. They own the knowledge about the world and themselves; they are aware of their own beings. They search for true teachings, and assimilate these 'truth' to perfect themselves. These teachings are not a form of knowledge-power that strengthens certain specialists' dominant position in society. Instead, '[t]he truth enlightens the subject; the truth gives beatitude to the subject; the truth gives the subject tranquility of the soul' (Foucault, 2005: 16). Ultimately, the truth must serve the purpose of fulfilling and transfiguring an individual's very being. The transformation of the self by the self requires an individual's commitment and effort to continually advance and improve the self, including how an individual *voluntarily* chooses and follows certain teachings (Foucault, 2007: 181f.). Thus stages of self-improvement are mostly controlled by an individual's judgement and conduct, not by societal norms, traditional conventions, or any other external authority. The care of self does not need rituals to confirm or reconfirm the subject's being, identity or position within a society, as is the case for *rites de passage* as discussed by Victor Turner (1967).

Below, I introduce Foucault's discussion of the care of self in both philosophical and Western religious contexts (Section 4.1.1). In Section 4.1.2, I examine the learning process of self-care and the power relationships between self and self, focusing on how the self masters the weaker part of the self, taking the example of asceticism. I then explore how, through speaking the truth about oneself, a person constitutes him-/herself as the true being or model of his/her own discourse, what Foucault termed '*parrhēsia*' (Section 4.1.3). After discussing Foucault's concepts, I introduce Eastern notions of self-care in Section 4.2. In the final section of this chapter, I use these concepts to analyse how an extended concept of self-care contributes to an understanding of an individual FLG follower's cultivation practices, which may include resistance to this- and other-worldly geopolitical forces.

4.1.1 Goals of Care of the Self: This and Other Worldly Salvation

This section discusses the practices and goals of the care of self. Foucault's analysis focuses on the attitude and the power-relationship between the subject and him-/herself (Harrer, 2005). Caring for and improving the self might have philosophical or religious reasons, such as this-worldly or other-worldly salvation (Foucault, 2005). In a philosophical sense, salvation is interpreted as taking care of issues in this life, to be free from threats, emotional turmoil or disturbances and to be able to stay tranquil, happy and peaceful with oneself (ibid: 184). In a religious sense, salvation indicates working and walking on a journey from this world to another, from mortality to immortality, from an impure world to a pure one, which is mostly accompanied, guided or conducted by supernatural forces (ibid: 181). The guidance and teachings that lead towards philosophical or religious salvation are accessible to, but not imposed on, everyone regardless of their social status. However, only those who dedicate themselves to self-formation and transformation can be saved. In other words, according to

Foucault, the principle and practices are open to everyone but salvation is exclusive, limited and reserved for people who accept the teachings and also commit to the practices of improving the self (ibid: 113f.). The ideas regarding the care of self and discourses of salvation, whether they belong to philosophy or religion, are not Foucault's main concern. Or more exactly, philosophy and spirituality were not separated domains in Antiquity:

Schematically, let's say that throughout the period we call Antiquity, and in quite different modalities, the philosophical question of "how to have access to the truth" and the practice of spirituality (of the necessary transformations in the very being of the subject which will allow access to the truth), these two questions, these two themes, were never separate (ibid: 16f.).

Instead, he cares about the tactics and strategies as *processes* concerning how the subject is formed, whether the subject becomes an object of pastoral power and/or institutional discourses, or whether the subject is formed as the master/mistress of the self who has the knowledge and ability to direct and transform himself/herself, either in this or another world (Foucault, 2007: 211f.).

The spectrum of caring for the self ranges from simple, ritual and cultic practices at one end, to being concerned with sophisticated, theoretical and individual practices on the other (Foucault, 2005: 114f.). The knowledge or the truth guiding the self towards salvation may include teachings that the subject assimilates and constantly reflects upon, and in turn, adjusts his/her conduct accordingly. These guiding sources are not codified laws or regulations that require absolute obedience, but, rather, principles that individuals acquire through learning processes. In other words, an individual becomes the judge and instructor of his/her own conduct. Furthermore, the care of the self means more than simply *having* or *possessing* the knowledge of salvation through reading and memorizing teachings and/or scriptures. An individual internalises and assimilates this knowledge, examines and adjusts his/her conduct accordingly, to continually work on advancing the self. In Foucault's interpretation, the

knowledge or the truth of salvation, therefore, is considered one of enabling and empowering individuals rather than knowledge given to individuals as objects by an external authority. It is not knowledge accompanied with qualification or certification that one acquires as a skill to exchange with others. Knowledge and truth of salvation enables an individual to become the master of the self and become independent from others (Foucault, 2005: 17f.). These different modes of truth in relation to individuals can be better summarised in Foucault's own words:

If we define spirituality as being the form of practices which postulate that, such as he is, the subject is not capable of the truth, but that, such as it is, the truth can transfigure and save the subject, then we can say that the modern age of the relations between the subject and truth begin when it is postulated that, such as he is, the subject is capable of truth, but that, such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject (ibid: 19).

4.1.2 Learning Processes, Self-Mastery and Religious Asceticism

Self-care practices transform and continually advance the self, which requires individuals to master the self according to Foucault. He contrasts self-mastery with the logic of 'pure obedience' (Foucault, 2007: 174) and 'complete subordination' (ibid: 175) typical of pastoral care in the Middle Ages; for Foucault, the Christian Church was 'the embryonic point of the governmentality' (ibid: 165) and the Christian shepherd took responsibility for each individual sheep and for the entire flock to lead them to salvation (ibid: 167f.). Individuals thus submit themselves to the shepherd for guidance and care. The priest or the superior of a monastic community observes, directs and monitors 'everything that every single sheep has done' at any time (ibid: 170), including teaching 'spouses the conduct they should follow in their intimate relations' (ibid: 181). Thus, individuals are not merely submitting to certain principles or teachings, but to someone who is in a superior position; the individual 'obeys in order to be obedient', which may lead to renouncing one's own will (ibid: 177).

In contrast, self-care supposes that every individual can become better and stronger, by becoming more fully the master of him-/herself, which requires learning and training. Various acts are involved in the long process of learning, which may include, for example, reading, memorizing and interpreting texts; assimilating precepts; self-reflection; and learning from others (Foucault, 1992 [1984]: 27, 1990 [1984]: 39-68, 2005: 116). This learning process does not require an individual's submission to given rules, but rather equips one with principles, according to which an individual can measure, examine and adjust his/her daily conduct (Foucault, 2005: 240f.). Individuals become the owners of their own self-knowledge and the judges of their own conduct.

Foucault (1992 [1984]: 45-52) discusses how the immoral uses of pleasure were historically measured by excess and self-indulgence and not by the act itself. In other words, morality and pleasure are not universally codified and should take several circumstantial factors into consideration, depending on an individual's own judgement and calculation (ibid: 53f.). For example, in Greek culture, the consumption of foods and wines and sexual pleasures were considered ethical objects to be cultivated by a moral man. In Antiquity, virtues were considered to be one's self-willed resistant attitudes toward one's own desire and pleasure; resisting seduction and controlling internal violence demonstrated the control of an individual over the self (ibid: 67-71). The exercises of the self included voluntary abstinence or detachment of the mind from abundance or privation. Seneca's decision whether to go to festivities presents an example of the exercise of the mind: to refrain from festivities can demonstrate one's self-control and become a kind of test. But it would be more difficult and require a stronger moral will if one were to participate in a festival with a 'different' attitude, such as a detached mind or indifference (Foucault, 1990 [1984]: 60). For Seneca, moreover, the exercise of abstinence means to form a lifestyle, and not to regulate one's

life following prescription or prohibition. For Stoics, the whole of life can be regarded as a test (Foucault, 2005: 430f.).

Self-mastery in a religious context is illustrated by Foucault (2007: 204-208) through the example of asceticism as a form of counter-conduct to pastoral care in the Christian world during the Middle Ages. Ascesis, or the exercise of the self upon self, was regarded not as obedience to administrative laws, but as forms of self-mastery that bound the self with truth as they understood it, that is, the truth of philosophical or divine teachings in Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman cultures (Foucault, 2005: 181-185). Asceticism followed a logic contrary to pastoral power in at least four ways. First, through the exercise of the self upon the self, textual or scriptural ‘truths’ become internalised into the subject whereby the subject becomes a living example of the truth of sacred texts; truth was thought to act through the subject/body. Second, asceticism required a combative attitude towards pastoral care, challenging one’s own limits, such as through periods of fasting. Rather than denouncing or denying the self, asceticism can be seen as an attempt to strive for the control of the self, not of others. Third, it was an exercise of the self upon the self with increasing scales of difficulty, whereby individuals desired to overcome their present limits and thereby proceed to the next stage of testing. In this way, asceticism has an individualising tendency (Foucault, 2007: 208). Finally, the individual body and Christ become one through asceticism, as the individual subject/body attempts to suffer as Christ suffered. In these ways, one was believed to acquire tranquility and become indifferent to temptation, which is similar to Buddhist forms of asceticism (ibid: 206).

In addition to asceticism, Foucault also pointed out three other aspects of counter-conduct in opposition to pastoral care that are relevant to this research. First, communities of equal members as the reversal of hierarchical structure of power, whereby ‘each is a pastor, a priest or a shepherd’ and each has ‘no personal possession

of goods' (ibid: 211). Second, through mysterious experiences, individuals are *directly* connected with God, without the intervention of hierarchical pastoral powers (ibid: 212). Third, scriptures are the medium of God's message. 'Reading the text given by God to man, the reader sees the very word of God, and his understanding of it, even when confused, is nothing other than what God wanted to reveal of Himself to man' (ibid: 213). These forms of counter-conduct and spiritual revelation empower individuals and links them directly with divine power, instead of turning them into obedient sheep. This counter-conduct can also be found in both Master Li's scriptures and in FLG followers' practices, as I discuss below in Section 4.3 and Chapter 5.

To summarise, Foucault pays special attention to the logic of individualism, rather than to collective practices in his discussion of the care of self (Foucault, 1990 [1984]: 42). Firstly, individuals decide what lifestyle or teachings he or she wishes to follow, including whether he or she wishes to be independent from agitation, to be free from temptation or to be saved in another world. Secondly, after beginning to practice self-care, individuals learn to assimilate certain teachings. Thus, they are equipped with abilities to understand and interpret teachings, to judge and direct their behaviours, and to advance themselves as individuals. Individuals think and act according to their own calculation of circumstantial factors. There are no unified juridical codes suitable to all. It is individuals, not experts, who know themselves best. Individuals try to be as independent as possible, and each one is regarded as capable of becoming better, purer or stronger.

The focus is upon how individuals make decisions and choose what kinds of guidance they adhere to and exercise, and up to what limits. Guidance may come from texts, statements, or even a sage's own behaviours, which enable individuals to learn from and reflect upon their own actions. Based upon this guidance, individuals continually examine themselves, act appropriately and advance themselves. Texts or

discourses are not norms or codes; rather they serve as tools to guide individuals towards becoming better and more independent. At a later stage, individuals can master these texts or discourses and hence are thought to become living beings that internalise and enact these discourses of truth.

4.1.3 Speaking Truth and Parrhēsia

Thus far I have discussed the relationship between one individual and his/her self. In this section, I discuss the horizontal relationships among the followers of a set of teachings and belief-systems. A technique used to stylise the self as a moral or spiritual subject is *parrhēsia*, speaking freely or free speech (Foucault, 2005, 2011). Foucault identifies two important aspects of *parrhēsia*: firstly, the utterance is the commitment by the speaker to the truth of what is spoken; secondly, the subject becomes identical to the content/subject of what one has just spoken (Foucault, 2005: 406f.). An individual is thus the example of the truth of his or her speech. *Parrhēsia* expresses the self as an example of truthful discourse. Through telling the truth about one's conduct, one becomes the subject of truth, and thereby has sovereignty over the self.

Parrhēsia not only concerns the relationship to the self, in terms of the enunciation of the self as being true in conduct, it also has societal and political implications regarding relationships with others. The ideal of telling the truth includes therefore both horizontal and vertical relationships. For instance, speaking frankly to each other with benevolence, is also found in a horizontal relationship among students (Foucault, 2005: 389). Thus, alongside the master's *parrhēsia* to students in a vertical manner, students may gather together to expose their faults, weaknesses or guilt, and reveal their openness and courage to one another in a horizontal relationship. However, *parrhēsia* differs from the confessional system in the Christian Church. Confession, codified as the Sacrament of Penance in 1214, is a ritual whereby a spiritual authority

intervenes, judges, forgives, and promises an individual's salvation in the name of God (Foucault, 1998 [1976]: 58-61). *Parrhēsia* is not a ritual with spiritual significance situated within a power relationship; it is voluntary, open, and non-judgemental. It is thus not solely the master or priest who has the freedom to speak the truth to an audience; freedom to speak is also granted to followers of the teachings themselves.

In his 1983-84 lecture series, '*The Courage of Truth: the Government of Self and Others*', Foucault (2011: 312) discussed how the Cynics' *parrhēsia* not only involved self-care, but also caring for others – for the whole of humankind. He described the Cynic as 'the man of *parrhēsia*' (ibid: 166), for they not only speak the truth about themselves, but their way of life, as illustrated by their minimum material consumption and ascetic practices, which can be considered as an enactment of their truth (ibid: 173). The Cynics used their own conduct to demonstrate, promote and persuade others to adopt a model of truthful living, that is, an alternative mode of existing in the world compared to the 'normal' life led by most people (ibid: 314). They didn't intrude into others' lives, but observed and inspected them. The Cynics used their own lifestyle as an example for all people seeking an alternative to the then currently popular lifestyle (ibid: 314f.). Through their *parrhēsia* of life, 'the care of other thus coincides exactly with the care of self', whereby the change of an individual's conduct can influence 'the general configuration of the world' (ibid: 313).

In the same lecture series, Foucault (2011) also discussed *parrhēsia* in a religious context (see also Bernauer, 1999).³¹ In the pre-Christian texts, truth telling refers to the individual's vertical and direct relationship with god. In New Testament texts, *parrhēsia* refers to the apostolic virtue of preaching the Gospel as a sign of Christians' fearless and courageous confidence in God (Foucault, 2011: 330f.). Foucault

³¹I wish to acknowledge Bernauer's (1999) analysis of the role of Cynics and *parrhēsia* in a religious context in Foucault's 28 March 1984 lecture, which inspired my discussion in this paragraph.

contrasts the *parrhēsiatic* mode of Christianity with the anti-*parrhēsiatic* mode of the pastoral institution of Christianity. The latter is characterised by obedience, decipherment of the self through confession, self-doubt and fear of God (ibid: 337). When a person speaks the truth about his or her negative self, this is an aspect of disclosure in *parrhēsia*, which is different from the mode of confession in the Catholic Church. The purpose of *parrhēsia* is not to ask for forgiveness and salvation from an external authority, or to open oneself up as an object in need of expert spiritual or medical discourses and pastoral care, but to demonstrate one's courage to confess one's own wrongdoings and determine to improve oneself. Regarding relationships with others, Christian *parrhēsia* might escalate to an extreme form: martyrdom when facing persecution (ibid: 331). Foucault discusses the beliefs of one Christian saint of the fourth century, John Chrysostom, who stated that: '[i]n the midst of persecutions, the sheep perform the office of shepherds, soldiers perform that of leaders, thanks to their *parrhēsia* and their courage (*andreia*)' (quoted in Foucault 2011: 331). Thus, faith and trust in God can lead to martyrdom. Martyrdom becomes a form of *parrhēsia*, which is the bodily enactment of one's own faith and the bodily refusal of dominant social and political pressures. Again in John Chrysostom, Martyrdom as religious *parrhēsia* is 'a wisdom which refuses to be enslaved, a tongue full of courageous boldness' (ibid: 331f.).

As described above, Foucault drew upon the Western traditions of Greek, Hellenistic and Roman of the care of the self to illustrate how one could become one's own authority in subject formation. As I discuss in the next section, scholars in other disciplines have similarly examined Eastern cultures to describe the phenomenon of cultivation and the self-transformation of the self (Section 4.2). In section 4.3, I apply Foucault's understanding of the care of the self to interpret FLG cultivation.

4.2 Cultivation in the Falun Gong Scriptures

This section examines FLG scriptures to better understand the practices of FLG cultivation in relation to Foucault's concept of the care of the self. Before introducing these texts, some basic concepts of Falun Gong will be introduced and key terms clarified (Section 4.2.1). Secondly, the details of FLG cultivation will be discussed (Section 4.2.2). Then, the logic of individualism and the body and mind as the space of cultivation in FLG teachings will be highlighted (Section 4.2.4). At the end of this section, I examine horizontal relationships among FLG cultivators (Section 4.2.5) and 'telling-truth/saving-life' as part of personal cultivation (Section 4.3.6). I want to remind the reader that many FLG beliefs are common to Chinese popular religion, however the similarities between the two will not be discussed in this thesis.³²

Before introducing the FLG scriptures, I want to discuss the concept of self-transformation into divine beings in Taoism and Buddhism, which is similar to FLG teachings. As discussed in Chapter 3, religious ideas and practices from the East have continually been blended into new religious teachings, and the FLG is no exception. In the Taoist tradition, the heart and the body are believed to be vital essences which can be cultivated (Schipper, 1993; see also Sullivan, 1990; Lawrence, 1998). Through their cultivation, Taoists believe they can achieve self-transformation and even immortality. In Buddhism, individuals are thought to become enlightened beings through the practice of self-cultivation and self-transformation. The fundamental principle of Buddhist ethics is *dharma*, a universal natural law, that 'governs both the physical and moral order of the universe', whereby even gods or Buddha are subject to the same universal principles (Keown, 2005: 3f.). Although the requirements and teaching of *dharma*, as a universal moral law, have been revealed by enlightened beings such as the Buddha, individuals are thought to have the capability of learning the truth of reasoning and living in line

³² This point originated after discussion with D. Palmer on 23 February 2016.

with the principles of *dharma*, and in this way each can become an enlightened being. Living in accordance with *dharma* and implementing its requirements is thought to lead to happiness, fulfilment, and salvation; neglecting or transgressing it is said to lead to endless suffering in the cycle of rebirth (ibid: 4). The core of Buddhist ethics is the process of self-transformation, which includes eliminating negative thoughts with increasingly positive ones; it is a journey of self-realization which leads to becoming a Buddha, the enlightened one (ibid: 25).

Similar to these Taoist and Buddhist concepts, self-transformation also plays a central role in the FLG practices. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I use the term ‘cultivators’ (*xiulian ren*) to refer to FLG followers, largely because they themselves use this concept rather than the generic word ‘practitioners’. In the English version of many FLG scriptures, the terms cultivator and practitioner are used interchangeably. However, the signifier ‘practitioner’ is closer to 練 in the Chinese language. In my work, I use the word ‘cultivator’ to refer to dedicated FLG followers and ‘practitioner’ to indicate more casual followers who practice FLG as a sport or as *qigong* without focusing on their own moral improvement (Chan, 2004: 671f.; Taipei_fieldnotes_130714).

The Chinese word *xiu* 修 of *xiulian* (cultivation) refers to ‘studying, regulating, repairing, or cultivating, both in the sense of cultivating the body or mind’ (Penny, 2012: 152f.). The second half of *xiulian* is the word *lian* 煉 is signified in FLG scripture and publications by the Chinese character compound of fire 火; this means to ‘smelt or refine some material, usually metal, as in creating an alloy or tempering a blade, for example. The compound word therefore has the connotation of transforming a base substance into a more refined one’ (ibid: 153). Master Li (2005a: 64) outlines the underlying principles of both words in the Chinese version of *The Essentials of Diligent Progress, Vol III, 精進要旨三 (jingjin yaozhi san)*, whereby the Buddhist, Taoist and

FLG cultivation practices are designated by the word *lian* 煉 of the compound of fire. However, there is another word for *lian*, 練, which is pronounced the same, but uses a different character compound 糸 (silk), which means ‘to boil and scour raw silk, similarly referring to a process of refinement through the application of heat’ (Penny, 2012: 153). Two further nuanced meanings of the second *lian* 練 of the silk compound are concerned with 1) training, such as training soldiers, and 2) practicing repeatedly, such as practicing dancing (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 1994). In modern Chinese, these two meanings – training and practicing – are more commonly associated with the word *lian* 練 than are the meanings related to the boiling and refinement of raw silk. Master Li indicates *qigong* or other practices in the ZFL using the word *lian* 練 of the compound of silk. Li’s use of 煉 instead of 練 in the Chinese FLG scriptures, therefore, quite precisely emphasises that the FLG is more than repetition and training, but is concerned with transforming the substance, or the self, to forge a new self. The idea of cultivation is not unique to the FLG; it has both Taoist and Buddhist origins. In the Taoist tradition, for instance, the body is believed to be able to be cultivated into an immortal being (see Yuasa, 1987, Schipper, 1993, Sullivan, 1990, Lawrence, 1998). In Buddhism, individuals are thought to dedicate themselves through self-cultivation and self-transformation into enlightened beings (see Keown, 2005).

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, the FLG initially had developed under the category of *qigong* in China and enjoyed a degree of freedom, including membership of the Chinese Association for Research into Qigong Science (CARQS) in 1992. Years later, the FLG movement began to emphasise its distinction from other *qigong* groups; by 1995 it requested to withdraw its CARQS membership, which was granted in 1996 (Penny, 2012: 50). Instead of accentuating *qi*, with the publication of the *Zhuan Falun* (1996e), Master Li emphasised the cultivation of not only energy, but most importantly

of the mind. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Li regards FLG as a practice of a Buddha law or *dharma*, termed *fa*, which is a higher level than *qi* obtained through normal *qigong*. The FLG is not predominantly dedicated to health-improvement but to the refinement and purification of the spiritual and physical self in all aspects of life (Li: 1996e: 161).

4.2.1 Basic Concepts of Falun Gong Belief

I have already described how in the most important book of FLG teaching, *Zhuan Falun*, Master Li presents the FLG as the teaching of the ‘Buddha *fa*’. Li describes ‘Buddha *fa*’ as revealing the fundamental principles of the universe, *zhen-shan-ren* (truthfulness, compassion and forbearance) (Li, 1996e: no pagination, 2000d: i). Based upon these principles, the ‘Buddha *fa*’ evolves into more complex forms at different levels:

The Buddha Fa manifests different forms at different levels and assumes different guiding roles at different levels. The lower the level, the more complex. This characteristic, Zhen-Shan-Ren, is in the microscopic particles of air, rock, wood, soil, iron and steel, the human body, as well as in all matter (Li, 1996e: 12f, 2000d: 7).

In my view, this complexity of the different forms of Buddha *fa* is not and cannot be fully addressed in Master Li’s scriptures; it requires cultivators’ active engagement in interpreting and applying the universal principles into their daily life, which is discussed below. In the FLG, Buddha *fa* principles, as characteristics of the universe, are *prior to and higher* than any divine being, including the Buddha Sakyamuni or god(s) whose divine status is the result of their cultivation based upon these principles of the universe.

As Li (1998d) explains:

Did you know that Dao is one kind of god; Buddha is another kind of god; Yahweh, Jesus, and St. Mary are also one kind of god? Their Attainment Status and bodily forms vary as a result of differences in their cultivation objectives and in their understandings of the universe’s Dafa. It is the Buddha Fa that created the immense cosmic body, and not these Buddhas, Daos, and Gods.

Here Li reminds the readers that even divine beings need to commit themselves to continually advance and improve the self according to the universal principles of truth, compassion and forbearance. Their subjectivity and divine status is the result of their own cultivation. The same model is applied to individual FLG followers. In the FLG teachings, humans were originally divine beings. Li states that ‘human beings all fell here from the many dimensions of the universe’ when they separated themselves from the principles of the universe and began to have more earthly attachments (Li, 2008 [1996]: 12). Humans must cultivate themselves to return to their original divine status; otherwise, ‘[t]hose who fail to return will have no choice but to reincarnate, with this continuing until they amass a huge amount of *karma* and are destroyed. That is why Earth has witnessed many catastrophes’(ibid: 13).

As the above discussion indicates, there are different levels of cultivation. If a cultivator cultivates progressively, his or her cultivation can move from the ‘Triple-World-Law’ to the ‘Beyond-Triple-World-Law’ level, which means that he or she will not reincarnate; instead, he or she can continue to cultivate as an enlightened being at different levels, known as the Attainment Statuses, which are, in ascending sequence: Arhat, Bodhisattva or Buddha. Cultivation of the ‘Buddha *fa*’, then, is believed to continue even when one cultivates beyond the ‘Triple-World-Law’ of reincarnation (Li, 1996e: 5f., 69f., 2000d: 3, 39). This progression into a higher level mainly depends upon the cultivation of *xinxing* (mind or heart nature; moral character (glossary in Li, 2000d: 198)), such as eliminating desires, attachments and enduring hardships (Li, 1996e: 23f., 2000d: 13). Cultivation of *xinxing* increases *de* (virtue, merit and a precious white substance (glossary in Li, 2000d: 193)). Then, *de* is transformed by the cultivator’s master into *gong* (cultivation energy) (ibid: 194). With the increase of *gong*, the cultivator reaches higher levels of cultivation and the colors of *gong* change:

In Triple-World-Law cultivation, the *gong* that emerges first is red, and when the person’s level elevates, it becomes orange, then yellow, then green,

etc., with there being nine colors in all—i.e., red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet, colored, and colorless. To see which level you are at, one look will suffice. If you have attained a translucent body and continue to cultivate upward, it will be Beyond-Triple-World-Law cultivation that you do. You will have gained a celestial rank and begun the initial phase of Arhat Fa cultivation. Doing Beyond-Triple-World-Law cultivation means that you have surpassed the Three Realms and are no longer subject to reincarnation. If you end your cultivation at this stage, you are an Arhat.

If you continue to cultivate onward, you will be cultivating at the eminent rank of Arhat, and that level has coloration as well. However, the colors of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet here are different from those in Triple-World-Law. The colors in Triple-World-Law cultivation are dense, similar to those of human beings. But at that [Arhat] level, they are translucent gradations of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet, colored, and colorless. With further cultivation, there are more sets of nine colors, with the difference being that they are more translucent, more exquisite, and more beautiful. It repeats in this manner over and over. Where a person is in cultivation can thus be discerned (Li, 2008 [1996]: 29).

The FLG cultivator's master is Master Li, whose important role is to transform an cultivator's *de* into *gong*, so that the cultivator can progress to higher cultivation levels. This confirms Master Li's indispensable and unchallengeable position among FLG cultivators. Nevertheless, the total cultivation depends upon the cultivator's own efforts. Any cultivator can transform him-or herself into an enlightened being at as high level as possible through cultivating the divine elements in the self, and eliminating the ill and bad substances in the self. Rather than submitting to a divine authority, FLG cultivators can transform the self by themselves into divine beings following certain principles. 'Cultivation depends on one's own efforts, while the transformation of *gong* is done by one's master' (Li, 1996e: 26, 2000d: 14). The relation with the Master Li is necessary; however, absolute obedience to the Master does not result in one's salvation. As I describe below, the level of one's cultivation depends on each individual's commitments.

4.2.2 *How to Cultivate?*

A higher cultivation level is believed to be achieved when *de* (virtue, a precious white substance) is increased and transformed into *gong*. However, in FLG cultivation, the increase of *de* is not mainly from active commitment to virtuous doings, but mainly from the transformation of other's or the self's *karma*, which is considered a black substance resulting from previous wrongdoings (Li, 1996e: 127f., 2000d: 74). One is believed to acquire *karma* by his or her own wrongdoing, and thus loses his or her *de* to others who suffer from his or her wrongdoing. If the latter fights back with the same wrongdoing, they will lose *de*, too. If one endures others' wrongdoings, he or she can acquire *de* (Li, 1996e: 28f., 2000d: 15f.).

One can also transform one's own *karma*, either accumulated in this life or previous lives, into *de*, which is important in FLG cultivation. FLG spiritual belief assumes reincarnation; human spirits carry their *de* and *karma* from previous lives into this life, and will continue to bring them to the next life. For example, if someone had lots of *de* of virtue but failed to cultivate beyond the 'Triple-World-Law' to become an enlightened being, he or she could become a high-ranking official or make a fortune in the next life (Li, 2008 [1996]: 3). One can 'inherit' *karma* with the self without doing anything wrong in this life.

When one does a bad deed, one obtains the black substance, karma. [...] this karma is not accumulated in only one lifetime. The community of cultivators believes that a Primordial Spirit does not become extinct. If a Primordial Spirit does not become extinct, one probably had social interactions before this life. So one might have owed something to someone, bullied someone, or done other bad things, such as killing, which would induce this karma. These things add up in another dimension, and one always carries them; the same is also true with the white substance (Li, 1996e: 127f., 2000d: 74).

Transforming *karma* into *de* can be achieved by enduring physical sufferings, such as through meditation or enduring pain. Illness is also regarded as a form of *karma*. Illness *karma* can be eliminated if one endures the physical discomfort caused by illness, so one can pay off the *karma* one inherited from the past:

when the legs are painful, the black substance moves to the legs. The black substance is karma that can be eliminated through suffering; it can then be transformed into de. Once the pain is felt, karma begins to be eliminated. The more karma that comes, the more pain the legs feel (Li, 1996e: 129f., 2000d: 75).

Master Li contrasts enduring the pain and thus eliminating illness *karma* with seeking medical treatment, which does not really remove the *karma*. This opposition to medical care is highly criticised by the CCP (Chapter 2) and is also continually debated among FLG followers (Chapter 5). However, this viewpoint should be regarded as a general principle, not an absolute order:

When a person reincarnates after death, some of his sickness-karma is pressed into his body at the microscopic level. When he reincarnates, the new physical body's matter has no sickness-karma on the surface (but there are exceptions for those with too much karma). What was pressed into the body in the previous life then comes out, and when it returns to the surface of this physical body the person becomes ill. [...] Once ill, the person takes medicine or seeks various kinds of treatments, which in effect press the sickness back into the body again. This way, instead of paying for the sickness-karma from his wrongdoing in the previous life, he does some additional bad things in this life and hurts others; this brings about new sickness-karma and leads to different kinds of sicknesses (Li, 1996d).

Besides enduring physical suffering, the most important practice to eliminate *karma*, gain *de* and advance one's level (all three are believed to be interconnected), is to cultivate one's mind. This includes keeping the mind calm and kind, and eliminating all kinds of human desires and attachments:

Mentally overcoming tribulations is the key to truly improving one's level. If one can make progress just by suffering physically, I would say that Chinese farmers suffer the most. [...] It is not that simple a matter. Therefore, we have said that to truly improve oneself, one should genuinely upgrade one's mind. Only then can one truly upgrade oneself.

During the process of transforming karma, to keep yourself under control—unlike an everyday person who would mess things up—you should always maintain a heart of benevolence and a mind of kindness. [...] Thus, when you encounter a conflict, I would say that it is to transform your black substance into the white substance, *de* (Li, 1996e: 132f., 2000d: 77).

Gaining *de* in FLG is thus mainly dependent upon eliminating one's *karma* and controlling one's desire and inner turbulence or temptation. As Li described above, the focus of cultivation is on the relationship between the self and self, not through

‘virtuous actions’, such as charity for the underprivileged. It doesn’t mean that one should not help others; one can help others if necessary, but the action might hinder others from repaying their own karmic debts (Li, 1997d). Even the Buddhas do not eliminate suffering in this world. If the Buddhas did so, then no one would need to repay for their wrongdoing in this life or previous ones:

Buddhism also holds that Buddhas are everywhere. If a Buddha waved his hand once, all of humankind’s diseases could be wiped out; this is absolutely achievable. With so many Buddhas around, why hasn’t anyone done this? It is because a person did wrong in the past that he suffers these hardships. If you have cured his illness, that is the same as violating the principle of the universe, for one can then do wrong deeds and owe someone something without having to pay for it. This is not allowed. [...] Only by having people practice a righteous way can there be true salvation of all beings (Li, 1996e: 62f., 2000d: 36).

In my understanding of Li’s scriptures above, individuals should not attach themselves to doing virtuous deeds for others; rather, they should dedicate themselves to self-cultivation and refrain from wrongdoing.

Throughout the FLG cultivation process, a cultivator might attain or experience supernormal abilities, such as clairvoyance, precognition and retrocognition, or being able to see with the Celestial Eye³³ (Li, 1996e: 41-80, 2000d: 25-46). However, these are not the main goals or ends of FLG cultivation. Diligent FLG followers should dedicate themselves to cultivating the mind and eliminating attachments. Pursuing supernormal abilities and showing them off is regarded as a kind of attachment and therefore should be avoided (Li, 1996e: 92, 2000d: 53).³⁴

³³ ‘The Celestial Eye that we refer to is, in fact, located slightly above and between one’s eyebrows, and it is connected to the pineal body. This is the main channel. The human body has many additional eyes. [...] Therefore, some people can read with the ears, and some can see with the hands or from the back of the head; still others can see with the feet or stomach. It is all possible’ (Li, 1996e: 41f., 2000d: 25).

³⁴ For a more detailed introduction to FLG’s spiritual anatomy and cosmology, see Penny (2012).

4.2.3 Non-institutionalism and Individualism in the FLG

As discussed in the previous section, the cause and amount of one's *karma* is unknown to others, so one should not intervene in others' private affairs. Furthermore, Master Li's scriptures address the issues of 1) non-institutionalism, 2) individualism and 3) self-mastery in FLG cultivation practices. Firstly, Master Li is very sceptical of institutional forms of religion, and is critical of governmentality in general. He provides an example in which a junior monk might have a higher cultivation level than a senior monk, but the senior can expel the junior arbitrarily using his own authoritative power:

[P]eople such as senior monks, supervisors, or abbots in temples are not necessarily of great inborn quality. [...] The more comfortable the senior monks' lives are, the harder it is for them to reach the state of Unlocking Gong since there is the issue of karma's transformation. [...] The junior monk always works hard and tirelessly. It is quicker for him to repay his karma and become enlightened. Perhaps one day he achieves the Unlocking of Gong all of a sudden. With this Unlocking of Gong, enlightenment, or semi-enlightenment, his supernatural capabilities will all emerge. [...] But the abbot will be unable to put up with it: "How can I still be the abbot? What enlightenment? He is experiencing cultivation insanity. Get him out of here." The temple thus expels the junior monk (Li, 1996e: 248f., 2000d: 143).

As Li indicates above, he is suspicious of the power relationships within religious institutions because spiritual leaders do not necessarily have better spiritual qualities than junior fellows. He even regards the mysterious experiences (one form of counter-conduct in Foucault's discussion), such as unlocking of *gong*, supernatural capabilities or enlightenment, more valuable than institutional status.

Li also opposes any religious formality, such as financial management, rituals or regulation. Firstly, he rejects collecting or accumulating wealth from FLG followers for any religious purposes, such as temple-building or the erection of Buddha statues (Li, 1997c): 'Let me tell you that no one can change this: The assistance centers absolutely cannot keep any money' (Li, 1998a). So far as I can tell from my understanding of the FLG scriptures and from fieldwork in Dublin and Taiwan, the financial contribution to 'truth-telling' projects is voluntary, not encouraged in the scriptures, and not rewarded

with a special religious status or position. FLG followers who are well-off or more capable of fund-raising from non-FLG followers may contribute to the expenses of organising events or of running the New Tang Dynasty Television network in Taiwan, but they are not praised for so doing.

Master Li further avoids precepts or any coercive means of directing cultivators' behaviour:

Laws, decrees, and regulations can only fix what's on the surface, not what's at the core. [...] So what's most crucial is the change of a person's heart and the elevation of a person's morality. That is the only way to fundamentally change people, to have humankind become good again, and have cultivators reach Consummation. There's no other way (Li, 1998b).

External regulations do not alter one's heart and morality, for, one only 'obeys in order to be obedient' (Foucault, 2007: 177). Instead, cultivation and the elevation of morality should be achieved by one's personal will and effort. Given Master Li's rejection of the institutional and material forms of religion, daily life then becomes the space for FLG followers to cultivate virtue and eliminate their human attachments. Master Li distinguishes between cultivation in daily life and cultivation in temples or in mountain retreats, the latter of which use space to isolate cultivators from human attachments. In contrast, FLG situates cultivators in environments that include different kinds of attractions, gains and losses, competitions and conflicts. FLG followers need to use their own strengths to cultivate virtue and resist the influences of everyday society:

Amidst the complex environment of everyday people and its interpersonal xinxing frictions, you are able to rise above and beyond—this is the most difficult thing. It is hard in that you knowingly lose your vested interests among everyday people. Amidst your critical self-interests, are you moved? Amidst interpersonal mindgames, are you moved? When your friends or family suffer, are you moved? [...] It is convenient because of this. Our school of practice is the most convenient, as one can practice it among everyday people instead of becoming a monk or nun. It is also most difficult because of this, as one will practice cultivation in this most complex environment of everyday people (Li, 1996e: 276f., 2000d: 159f.).

In FLG, daily life is a test. This echoes Foucault's discussion of Seneca regarding festival-going. A detached mind and indifferent attitude requires stronger self-control

than merely to avoid the festival. Therefore, cultivation can be practiced anytime, and the tests of daily life can be numerous, multi-faceted and complex depending on an individual's cultivation levels and understandings of *fa*. FLG cultivation in daily life should conform to the structure of the surrounding society as much as possible. Therefore, FLG followers need not give up their jobs or their material possessions. It is not the external formality that is important, but the heart and virtue that need to be cultivated to reduce attachments to fame and material wellbeing:

If you don't have the attachment, but people treat you well and insist on offering you an executive position, then take it. It doesn't matter. If your business expands and grows large and you make a lot of money, let it be. It doesn't matter. You can cultivate no matter what social class you are in (Li, 1999a).

If they want to, people from any social class can cultivate themselves.

Secondly, in addition to being critical of institutions, Master Li also highlights the individualist logic of FLG cultivation. One should not take other cultivators as models, as each one's spiritual characteristics, desires and attachments are unique and different from others.

A cultivator has no role models. The path each person is to take is different, because each person's foundation is different, the sizes of their various attachments are different, the characteristics of their beings are different, their jobs among everyday people are different, their family environments are different, and so on. [...] If there really were pre-made paths and effortless rides, that definitely would not be cultivation (Li, 2001d).

Each cultivator has his or her own unique path of cultivation and faces different difficulties and tests. In relation to Foucault's discussion of counter-conduct, the FLG community is not about hierarchy or equality but about uniqueness, as there is no role model to follow.

Master Li, in emphasising the unique quality of each individual, underlines that each cultivator may have different understandings of the 'Buddha *fa*' depending on his/her cultivation level. Indeed, the difference in understanding among individuals at different levels is taken for granted by Master Li.

My writings usually contain many inner meanings at numerous and grand levels, and they have a broad scope. So you couldn't possibly explain them. You can explain what you understand, but others might not agree. They can explain what they've understood at their levels, but you might disagree. Everyone has his own understanding, and understandings differ from person to person due to differences in levels. As long as you keep your mind calm, and read the book and study the Fa without any notions, even if you feel that you don't understand, it's guaranteed your understanding won't be off track (Li, 1998b).

Interpretations of Buddha *fa*, or scriptures, are not rigid, and do not need to be unified. Understandings change as individuals advance in their cultivation levels: 'when you move to a different level or change your vantage point, you will discover that your understanding is not the same as before. That's how you will progressively understand the Fa as you continue to improve and continue to cultivate' (Li, 1999b). Buddha *fa* is not a codified set of rules or spiritual knowledge owned by spiritual experts, but general principles subject to each individual's understanding and interpretation. Similar to Foucault's discussion of the care of the self, individuals are the owners of the knowledge of spiritual teachings and the knowledge of self (Foucault, 1998 [1976]).

Furthermore, Master Li gives his scriptures, especially *Zhuan Falun*, a unique status as a form of direct contact between himself and individual FLG followers. According to Master Li's (1996e: 225, 2000d: 130) promise, '[e]very word in my book bears my image and Falun, and every sentence was spoken by me'. By reading the ZFL, the body of the reader is believed to be transformed by Master Li and prepared for cultivation. The central role of the ZFL echoes Foucault's discussion on reading scriptures directly as a form counter-conduct to pastoral care, in which a pastor or spiritual expert provides the flock with the interpretation of the 'truth'. In contrast, reading the scriptures by the self, 'even when confused, is nothing other than what God wanted to reveal of Himself to man' (Foucault, 2007: 213).

Regarding the above concerns, FLG cultivation in Master Li's scriptures is intended to be practiced by individuals as the 'Great Way without form' (Li, 1999d). So,

FLG followers should cultivate amidst ‘ordinary’ society, a word used in FLG scriptures and by many interviewees to describe non-cultivating human beings or societies. Cultivation, therefore, depends solely upon cultivators themselves, and not upon external religious institutions or any formalities imposed upon them (ibid).

Based upon the first two principles of non-institutionalism and individualism, Master Li repeatedly states that FLG cultivation is not a religion. Religion in Master Li’s understanding should have institutional forms, regulations and wealth management, which all belong to ordinary human society and do not help FLG followers’ cultivation. According to the same logic, FLG cultivation should not involve engagement with politics, which is thought to concern attachments to profit, power, competition and war. In 1996, before the ban, Master Li highlighted that one should ‘(n)ever get involved in politics, nor interfere with state affairs. Truly cultivate and become benevolent. Keep Dafa pure, unchanged, and indestructible like diamond, and it will thereby exist forever’ (Li, 1996b).

Thirdly, although FLG cultivation is open to anyone, being an FLG cultivator does not guarantee Buddha status if one fails to cultivate and transform themselves into divine and enlightened beings.

The most we can say is that you’ve converted to a religion or that you’ve become a monk or nun, but it doesn’t mean you are Buddha’s disciple. Buddha only looks at one’s heart. Becoming a monk or a nun is only a form through which you express your reverence towards Buddha. Only by fundamentally transforming yourself can you become a true follower of Buddha (Li, 1998b).

Converting to a religion and becoming a spiritual professional does not lead individuals to spiritual salvation; one needs cultivation and self-transformation. However, ‘[e]ven for those who can continue their cultivation practice, it remains to be seen whether you can succeed and if you are determined to practice cultivation. It is impossible for everyone to become a Buddha’ (Li, 1996e: 80, 2000d: 45). In other words, effortless cultivation are not sufficient for spiritual perfection. What matters is the *diligent*

cultivation and *transformation of the self*, or, an attitude of self-mastery in Foucault's words, for FLG cultivation.

As already mentioned, besides enduring physical suffering to eliminate *karma*, the key FLG practice is to cultivate one's mind, such as keeping the mind calm and kind and eliminating all kinds of human desires and attachments. To cultivate one's mind, a cultivator should take a combative attitude toward the demonic nature of the self, such as violent tendencies, selfishness, anger or laziness, and eliminate it. In this way, one expands the divine and Buddha nature of the self, such as 'compassion, thinking of others before acting, and the ability to endure suffering' and, thus increases one's cultivation level (Li, 1996a). A public dialogue between a FLG follower and Master Li illustrates these points:

Question: I am aware of the state of my xinxing, and at the same time, I sense that I have demon nature. How should I eliminate my demon nature?

Teacher: That's actually an excellent state. In other words, you're able to sense the bad side of yourself, so you should repel it, resist it and reject it. You should repel it from your mind, not follow those thoughts, and stop doing those bad things. Then you are cultivating and improving—that's called cultivation (Li, 1999c, italics and bold in original).

Here, Master Li delivers an important message that the recognition of the demonic nature in the self does not result in the denial and denouncement of the self, rather it is a chance for the cultivator to conquer it and advance him- or herself. Master Li didn't investigate, judge or condemn the follower's recognition of his dark side. Instead, he encouraged the cultivator to be diligent and ready to master and reject it, in order to progressively expand the divine part of the self, and thereby transform the self into a divine/enlightened being. The FLG's recognition of the divine in the self shares the same premise with Foucault's discussion on self-care: 'seeing the divine in oneself are, I think, fundamental in the Platonic and Neo-Platonist form of the care of the self' (2005b: 76). This dialogue also shows that Master Li is inclined to talk about general principles, instead of analysing specific issues and the cases of specific individuals. In

other words, his discourse elaborates general principles which can guide an individual's cultivation to pursue their own forms of transformation.

If a FLG cultivator fails to transform the self into a divine being, he/she will not be punished or sent to 'hell'. Instead, a person carries the cultivated *de* and *gong* into a subsequent life:

There are some people, though, who truly cannot keep cultivating, in which case it will be arranged for them to receive rewards in their next life; they might become high-ranking officials or make a fortune. Of course, this isn't what we cultivators are after. But that is what happens with those who can't go on cultivating (Li, 1999d).

There is no final trial, no condemnation or hell sentence, and even no earthly punishment if FLG followers fail to cultivate (But for non-cultivators, those who are associated directly or indirectly with the CCP are explicitly threatened with heavenly retribution as discussed in Chapters 3 and 6). Rather, I find this message from Master Li to be encouraging and motivating. Any cultivator who fails to reach enlightened status in this life can still continue to cultivate in another life, although it is considered better to cultivate diligently to gain Buddha status in this life so one does not need to suffer in the next reincarnation. The destiny of the FLG followers are fully under their control and depends on their own efforts of self-mastery and self-transformation.

4.2.4 Horizontal Relationships among FLG Cultivators

As outlined in the previous section, cultivation has no model to follow and everyone is encouraged to concentrate on their own way and their own journey of cultivation. However, Master Li does encourage FLG followers to exchange their cultivation experiences among themselves. Listening to others' cultivation experiences can encourage individual cultivators to reflect upon themselves, and 'make people recognize their own weaknesses and identify their shortcomings; it can move their hearts, refine their conduct, and enable them to make progress more rapidly' (Li, 1997b). Master Li

encourages group study whereby FLG cultivators should study ‘Buddha *fa*’ (the scriptures) together and exchange experiences regularly. Doing so, creates an environment of cultivation and offers a chance for cultivators to retreat from ‘ordinary human society’ and refresh their cultivation modes.

You all have jobs in this ordinary human society, and you have social activities—all of you have contact with everyday people and ordinary human society. Consequently, what you see and hear, whether you intend it or not, all has to do with everyday people’s things, which will interfere with your cultivation. So it’s beneficial for you to often study the Fa together and use this basin of fresh water to cleanse yourselves (Li, 1999c).

As group gatherings became increasingly risky inside China following the repression in 1999, a website, Minghui.org served as the main virtual platform for exchanging cultivation experiences among FLG followers both inside and outside China.

In face-to-face-meetings, individuals might conduct self-examination at FLG meetings. As mentioned previously, a cultivator should seek out the demonic nature of the self, take a combative attitude towards it and eliminate it. According to Master Li, this should not be reduced to self-criticism or the negative labelling of oneself and others. Rather, the most important purpose of the gathering is the advancement of oneself (Li, 1997a). However, an individual’s learning of the ‘Buddha *fa*’ and cultivation is considered more important than group-learning:

Question: Listening to others’ experiences inspires and enlightens me, but I find it not as solid as enlightening to things on my own.

Teacher: That is right. Of course that’s how it is. What you enlighten to yourself, which is mainly through your own cultivation, is the most solid. On the other hand, you can indeed draw lessons from what others say. That can facilitate your progress too, so it is beneficial. Fa conferences won’t be held often. Our conferences do have benefits. But don’t share experiences too often. You should focus your energy on studying the Fa and reading the book (Li, 1998c).

In sum, learning through a horizontal relationship among other cultivators can help FLG cultivators to learn from each other and reflect upon themselves. This form of

gathering is encouraged by Master Li. However, individual cultivation and the learning of *fa* is more important than group study or the sharing of experiences.

4.2.5 'Telling-Truth/Saving-Life' as a Cultivator

Master Li elaborated the 'telling-truth/saving-life' discourse after the repression of 1999, which was discussed in Chapter 3. Accordingly, these 'truth-telling' practices are integral to personal cultivation and imbued with spiritual significance. 'Truth-telling' should not be understood as the exercise of *solidarity*, a concept that is widely deployed in understanding social movements (Tarrow, 1994: 4) and is simply taken for granted regarding FLG followers by Master Li. Instead, he emphasises the cultivation aspect of 'truth-telling', whereby FLG followers should never forget their individual cultivation when they tell the 'truth' to public. The lives saved by a FLG follower can enrich his or her paradise when he or she reaches spiritual fulfilment:

Clarifying the truth isn't a simple matter—it's not only a matter of exposing the evil. When we clarify the truth we are saving sentient beings, and at the same time it involves the matter of your own improvement and your elimination of attachments during your cultivation, and the matter of Dafa disciples being responsible to the Fa in their cultivation, as well as issues like how you fill and enrich that paradise of yours in your final Consummation (Li, 2001f).

Further, Master Li inscribes individual FLG followers' courage of 'truth-telling' with divine meanings:

I'm not Jesus, and I'm not Sakyamuni, but the Fa has created millions and millions of Jesuses and Sakyamunis who have the courage to walk the path of Truth, who have the courage to risk their lives for the sake of the Truth, and who have the courage to devote their lives to saving sentient beings (Li, 2002b).

This passage shows that Master Li's supreme position, as always, is unchallengeable; nevertheless, 'telling-truth' practices discursively elevate FLG followers to a divine level, from that of a mortal human to that of a courageous divine being. This elevation echoes Foucault's (2011: 331) analysis of religious *parrhēsia* '[i]n the midst of

persecutions, the sheep perform the office of shepherds, soldiers perform that of leaders’.

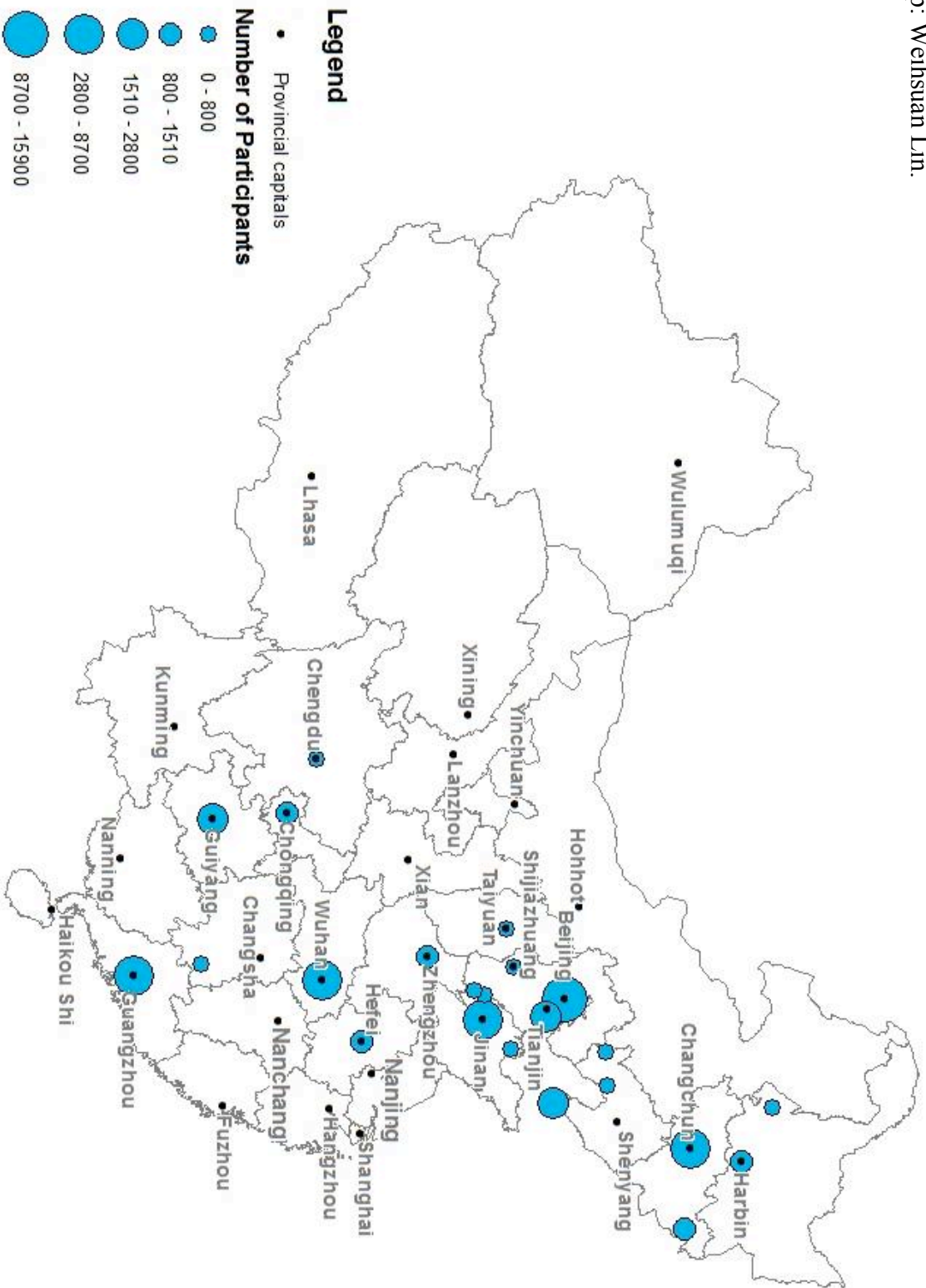
4.3 Spatial Development of the FLG within China between 1992 and 1999

The evolution of the individualistic and non-hierarchical characteristics of the FLG can also be found in the spatial development of the Falun Gong within China between 1992, its inception, and 1999, when the FLG was banned. At the beginning, between 1992 and 1994, Master Li promoted the FLG himself by giving one-week training lectures in public auditoriums in big cities. After 1995, Master Li stopped giving public training lectures and instead the FLG was promoted more efficiently by individual followers on the ground. This spatial development can partially explain how the FLG was able to recruit millions of followers within only eight years in China, which resulted in the CCP’s anxiety towards what appeared to be the uncontrollable spatial diffusion of this movement.

1992-1994

Figure 4.1 shows the location of and numbers of participants in Master Li’s lectures from 1992 to 1994. Master Li gave training lectures mostly in provincial cities; Beijing, Changchun, Jinan, Wuhan and Guangzhou had higher number of participants. During this time, Li’s training lectures were mostly held in auditoriums in big cities. In Beijing, these were held in: the Army's Second Artillery Auditorium, the Auditorium of the Chinese Department of Aerospace's Third Academy, the Nuclear Equipment Factory's Auditorium, the Wukesong Space Division Second Academy Auditorium. In Changchun, these were held in the provincial Party Committee Auditorium, and in Guangzhou in the Auditorium of the Federation of Trade Unions' headquarters (Zhengjian.org, 2012).

Figure 4.1: The Total Number of Participants in Master Li's Lectures from 1992 to 1994.
 Data Source: Zhengjian.org, 2012.
 Map: Weihuan Lin.



The use of official auditoriums indicated that the FLG was positively supported by important CCP officials. Lecturing in big cities also enabled Master Li to gather as large an audience as possible. The total number of participants in training lectures was far less than a million in 1994.

1995-1999

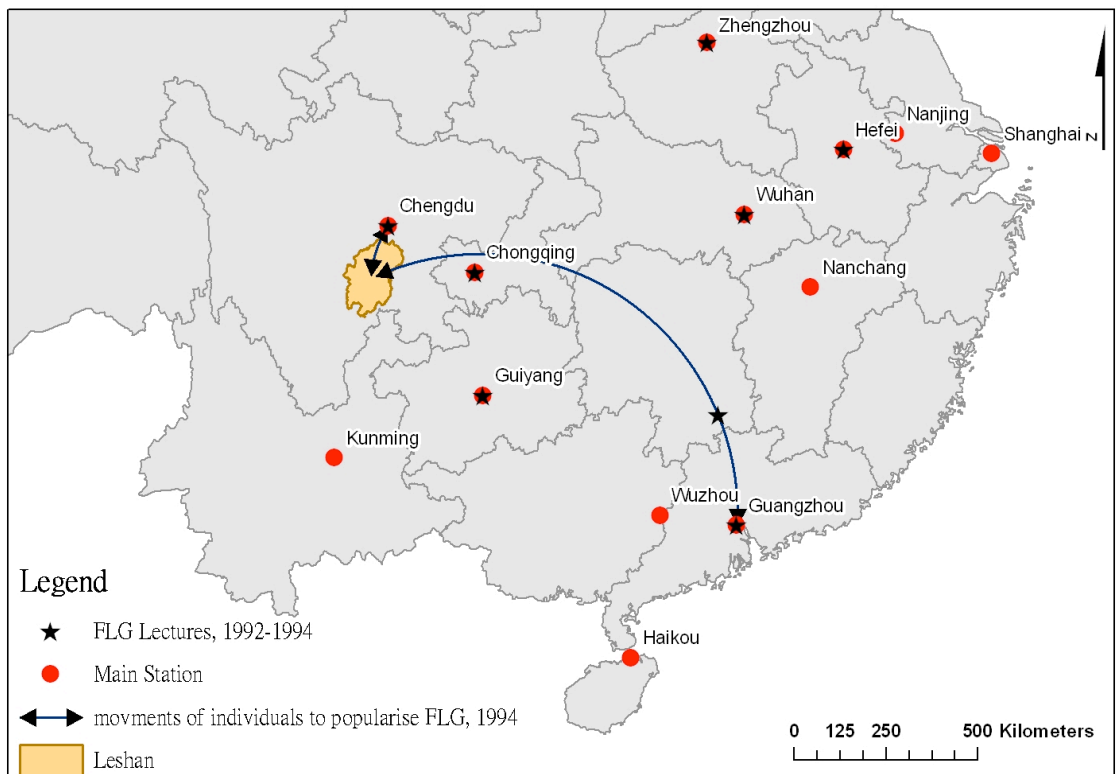
The strategy to expand the FLG changed within 3 years of its establishment. In September 1994, Master Li Hongzhi announced that he would cease the training lectures and dedicate himself to the study of Buddhism. Since 1995, he has given little time to offering *fa* lectures. As previously mentioned, the book, *Zhuan Falun* (ZFL), was first published on 4 January 1995 and originates from Mr. Li's nine lectures in Guangzhou in December 1994; Li asserts that reading this scripture has the same effect as listening to him directly. With the publication of the ZFL, the diffusion of the FLG was no longer dependent on the presence of Master Li and attending his lectures in mass public spaces in big cities, but on the ZFL. In other words, the FLG became popularised by a media that had no time-space constraints, because the book 'embodies' Master Li himself (Penny, 2012: 100). Thus, the cessation of Master Li's training lectures and the launch of the ZFL mark a second phase of the diffusion of the Falun Gong: the popularisation of the FLG through individuals. In 1996 Master Li immigrated to the USA.

Although the practice of cultivation in this second phase is individualistic, the organisational structure of FLG sites is hierarchical. Tong (2002) summarised the FLG organisation as similar to the governmental administration based upon official media reports in 1999. The headquarters, Falun Dafa Research Society, is located in Beijing. Thirty-nine main stations have been established in both the provincial capitals and the largest cities of municipal regions. These stations supervise the 19,000 guidance stations in counties and urban districts. Practice sites in villages, housing blocks and work units

in the cities are overseen by the guidance stations (Tong, 2002: 642). However, the process of its development could also be individually initiated.

The spatial diffusion of the FLG in this period was unpredictable and decentralised, rather than totally hierarchical. For example, Figure 4. 2 illustrates how two individuals from Leshan, a prefecture-level city, spread FLG teachings.

Figure 4.2: Movements of Individuals to Popularise FLG in Lashan (A prefecture-level city), 1994-1995. Data Source: Jia (2009).
Map: Weihsuan Lin.



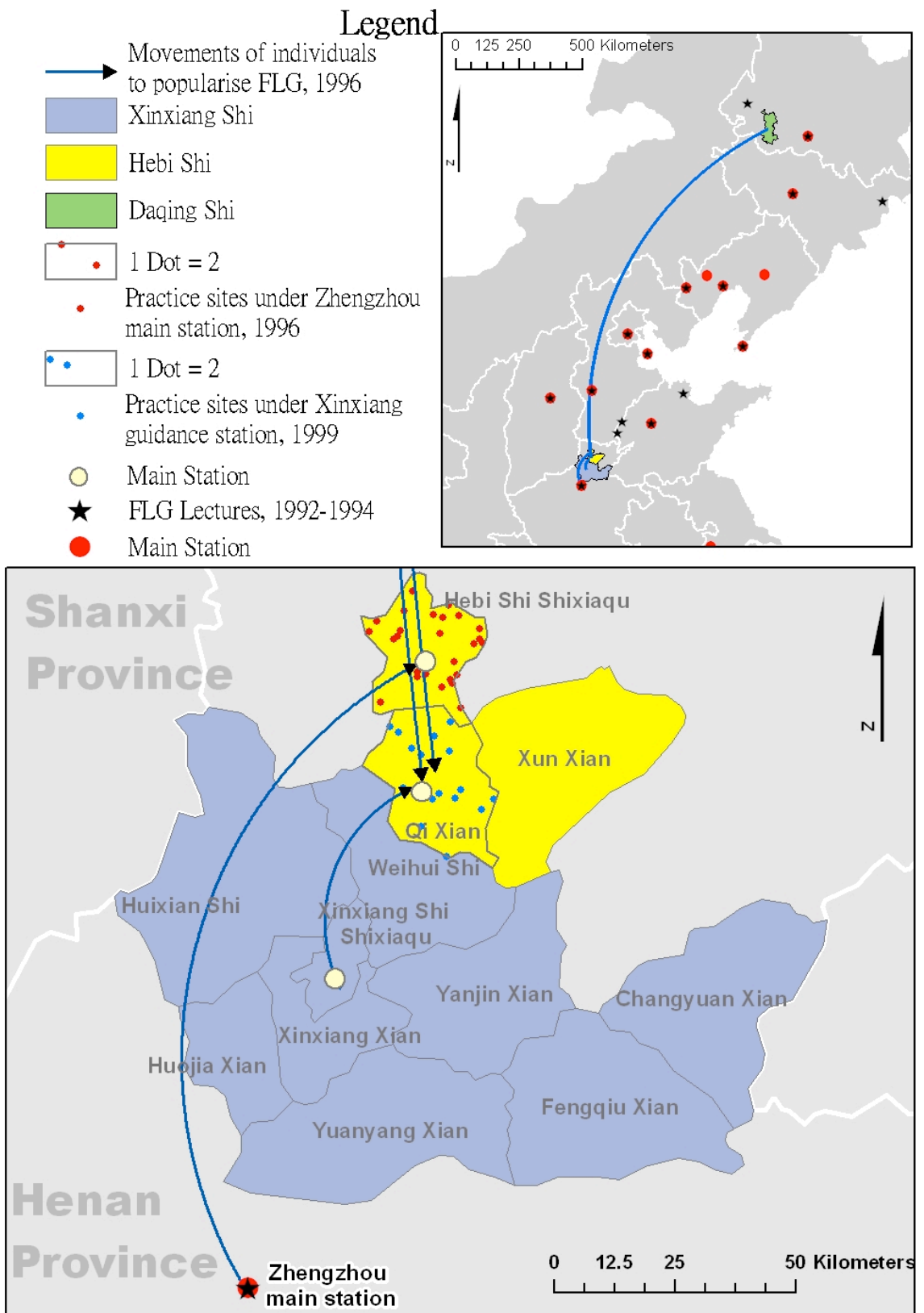
First, they attended Master Li’s lectures in Chengdu and Guangzhou (separately in 1994). In 1995 they established the Leshan guidance station under the supervision of the main station of the Sichuan province (probably Chengdu main station). In other words, the establishment of the Leshan guidance station was done by individuals independently of the main station, who had only attended Li’s public lectures.

Figure 4.3 demonstrates three different forms of diffusion of FLG activities in Hebi (a prefecture-level city) in 1996. The first was hierarchical diffusion whereby the Zhengzhou main station sent people to Hebi Shi Shixiaqu in 1996 and directed the establishment of the guidance station that was subject to the Zhengzhou main station.

The second spatial diffusion was initiated by FLG followers from the guidance station in Xinxiang Shi Shixiaqu; they went to Qi Xian in 1996 and helped to establish a same level guidance station, which later supervised 34 practice sites by 1999. The third mode of the FLG popularisation was also initiated by individuals. Two migrant workers working in Daqing oilfield in North China learned the FLG and brought it back to their home village in Qi Xian in 1996. These examples illustrate how unplanned diffusion initiated by individual FLG followers can be quite efficient and can expand beyond administrative boundaries.

Although there was a case of hierarchical diffusion of FLG popularisation started by the Zhengzhou main station, Figures 4.2 and 4.3 both reveal strong bottom-up and individual initiation modes. This mode of diffusion not only took place between connected areas, for example between Chengdu and Leshan, and between Xinxiang Shi and Qi Xian, it also occurred between places that were up to one thousand kilometres apart. For example, patterns of diffusion followed the movements of migrant workers between Guangzhou and Leshan, and between Daqing Shi and Xi Xian.

Figure 4.3: Movements of Individuals to Popularise FLG in Hebi (a prefecture-level city), 1996. Data Source: Zheng, 2009.
Map: Weihsuan Lin.



4.4 Conclusion

This chapter moves beyond a discourse analysis at a group level (Chapter 3) to describe the self-constitution and self-transformation at the level of the body-self-spirit. This analysis challenges the understanding of a collective group as a homogeneous subject; instead, it presents diverse practices of self-care and dynamic relationships between an individual, as an active subject, and the truth of spiritual teachings. Foucault's later writings focused on the relationship between the self and self in Antiquity, including how a person internalises and assimilates the knowledge that leads to this-worldly (philosophical) or other-worldly (religious) salvation. In addition, he described how an individual becomes the master of the self. In this process, the self becomes the object of self-examination, but individuals might develop a resistant attitude to combat desire and pleasure. In a religious context, this is usually known as asceticism.

In the case of the FLG, Master Li's scriptures illustrated how followers can cultivate and transform themselves into divine beings. FLG cultivators should take a combative attitude toward the demonic nature of the self without submitting themselves to external authority. Self-care has another important political implication. The FLG's individualised cultivation, as centred around the scriptures and Master Li's insistence on non-institutional forms of spiritual practice, influenced the spatial development of the FLG within China between 1992 and 1999, as illustrated in the maps in Section 4.3. This decentralised, unpredictable and ungovernable pattern of spatial diffusion has presented a challenge to the CCP's religious governmentality. Such a pattern may be difficult even for the police form of governmentality that attempts to impose a grid on even the smallest non-official administrative unit, and in China does so to impose a surveilling gaze that is always directed at local religious activities (Chapter 2).

Foucault also discusses the relationship between self and others, or *parrhēsia*. *Parrhēsia* is when one speaks the truth about oneself freely to others, such as to

demonstrate one's courage, or when one admits to wrongs in the determination to improve oneself. The ideal is to conduct oneself following the truth that the person expresses. A person in this way becomes a speaking subject of truth. Martyrdom is regarded by Foucault as a form of *parrhēsia* in a religious context, because it is the bodily enactment of one's own faith and the bodily refusal of dominant social and political pressures. For the FLG, the power of care for the self and *parrhēsia* can be exercised by individuals to become other-worldly divine beings. In doing so, they also challenge this-worldly political space.

I understand FLG cultivators' 'telling-truth/saving-life', as outlined in Chapter 3 and this chapter, as cultivation practices of self-care and *parrhēsia*. After 1999, Master Li encouraged FLG followers not only to care for the self (personal cultivation), but also to care for others; in other words, they should also tell the 'truth' to Chinese citizens in order to save their lives. As 'Fa-Rectification Period Dafa Disciples', Master Li stated that they should not only aim at their own personal salvation, but tell the 'truth' to the public in order to save their lives, and demonstrate their faith in FLG teaching, 'validating the *fa*'. I discuss truth-telling again in Chapter 6.

This chapter was based upon a scriptural analysis to demonstrate the individualised and non-institutional forms of FLG cultivation that aim at empowering individuals. In this chapter, I described how Master Li discussed general principles of Buddha *fa* without going in to the details of daily cultivation. In the next two chapters, I draw upon my ethnographic research about FLG cultivators to illustrate the rich and diverse cultivation possibilities, whereby individual FLG cultivators constantly reflect upon and modify themselves, and seek better ways of cultivating themselves. The energy they exercise upon themselves can be also practices upon the care of others, that is, telling 'truth' to Chinese citizens and the world. In Chapter 6, based upon my fieldwork and other scholars' data, I demonstrate how a de-centralised spiritual group

inside the PRC and in the rest of the world, can challenge and even transform existing worldly geopolitical space(s) through the individualised practices of self-care.

Chapters 5 and 6 will also show how individuals, not only Taiwanese but also some Chinese, exercise their will in choosing their own true teachings to follow, determinedly cultivating themselves in the face of numerous tests from their social environments and paying back their *karma* without intervention of medical expertise. This ungovernability of self-cultivation characteristic of FLG followers demonstrates the incompleteness of the CCP's religious governmentality, which attempts to promote the model of a 'healthy' citizen and to prevent populations from committing non-official or 'evil' religious practices.

Chapter 5: Practices of Individual FLG Followers' Cultivation

Chapter 4 analysed different practices of self-constitution, self-examination and self-mastery in Foucault's analysis of 'care of self'. In the case of the FLG, Master Li offers a system of cultivation, in which earthly beings transform the self into divine beings based upon the model of self-care. Li emphasises individualised cultivation and strongly opposes institutionalised forms of religion, a form of belief closer to Foucault's concept of 'counter-conduct' than to what he called pastoral care. In the scriptures analysed in Chapter 4, Master Li's discussion of cultivation provides general guidelines rather than a list of prohibited activities or codified regulations.

FLG followers' *individual* interpretations of FLG scriptures and daily practices of cultivation remain underexplored. Some scholars have argued that research needs to distinguish between academic and FLG followers' readings of the scriptures (Thornton, 2002), and between Master Li's teachings and how the followers translate these into lived experiences (Burgdoff, 2003). My emphasis on individualised practices differs from sociologist Chris Shun-ching Chan's (2013) research perspective. Chan's fieldwork (2013), which was carried out between 1999 and 2000 in both Hong Kong and Chicago, discusses how FLG followers reproduced ideology through mutual communication immediately following the CCP repression. Ownby (2008) notices the individualistic logic of FLG cultivation; however, his field research focuses more on the general overview of the FLG communities in North America.

This chapter draws upon extended interviews and interactions to describe: why individual FLG followers chose to enter the FLG movement; how they 'resonate' with Master Li's message without instruction or intervention from spiritual experts; and how they cultivate and transform themselves into what they perceive to be better and 'divine' beings. In addition, my use of participant observation investigates the relationships

among FLG followers to explore a spiritual movement that is highly decentralised and individualised. These observations provide a more active and vivid understanding of FLG practices than given by the study of texts and of organisational forms alone. This chapter explores how a non-institutionalised and ungovernable group mobilised themselves in practice and became a strong movement contesting the CCP's governmentality. The will and power of individuals to constitute and cultivate themselves plays a key role in my research, as it is the core impetus for FLG followers' challenge to the CCP. Self-care and caring for others is also essential in understanding the FLG 'telling-truth/saving-life' projects at both an individual and collective level: Why and how have individual FLG followers committed themselves to these diverse geopolitical practices, even when they themselves may not have experienced the CCP repression? I discuss these themes further in Chapter 6.

The individual body as a cultivation space serves as the main scale of analysis for Chapter 5. As an exploratory effort, the writing up of my fieldwork data followed Foucault's concept of the 'care of self'. Here, FLG perspectives, including Master Li's cultivation concepts and FLG followers' own interpretations, reasoning and practices, are presented. I discuss how FLG disciples cultivate themselves.

Below I first discuss my methodology and my fieldwork in Dublin, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. I introduce the range of FLG followers with whom I spoke and studied. Secondly, I introduce the main reasons why FLG cultivators started cultivation, including health concerns, this-worldly well-being, and other-worldly salvation. Thirdly, I examine the importance of studying *fa* for cultivators by focusing on how they apply the FLG principles of truth, compassion and forbearance in their lives, and how they eliminate attachments by taking combative attitudes through cultivation. In the final sections, I address the diversity of cultivation levels and mutual relationships among FLG cultivators.

5.1 Methodology and Fieldwork Context

To understand the perspectives of FLG followers and how they exercise cultivation and geopolitical practices individually, the data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 was collected using participant observation and interviews during the course of my fieldwork. This fieldwork was carried out between August 2012 and January 2014 in Dublin, Hong Kong, Taipei and other cities in Taiwan, with Taiwan serving as the main fieldwork site. The research process during my fieldwork was open-ended and ever-evolving (Herbert, 2010) as I focused on the subjects' 'doing' (Watson and Till, 2010: 129) and 'reasoning'. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the choice to make Taipei the main research site was made during the preliminary research in Dublin, 2012.

My research was divided into three main periods: 1) Dublin (August 2012 – July 2013), 2) Taiwan and Hong Kong (July 2013 – September 2013), 3) Taiwan and Hong Kong (December 2013 – January 2014). At the beginning, I conducted my fieldwork by observing and participating in FLG public activities which took place primarily in Dublin (August 2012 to July 2013). I helped to deliver flyers at public events, and observed cultivators and their interactions with the public. I also took photographs of large events; for smaller events, I drew sketch maps to illustrate their spatial organisation. However, Dublin only has one weekly *fa*-study group. I did not visit this *fa*-study site as it was off limits to non-FLG followers. The group is restricted to followers who commit themselves to cultivation and believe in the FLG teachings. I did not want to become a FLG follower for the purpose of this research. In addition, this group, which consists mainly of Chinese migrants, is very small and easy to identify. Most FLG followers abroad are relatively small in number as most of them are Chinese migrants (see also Ownby, 2008). Seeking to ensure anonymity and confidentiality for my informants, Taiwan proved a better location. At least 900 FLG practice sites, including daily exercise or weekly *fa*-study groups, exist in Taiwan. Figure 5.1 shows

the location of FLG sites (either bodily exercise or *fa*-study sites), which are widespread in both urban and rural areas as opposed to being concentrated in specific areas or being community-based. There are a wide range of FLG followers (according to age, education, gender and class background) and a diversity of individual and collective practices.

When visiting public spaces in Taipei city and Changhwa County, I observed a range of physical exercise sites, such as Daan Forest Park, Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall and Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall. Here, exercises started every day for two hours at around 6am and again later at 6pm. Other sites included public spaces where FLG followers practice ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ to tourists from the PRC, such as those in Taipei 101 Financial Center, Shilin Official Residence of Chiang Kai-shek and National Palast Museum. This starts daily from 9am to 5pm or even as late as 9pm. I also visited six weekly *fa*-study groups, a regional North-Taiwan *fa*-conference, the July 20th (720) parade in Taipei City, the September 1st parade in Hong Kong, and the Art Exhibition of Truth Compassion and Forbearance in Changhwa County. I also visited NTD TV premises. Figures 5.2 to 5.9 show the images of some of the sites.

Figure 5.1: FLG Sites in Taiwan, Excluding Island Areas (2013).
Source: Falun Dafa in Taiwan (retrieved on 19 November 2013).
Map Author: Weihsuan Lin, 2013.

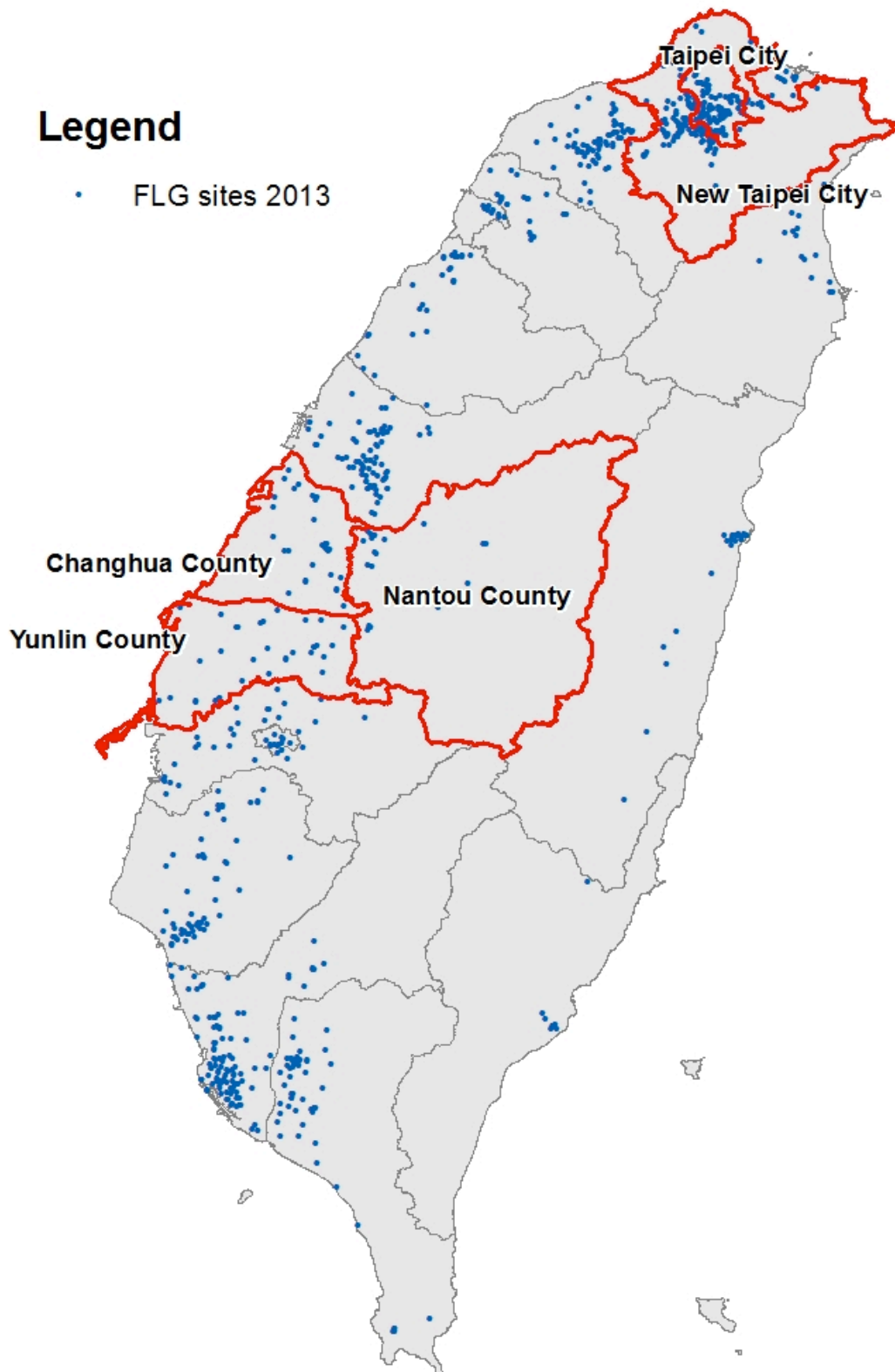


Figure 5.2: A FLG Physical Exercise Site, Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, Taipei City.
Source: Weihsuan Lin, 14 July 2013.



Figure 5.3: The FLG 'Telling-Truth' Site, Taipei 101 Financial Center, Taipei City.
Source: Weihsuan Lin, 17 July 2013.



Figure 5.4: FLG Placard, Yunlin County.
Source: Weihsuan Lin, 07 January 2014.



Figure 5.5: A FLG Physical Exercise Site, Changhwa County.
Source: Weihsuan Lin, 07 September 2013.



Figure 5.6: A FLG ‘Telling-Truth’ Site, National Palast Museum, Taipei City.
Source: Weihsuan Lin, 12 September 2013.



Figure 5.7: A FLG ‘Telling-Truth’ Site, Taipei 101 Financial Center, Taipei City.
Source: Weihsuan Lin, 29 August 2013.



Figure 5.8: A FLG ‘Telling-Truth’ Site, Sun Moon Lake, Nantou County.
Source: Weihsuan Lin, 10 January 2014.



Figure 5.9: A FLG ‘Telling-Truth’ Site, Hung Hom, Hong Kong.
Source: Weihsuan Lin, 31 August 2013.



At the beginning of my fieldresearch in Taiwan, I interviewed a number of FLG followers in these public spaces who were willing to share their time and experiences with me. During the first month, I was asked several times whether I had attended the 9-day-class, which is organised monthly at some sites for people who are interested in commencing FLG practices. Consequently, I went to a 9-day-class in July 2013. The class of six attendees was led by two FLG followers. We watched Master Li’s video lectures each day. These lectures were recorded in Guangzhou city in China prior to

1999. After watching the video, the two FLG instructors taught us how to do the five set exercises correctly. The first exercise, 'Buddha Stretching a Thousand Arms', unblocks the congested energy in the body and raises the followers' awareness of the surrounding energy-field (Penny, 2012: 203). The second exercise, 'Falun Standing Stance', 'opens' the entire body; in my understanding, this exercise channels *qi*, thereby improving the wisdom, strength and the divine powers of a person (ibid: 166). The third exercise, 'Coursing Between the Two Poles', activates the exchange of bad energy from the body to cosmic energy in order to purify the self. In this exercise, followers should move the hands from the head to the feet and thus create a space for the flow of energy. 'The hands should glide slowly along with the energy mechanisms outside the body. The energy inside the body moves up and down simultaneously with the hand movements.' (ibid: 192). Later, they put their hands in front of the abdomen, which means turning the falun [the wheel of *fa*] in other dimensions (ibid: 167). The fourth exercise, 'Falun Cosmic Orbit', activates the energetic circulation throughout the body (ibid: 166). The final exercise, 'Reinforcing Supernatural Powers', refers to a meditative status similar to the Buddhist gesture of meditation.

After this 9-day-class, my FLG activities intensified. I visited different weekly *fa*-study sites. At the end of the *fa*-study, I told the group discussion co-ordinators that I was a PhD student who was conducting research on FLG and that I had finished the 9-day-class. None of these co-ordinators had difficulty with my presence. If I wanted to write about someone's opinion, I asked for his/her permission or directly discussed it with that person as a researcher after the *fa*-study. In doing so, I was able to avoid disturbing or interrupting their *fa*-study and could still get their consent to write about it. Later, my mind started to work according to the newly-acquired logic of these Taiwanese FLG followers. After hearing someone's reflections on his/her own cultivation in one *fa*-study session, I also started to reflect on my own behaviour. I

started to learn from the *fa*-study group. In addition, I was invited by one FLG follower to fly with her to Hong Kong to join a FLG street demonstration. I also visited one ‘truth-telling’ site in Hong Hum. This visit triggered my third research journey to Hong Kong and back to Taipei again.

On my third research journey, I visited Taiwan and Hong Kong again in December 2013 and January 2014. During this trip, I visited five ‘truth-telling’ sites in Hong Kong, including Causeway Bay, Tsim Sha Tsui Ferry Pier, Mong Kok, Golden Bauhinia Square, and Wong Tai Sin Temple, where four of my interviewees were from the PRC. They had practiced FLG before and after the CCP repression in China, then migrated to Hong Kong for different reasons. They have since committed themselves to the practices of ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ in public spaces in Hong Kong. During this trip, I also visited: another regional Midwest-Taiwan *fa*-conference (January 2014) in Changhwa County; two additional weekly *fa*-study groups (one in Taipei city and one in Chuanghwa county); one ‘truth-telling’ site in Nantou county; the Niao Song Junior High School of Arts (organised by teachers who are also FLG followers in Yunlin County), and the Timeless Interactive Art Exhibition organised by the New Tang Dynasty Television. My understanding of FLG practices continued to develop throughout these three research journeys.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted 62 semi-structured and topic-focused interviews, 58 of which were recorded. The interviewees were from diverse social backgrounds: from those who were illiterate, to university professors, teachers, government officials, white and blue collar workers, a farmer, a nun, small and medium sized business owners, and housewives. Figure 5.10 provides a profile of the interviewees. The ages of participants ranged from 25 to 88 years (8 people aged between 20 and 40, 36 people aged between 40 and 60, 18 aged more than 60). 41 participants were female and 21 were male. In terms of nationality, 57 were Taiwanese,

1 person was born in Hong Kong, 1 person migrated from China to Hong Kong before the repression, and 3 people had migrated from China to Hong Kong after the repression (see Figure 5.10). 49 interviews were conducted in Taiwan and 13 in Hong Kong. I also encountered around five less dedicated FLG cultivators/practitioners during my field observations, which, while not the focus of my research, are also referred to later in my discussion.

Figure 5.10: Profile of Interviewees.

No	Nationality	Interview Location	Female/ Male	Age
1	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
2	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	40-60
3	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	60+
4	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
5	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	60+
6	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	60+
7	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	60+
8	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
9	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	20-40
10	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	20-40
11	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	40-60
12	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
13	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	60+
14	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	60+
15	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	60+
16	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	20-40
17	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	60+
18	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	60+
19	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
20	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	40-60
21	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
22	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
23	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	40-60
24	Taiwan	Changhwa County	F	40-60
25	Taiwan	Changhwa County	F	40-60
26	Taiwan	Changhwa County	M	40-60
27	Taiwan	Changhwa County	F	40-60
28	Taiwan	Changhwa County	M	60+
29	Taiwan	Changhwa County	F	20-40
30	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	40-60
31	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
32	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
33	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
34	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	20-40

35	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
36	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	20-40
37	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
38	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	60+
39	Taiwan	Hong Kong	F	60+
40	Taiwan	Hong Kong	F	40-60
41	Taiwan	Hong Kong	F	40-60
42	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
43	Taiwan	Changhwa County	M	20-40
44	Taiwan	Changhwa County	M	40-60
45	China/Hong Kong	Hong Kong	F	60+
46	Taiwan	Hong Kong	F	40-60
47	China/Hong Kong	Hong Kong	F	40-60
48	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	M	40-60
49	Taiwan	Hong Kong	F	60+
50	Taiwan	Hong Kong	M	60+
51	Taiwan	Hong Kong	F	20-40
52	China/Hong Kong	Hong Kong	F	40-60
53	China/Hong Kong	Hong Kong	F	40-60
54	Taiwan	Hong Kong	M	60+
55	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	60+
56	Taiwan	Nantou County	M	40-60
57	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	40-60
58	Taiwan	Taipei City	F	40-60
59	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	40-60
60	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	40-60
61	Taiwan	Taipei City	M	60+
62	Taiwan	Yunlin County	M	40-60

In terms of the way that I conducted these interviews, I always started with an ‘informal conversation’ and did not take any notes; I always made sure that the situation and context was informal, non-threatening and safe. I introduced myself and my research, and offered the possibility of a formal interview if the individual was willing to become a research participant. The interview questions were open-ended. Nonetheless, I always began with the same general questions: 1) Why and how did they practise Falun Gong? 2) Could they describe their cultivation experiences, including important or mysterious moments when practising the FLG? 3) Why did they become involved in public activities or ‘truth telling’ projects, such as demonstrations or promoting Shengyun Performance? To those FLG followers who co-ordinated projects, I asked two further research questions: 4) How did they organise public activities? 5) Were

there any problems when organising such events? In most cases, these general questions served as an initiative for further conversation. They also allowed me to get to know the particularities of different cultivation practices. I also posed new questions which arose spontaneously from the interviewees' responses and developed new insights from new and unplanned questions.

In terms of anonymity, all respondents' names have been changed. Any personally identifiable information, including photographs, gathered during the research process have been assigned codes or processed in such a way as to protect the identity of individuals. In this and the next chapters, notes supplied by me in direct quotes are identified by square brackets [].

5.2 Becoming Involved in FLG Cultivation

In this section, I discuss why individuals become involved in FLG cultivation. First, I provide a general context to situate cultivators' responses. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the emergence of the FLG in 1992 and its rapid popularisation in China took place during the *qigong* fever of the 1980s (see Chen, 2003; Palmer, 2007). Chan (2004) explained the rise and popularity of the religious and quasi-religious *qigong* movements in China during a phase of economic modernisation, when China opened up towards capitalism. Chan emphasised three underlying sociological perspectives to explain why these movements were so popular: 1) unresolved secular problems; 2) the breakdown of societal norms; and 3) the filling of an ideological vacuum. With the commercialisation of medical care in China, *qigong* exercises also offered an alternative way to improve health. At a time when there was a perceived lack of morality in China, the FLG appealed to certain groups of citizens. Furthermore, with rapid and intense capitalisation, the FLG offered an alternative for those seeking spiritual aspirations and ultimate answers to the meaning of existence (Ownby, 2008).

In Taiwan, however, the lack of morality and religiosity or an ideological vacuum cannot fully account for the social acceptance of the FLG or the increasing number of FLG practice sites, following the FLG's introduction to Taiwan in 1994. In 2001, there were 534 FLG sites; by 2013, there were 863 (Q. Li, 2001; Falun Dafa in Taiwan, 2013). Taiwan is considered more religious than China. According to a worldwide survey of religiosity in China and Taiwan, both of which are of the same ethnicity and language, the Chinese in the People's Republic of China were significantly less religious than the average for the 67 countries, whereas the Chinese in Taiwan were slightly more religious in terms of the belief in the existence of gods/God (Figure 5.11).

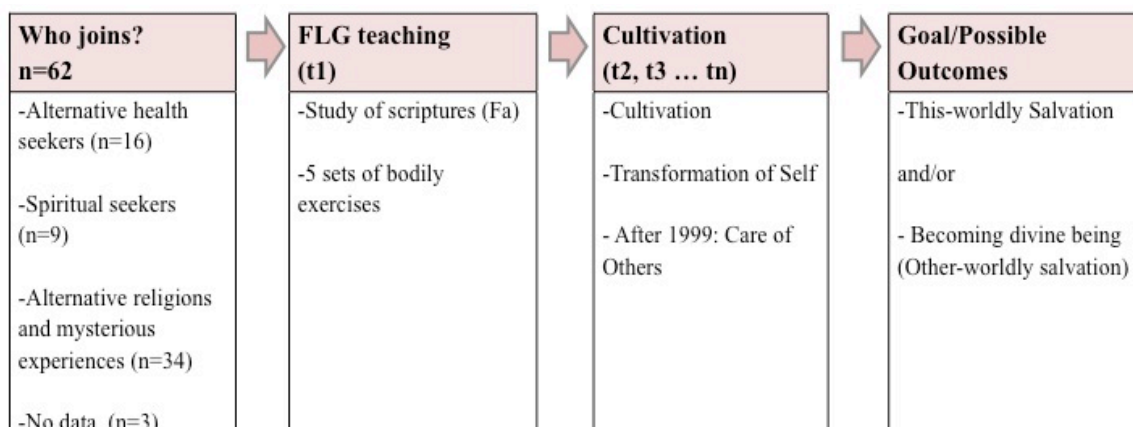
Figure 5.11: Religiousness in the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and Other Countries (2010-2014).

Source: World Value Survey wave 6 (2010-2014), Fourth release, Institute for Comparative Survey Research, 2015 (retrieved on 06 Feb. 2016).

Do you believe in God?			
	P.R. China (N=2,300) %	Average of All 53 Countries (N=77,983), %	Taiwan (N=1,238), %
Yes	16.8	82.2	89.3
No	71.7	14.5	9.4
No answer	2.5	0.6	0.5
Don't know	8.9	2.7	0.8
Independent of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are:			
	P.R. China (N=2,300) %	Average of All 59 Countries (N=84,751), %	Taiwan (N=1,238), %
A religious person	12.5	64.8	43.6
Not a religious person	57.0	26.2	35.8
An atheist	27.0	5.4	17.2
No answer	3.1	1.3	0.3
Don't know	0.4	2.2	3.1

My fieldwork in Taiwan revealed that FLG cultivators are active subjects who continually seek for this-worldly salvation, such as a healthy body or a peaceful mind, as well as other-worldly-salvation, including to obtain spiritual perfection. The three main stated reasons why my interviewees started FLG cultivation are: 1) seeking improvements in health (16 respondees), 2) seeking spiritual well-being (9 respondees) and 3) seeking an alternative to their previous religious activities to realise other-worldly salvation (34 respondees). In Figure 5.12, I describe the general trajectory of cultivation as a continual process as described by my interviewees.

Figure 5.12: The FLG Cultivation Process (I)



One reason given was *seeking improvement in health*, a response that is supported by other scholars (Lowe, 2003; Palmer, 2007; Ownby, 2008). In my own research, sixteen FLG followers out of 62 mentioned that they started to practice FLG as an art of *qigong* or as an alternative healing method; some sought to cure Neoplasm (Interview_130712_003), long-lasting flu (Fieldnotes_130812), cirrhosis (Interview_130720_004), being too thin and weak (Interview_130816_001), pain (Interview_130907_003), or stomach troubles (Interview_131230_002). They were amazed by the healing effects of FLG, and later committed themselves to becoming FLG cultivators. For example, I interviewed a man in his 40's, MZ, who worked part-

time in a bank, in front of the Taipei City 101 building to tell the ‘truth’ to Chinese tourists in the afternoon. He described his initial FLG practice:

MZ: One of my health indicators is high blood pressure, because I was impetuous, impatient and got nervous very easily. I went to western medicine and he [the doctor] first gave me medication without telling me more. Once you begin to take medication, it [taking medicine] continues for your whole life. Western medicine uses some [...] chemical methods to decrease your blood pressure by compulsion, but it doesn’t really understand the underlying reasons for having high blood pressure. After taking the medication for a while, I found out the side effects were immense. I felt cold easily because my heart-beat was lower. I thought I could not continue further taking medicine. Then, after learning this [FLG], I found out all my personality changed, that is, I am no longer nervous and don’t get angry easily anymore (Interview_130716_004).

MZ initially considered the FLG as an alternative to Western medicine. He felt that drugs dealt with his symptoms, but had harmful side effects and didn’t cure his health problems. Another female cultivator, CB, in her 60s-70s whom I interviewed at a ‘telling-truth’ site on one extremely hot July afternoon, told me that she had tried many different kinds of sports and medicine to cure her bodily problems, which included allergies, haemorrhoids and sleepless-ness after menopause.

CB: I tried all kinds of sports including swimming, walking, finger-pressing massage, sleeping pills, which I took more and more of and yet they still didn’t help. I still felt very tired. Then I came to FLG practice. It was really magical. Everything was OK again after practicing it within just half a year. You see, now I am fine. Otherwise how could I stand here? It would be impossible otherwise (Interview_130731_003).

CB used the word ‘magical’ to describe the health effects of the FLG. Her response was similar to other individuals with whom I spoke. Feeling better resulted in her strong commitment to continuing FLG practices.

In addition to perceived healing effects, a second reason given by FLG followers was that they cultivated for salvation in this life. This includes both mental and spiritual well-being, such as lifting the weight of their emotional burdens. Some of these spiritual seekers with whom I spoke did not have explicitly aim at improving their physical health when first they began. One female interviewee with two children, JY, stated that

she was surprised by her brother-in-law's improved moral behaviour and character after he began FLG cultivation. She then decided to read *Zhuan Falun* and found that she could immediately deal better with emotional problems in her marriage. As she states:

JY: Once I finished reading *Zhuan Falun*, I realised what Master [Li] was telling me and my heart lightened. My hatred for him, my husband, disappeared naturally [...]. He liked a woman in his company and wanted to divorce me. But from Master Li's teaching I understood that I should treat him nicely, treat him from the heart [...]. *Fa* told me this was because of *karma* [...]. *Fa* from the Master told me to be compassionate with others. One should treat others nicely. Yes, so I could be nice to him, naturally. After a couple of months, he never mentioned the two words [*lihun*, divorce] again (Interview_130818_001).

After this personal crisis, she cultivated for a further two years without fully believing in the possibility of transforming herself into a divine being:

JY: The first year, I cultivated because my body and mind benefited [...]. It wasn't until the third year that I started to believe that I could elevate upwards [...]. I didn't believe that I was able to cultivate and transform myself into a Buddha, Taoist or divine being. I didn't believe in myself. In the third year, I thought that every word from the Master was true, so I freed my mind of disbelief and committed seriously to cultivation (Interview_130818_001).

In the first two years, JY only cultivated for this-worldly salvation, such as being free from emotional turmoil; after committing herself to cultivation, she started to accept the possibility of transforming the self into a divine being.

I interviewed another woman, KJ, aged in her 40's-50's at the New Tang Television station, who expressed great appreciation for FLG cultivation without being interested in other-worldly salvation. When I asked her whether she had tried other *qigongs* practices before the FLG, she replied that she studied Mathematics and did not believe in gods or religion. She then stated that FLG cultivation has improved her body, temper and marriage. When I asked her whether working in the television station was linked to her wish for spiritual fulfilment, she replied that she didn't think about the latter:

KJ: Even if Master [Li] lied to me, I still feel very satisfied. Why? Because I never felt great before. I can only say, all my life, before I obtained the *fa* at

age 40, I felt I lived in vain, because life was bitter, my physical condition was bad, my mood was never good. I felt that everyone treated me badly and my social environment was very negative. Nothing was good, everything was bad. But after I started cultivation, I felt everything became better. I felt good even when everything around me turned sour [...]. I don't even care about achieving spiritual fulfilment or not in the end [...]. I don't even think about it. Because if one only has one life, then this life of mine is worth living. If one doesn't only have this life, I believe my next life/lives will be better. That is it (Interview_130816_004).

As her words indicate, to be saved in another world was not her primary concern; rather, she was more thankful for the perceived benefits that FLG cultivation had brought to her life. She recovered from feeling sick and weak; she now felt calm and was no longer angry with her family. She also stopped feeling suicidal. She could peacefully accept suffering in this life as repaying for her *karma*. Similarly, two Chinese FLG followers in Hong Kong told me that they were first attracted by FLG's moral guidance, that is, truth, compassion and forbearance (Interview_131227_003, Interview_131230_001).

The above four cases demonstrate how cultivation is used for spiritual salvation in this life. Cultivation has this-worldly effects and meanings. Cultivation in this world is seen as valuable, even if the promise of other-worldly salvation is not realised. In this respect, FLG followers' search for an improved life in this world can be likened to those who seek health benefits: FLG followers resonate with the FLG teachings at the bodily and emotional level. At the same time, some FLG followers in Taiwan mentioning having mysterious experiences, such as feeling hot, feeling energy flows, turning *fa-wheel(s)* in their bodies during FLG exercises, or seeing spiritual beings or lights that are invisible to the naked eye. Whereas not all FLG cultivators experience such magical occurrences, others experience a calmer mind. Still others learn to be indifferent to fame, self-interest and sentimentality. As a result of such health, spiritual and mysterious experiences, FLG followers noted their renewed satisfaction with their world and the meaning of this life.

The main and third reason given by some Taiwanese FLG followers and one Chinese FLG follower that I interviewed in Hong Kong was that the practice provided an alternative to their previous religious activities, including Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, Formless Buddhism, Taoism, Yiguandao and popular religions, which they had followed in hope of attaining other-worldly salvation. Based upon my research in Taiwan, the FLG appears to have attracted people who already had religious backgrounds; they gave up their previous religious activities when turning to the FLG.

One example, ZB, an ex-Buddhist nun and former abbot, illustrates how individuals who had practiced religion changed to FLG as an alternative. Even after helping to build three Buddhist temples, ZB continued to struggle in her search for spiritual perfection. Her uncertainty in guiding others during her previous Buddhist life, and her praise for the accessibility of FLG teachings were expressed as followed.

ZB: I became a nun to abstain from everything in this world. Of course I saw the Dharma. Here is a comparison. Cultivation in traditional Buddhist teachings is to follow human beings; my [FLG] cultivation is to follow *fa*. For example, I was an abbot and a responsible person of the temple. To where should I guide so many people with affinity? I was in great fear [...]. Sometimes they came back looking for the abbot, following a human being. It was not like the FLG disciples cultivating following *fa* (Interview_130801_004).

This former nun expressed one of the important criticisms as discussed by Li in Chapter 4: a suspicion of hierarchical power associated with pastoral care. As a former abbot in a traditional Buddhist institution, she doubted her ability to guide others, the sheep, who wanted to follow a shepherd. She does not think an individual should submit to someone in a superior position; instead, one should follow certain teachings. The main reason she left her previous religious practices was because of this opposition to pastoral care, even when she was in a superior position in that institution. One journalist's interview with a former female abbot also elicited a similar response to that recorded in my interview:

The Master [Li] revealed the deepest principles using the simplest and

clearest language in the world. For example, there were ten explanations of Buddha in Buddhist teachings. But our Master said: people who are enlightened due to cultivation are called 'Buddha'. One sentence covers the contents of tens of thousands of scriptures. One more example, what is cultivation? Master said, cultivation is the process of continually eliminating attachments of human beings. These principles, which we have not understood during decades of cultivation, were clarified by the Master's one sentence.

As these examples indicate, the accessibility of FLG teachings is an important characteristic of FLG practice, a point which was also noted by other FLG followers I interviewed. In Foucault's terms of self-care, the accessibility of the scriptures bypasses a system of knowledge and power relationships, thus any individual can start to learn and cultivate without submitting to religious clergy's guidance. Every individual can approach spirituality by him- or herself. ZB, for example, described her shift from her previous Buddhist school to the FLG by using a metaphor of taking a faster train to get to the same destination; she said that she had changed from the Chu-Kuang Express (the second fastest conventional railroad line in Taiwan) to the Tzu-Chiang Express (the fastest conventional railroad line in Taiwan) (Interview_130801_004). In this metaphor, the destination of her previous Buddhist teaching and that of FLG are the same, even if the methods used to reach it differ. Similarly, one ex-Taoist cultivator compared his FLG cultivation to studying for an academic degree; he had already obtained a Bachelors (Taoist practices) and now wanted to get a Ph.D (the FLG). Although he continued to visit his friends and eat in the temple where he used to cultivate, he no longer participated in Taoist activities because:

In my view, this [FLG] is the best ... now I can see that. I've already finished a bachelor's degree, and now I know there is Ph.D., a higher degree. I want to learn further. I also know there are degrees above a Ph.D. degree. That is it, right? It is impossible to go downward, right? Cultivating downward? Human beings cultivate upward. Learning without end (Interview_130727_001).

This passage also shows an independent spiritual seeker, who *voluntarily* searches, chooses and follows certain teachings. Rather than merely 'wander among religion'

(Chen, 2011a), he wanted to ‘cultivate upward’ in order to reach another level of spiritual fulfilment.

Two FLG cultivators (Fieldnotes_130726; Interview_130907) on different occasions described their previous active commitment to popular Taiwanese activities and rituals, to me as ‘taking joss sticks and following others to worship’³⁵, an expression that means that they just did what others told them to do without thinking too much about it. After getting in touch with the FLG, they ‘thought’ about it and decided to cultivate themselves following FLG teachings. One of these two followers described his experiences with different religions, including Daoism, Yiguandao, Vajrayana Buddhism and Zen Buddhism, as follows:

YS: No teaching touched me so deeply, not even any feeling, but the FLG does.

WL: No feeling at all?

YS: No, not even a bit. Most of them [other religions] don’t cultivate. Xiu [the pronunciation of cultivation 修 in Taiwanese] for them is not cultivation, but to receive money [收, the same pronunciation as Xiu in Taiwanese] and put it into your pocket. They do Xiu, but to receive money, not to cultivate the heart.

WL: Are they all the same?

YS: 90% are this way [...]. Or, they might assume the status of a god, want to build a temple for it and thus need donations. I tell you, all are fake (Interview_130907_005).

This respondent identified with FLG’s emphasis on self-cultivation, and also opposed the material possession of religious institutions or temples in Taiwan, something which is also criticised by Master Li. Both YS and the others who were ‘taking joss sticks and following others to worship’ were not satisfied with simply being part of communal conventions or following social rules; they wanted a direct connection with spirituality.

Some research participants explained their previous religious experiences through FLG teachings:

³⁵ 拿香跟拜 in Taiwanese.

LL: As a child, I saw a canopy at a funeral and its rituals. I viewed the canopy carefully. There were many scenes of hell on that canopy. A painted person made a very strong impression on me. There was a painted eye on his head. Very strange, just one eye. But there were many small eyes in this eye. I asked those people but nobody could answer. They said that was how it was painted. However, surprisingly, Master's *Zhuan Falun* explains that this person has cultivated to a very high level so he has this compound eye, a big eye with many small eyes [...]. So well explained! So it [*Zhuan Falun*] is not that simple. Even if it isn't the truth, can it lie to such a degree? Then I got to know there were five sets of exercises. So I started them (Interview_130821_001).

I understand LL's example as an indication that no singular dominant religious authority exists in Taiwan; religious symbols are open to many possible interpretations. FLG teachings offer one system of interpretation regarding religious symbols, one that resonates with followers' previous religious experiences. Whereas some symbols and religious stories may resonate with FLG teachings, others may not. When people do not resonate with FLG teachings, they may leave. People who do not resonate with Master Li, do not commit themselves to cultivation. However, cultivators might also choose to stop their cultivation and resonance with Master Li at any point, and choose to leave the FLG. They may, of course, choose to return to resonate with Master Li at a future point. One experienced FLG cultivator in charge of a 'telling-truth' site and another *fa*-study group told me that only five or six out of forty interested people have stayed and dedicated themselves to FLG activities (Interview_140110_001). Three Taiwanese and one Chinese FLG cultivator I interviewed recommenced their cultivation after leaving FLG for a couple of years.

For example, one FLG follower, YX, started his cultivation as a junior high school student and stopped it in his second year of university. During his day-to-day life as a non-cultivator, he consulted three traditional public religious [non-FLG] specialists thought to have had supernatural abilities to pursue his career goals and solve personal problems. He found these consultations with spiritual specialists to be effective, because they solved his temporary problems. However, he found that they did not help his long-

term cultivation, so that he felt it necessary to return to cultivation to prevent pain and debts appearing in future lives through reincarnation. So he re-joined the FLG's nine-day class, where I met him after the class (Interview_130803_001). The young man's experience demonstrates that his previous religious experiences didn't hinder his ability to practice the FLG, but provided an interpretative frame to recommence FLG teachings.

This phenomenon of active spiritual self-subjection is not unique to Taiwan. One Chinese male FLG follower, TA, residing in Dublin had experienced other religions, but in the end he chose the FLG:

TA: Religion is exclusive, but Truth-Compassion-Forbearance is not [exclusive]. I tried Buddhism, Taoism, and Catholicism. Catholicism regards Buddhism as heterodox. But how can Buddhism be heterodox? Buddhism exists for thousands years! So I didn't get baptised and started to accept the FLG (Fieldnotes_120609).

Another male Chinese FLG follower, who migrated to Hong Kong and worked in *The Epoch Times* newspaper, also explored Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity before FLG. He described his spiritual journey as 'different gods coming in different periods' (Fieldnotes_131231). The 73-year old Chinese FLG follower I interviewed in Hong Kong, discussed at the beginning of Chapter 1, also first started to read other Buddhist scriptures, and then decided to become a FLG cultivator because she had mysterious experiences when reading *Zhuan Falun* (Interview_131225_001).

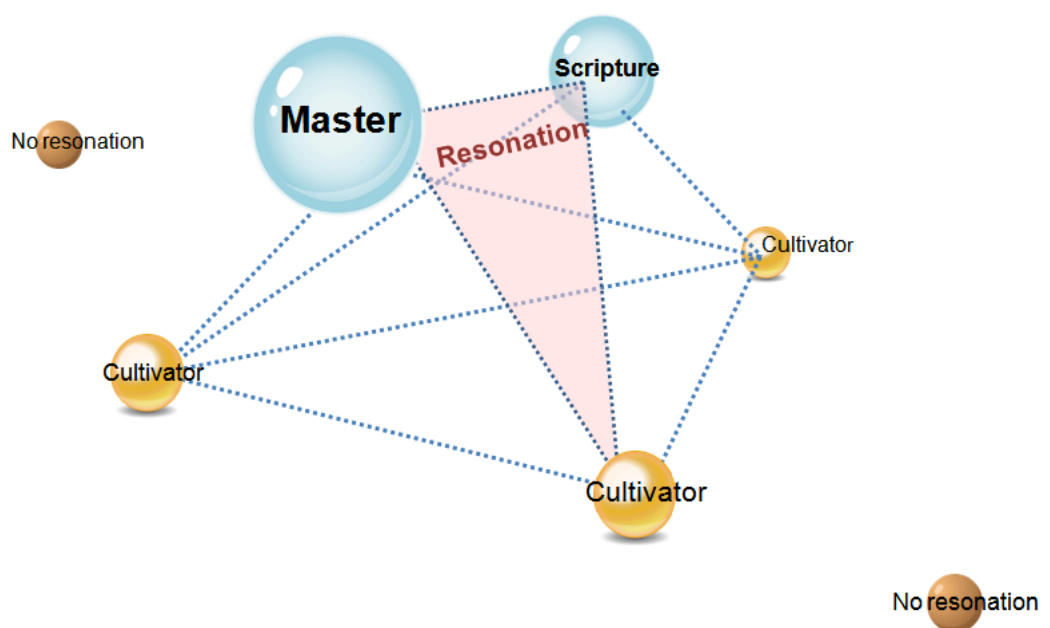
These examples highlight how the Taiwanese FLG followers and some Chinese who I interviewed had diverse motives for pursuing their FLG practices; not all were 'religious' reasons in the Western sense. They were independent and free-spirited or bodily self-carers, who sought this-worldly salvation, including physical and mental well-being, and in some cases, other-worldly salvation. Furthermore, the former abbot's reflection on her previous religious practices highlights the FLG's critique on pastoral care. In her view, the FLG enables each individual to connect with the spiritual

teachings without submitting themselves to other persons within power relationships. All of whom I spoke were willing to dedicate themselves to their spiritual self-subjection, a theme to which I now turn.

5.3 The Importance of Cultivation in the FLG

This section will discuss cultivation in the FLG. The relationships between: Master Li and followers, and the role of scriptures and FLG followers will be discussed first, followed by an analysis of different aspects and processes of FLG cultivation in subsections. Figure 5.13 illustrates in schematic form different spaces of resonance between cultivators, Master Li, the scriptures, and other FLG cultivators. I use the term ‘resonance’ to refer to the way that followers speak of feeling in tune with Master Li’s teachings, experiencing something like a harmonious vibration. This spiritual connection may result in a follower’s strong adherence to the teachings without any external pressure.

Figure 5.13: Resonance with Master Li and *Fa* (scriptures).
Source: Weihsuan Lin.



5.3.1. Resonance between Master Li and FLG Followers

The FLG followers I interviewed started to resonate with Master Li and his teachings at some point in their practice. Master Li's position within the FLG is regarded as unchallengeable. One cultivator regarded Master Li as a 'Messiah' (Interview_140121), whereas her husband, another FLG cultivator, regarded Master Li as an initiator who helped FLG followers become Jesus or Buddha, in other words, a spiritual guide empowering individuals to become divine beings (Interview_140119_001). Alongside the diversity of views they hold of Master Li, his followers came to him in different ways and they experience and understand his presence each in their own fashion.

Firstly, personal relationships with Master Li vary depending on individual cultivation levels. The dreams of an elderly FLG cultivator, GW, reveal two modalities: moving from a dependence on Master Li's help to depending on one's own power and cultivation. As he explained:

GW: I had a dream that I was caught by something. It twirled me, I was scared. I said 'Master!' It let me go. But it came to me again, caught and twirled me. I shouted loudly 'Master Li!' Then I woke up [...]. It let me go [...]. During *fa*-study exchange, I told a *tongxiu* [fellow FLG cultivator] about this dream. The *tongxiu* asked me 'Why did you bother Master with that? Master gave us functions [...]. Why did you ask Master Li for help if you have already got functions from him?' Then, I had a dream again. A dream of a monster, not a human. Its face was shining with green light. It approached me from far away. I knew it was evil and not something good. I said immediately, 'If you come further, I will eliminate you by sending righteous thought'. It kept coming. So I said 'The *fa* rectifies the cosmos; the evil is completely eliminated' [法正乾坤, 邪惡全滅] Then it was gone (Interview_131230_003).

In his first dream, GW used the name of Master Li and this helped scare away the danger. In his second dream, the cultivator stood on his own feet, and without directly calling for Master Li's help, managed to defeat the monster, after getting encouragement from a *tongxiu*, or fellow cultivator. Both of these modalities can be found in the interviews with other cultivators. When encountering emergencies, difficulties, wishes or pain, some cultivators might cite Master Li's name on occasion

and Master Li was believed to help them. However, most cultivators with whom I spoke know that cultivation and elevating their cultivation level is focused primarily upon the self.

Secondly, the desire to meet or see Master Li also varies amongst cultivators. Again, I suspect this difference has to do with the different levels at which individuals cultivate. Some followers were eager to visit Master Li at the annual *fa*-conference in New York. However, one cultivator who attended the annual *fa*-conference in New York quite often regarded her strong desire to see Master Li as an attachment and therefore as a negative quality (Interview_130816_004). Other cultivators did not feel seeing Master Li in person was necessary. In the case of A: ‘Many followers want to see [the] Master. I didn’t know why. I don’t think like that. I feel Master Li is just right beside me.’ In the same conversation with A, another follower B added to A: ‘I haven’t seen Master Li personally, either. It has been 12 years. I haven’t seen him’ (Interview_130824_001).

Thirdly, some cultivators claim to feel the presence of Master Li’s existence in their daily lives. For instance, two FLG followers, who independently described their experiences of successfully persuading PRC citizens to renounce their CCP memberships, stated they were able to do this because of Master Li’s ‘help’ from another space (Interview_130821_001, Interview_131227_003). Or, for example, three cultivators mentioned that when they encountered difficulties, they understood the latter as tests provided by Master Li to improve their cultivation. However, whether they would pass these tests depended upon their own selves, or levels of cultivation (Interview_130816_009, Interview_130821_001, Interview_131226_002).

For FLG followers, practice primarily entailed regularly cultivating the heart and mind, which is more than, if not equally as important as, doing the five sets of physical exercises. In my research this was regularly mentioned. Two elderly Chinese migrant

FLG followers, a man and a woman, illustrated this point well when they both independently pointed to their hearts and told me that ‘the important point of FLG is not the law wheel [Falun] in the body’, but ‘cultivating the heart’ (Fieldnotes_130714). Another FLG follower asserted that ‘cultivation is cultivating your heart. The exercise is only an aid. Cultivation comes first and exercises come later’ (Fieldnotes_130823_004). One FLG follower, who is a lawyer, complained that judges often understand FLG as *qigong* and don’t really know that FLG followers need to read scripture and learn *fa* (Fieldnotes_140119). I also found that followers were used to outsiders not understanding the basics of cultivation. In Dublin, I was asked the same question by two different FLG followers: ‘Have you read the *Zhuan Falun*?’ One of them explained to me that without cultivation, the five sets of movements are merely like doing gymnastics (Fieldnotes_130302).

As these and other followers regularly emphasised, FLG cultivation also means more than memorising Master Li’s scriptures; it means to actively cultivate the self, including the mind and one’s behaviour. In one *fa*-study group in Taipei City, a follower raised a question concerning the FLG’s cosmology and ideas about the universe, which was an unusual topic in *fa*-study groups that I visited but which interested three FLG followers whom I encountered in private. One elderly female FLG follower responded to the query by stating that: ‘the great way is very simple and easy’.³⁶ She felt that debating the meaning about specific words and sentences is too abstract; rather, one should ask oneself whether he/she has behaved according to the simple principles (Fieldnotes_130809). One female FLG follower with a PhD in Literature in the U.S. described the FLG as follows: ‘It [the FLG] is closer to Eastern thinking. It is more open. It is not like Western thinking that [...] offers [an interconnected] system of philosophy and reasoning to you. We [FLG] might not give

³⁶ 大道至簡至易 in Chinese.

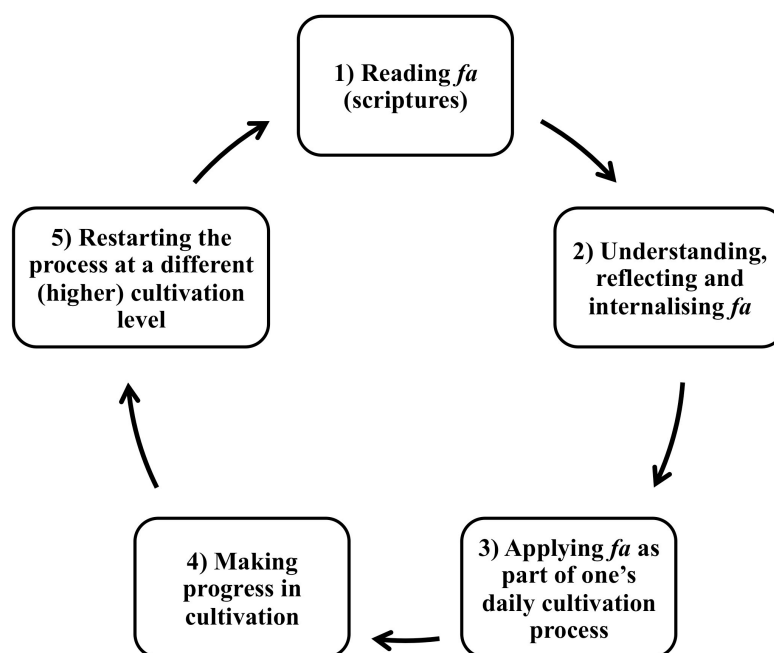
you that kind of philosophy and reasoning, but we continually practice it' (Interview_130829_008). This quotation is suggestive of Ding's (2004: 372) description of the new religious movements in Taiwan as being less systematic in structure and providing less in-depth theologies than is the case for more formal religions. For some followers, having 'mysterious experiences' was cited as evidence that the FLG teachings are true; no theological arguments or historical evidence was needed to prove the existence of God/gods. As the examples from the followers above suggest, one is persuaded of the effectiveness and value of the movement not primarily through philosophical or spiritual reasoning or only through physical exercises, but mainly through the day-to-day practices of cultivating the heart and self.

5.3.1. Studying and Internalising Fa (FLG Scriptures)

On the basis of my observations and interviews, I have classified the FLG cultivation process into five parts as depicted in Figure 5.14: 1) reading *fa* (scriptures); 2) understanding, reflecting and internalising *fa*, or *xuefa ruxing* (studying *fa* with the heart); 3) applying *fa* as part of one's daily cultivation process; 4) making progress in cultivation; and 5) restarting the process at a different (higher) cultivation level. The process continues upwards in a spiral form. Figure 5.14 also elaborates upon Box 3 of Figure 5.12. Below I discuss different aspects of these elements of cultivation.

Figure 5.14: The FLG Cultivation Process (II).

Source: Weihsuan Lin.



Studying *fa* (FLG scriptures) to understand the underlying principles of the universe is an individualistic practice. Studying *fa* is like a personal tool that helps an individual fashion his/her own cultivation practice; so, each cultivator has his/her own connection with *fa*. I only understood this after having a discussion with FLG cultivator YX, who was between the ages of 20 and 30. At the time, I wanted to know how *qigong* was understood and accepted by Taiwanese FLG followers. My impression was that Master Li's discussion of *qigong* took up too great a part of the video lectures, which also discussed the scripture *Zhuan Falun*. My interpretation was based upon the scholarly literature about the *qigong* boom in China in the 80s and 90s. However, YX told me one should not read the scriptures in this way. He first cited a part of *Zhuan Falun* about Master Li's discussion about *qigong* to me:

Master Li: Some people think that I [Master Li] just do not allow them to go to the hospital, so they think: 'If you don't let me go to the hospital, I'll go see a qigong master.' They still consider it an illness and want to see a qigong master. Where can they find a true qigong master? If you find a phony one, you will be ruined at once (Li, 1996e: 212, 2000d: 123).

Then YX explained his understanding of *qigong* masters in the scripture as persons with supernormal abilities whom he visited before in Taiwan. YX associated the illness discussed in the scriptures to his own mental illness, including addictions to fame, self-interest and sentimentality. YX asked different non-FLG religious persons to use their supernormal abilities to solve his this-worldly desires. When reading the above passages of the ZFL, he realised that he should not visit religious persons to solve his personal problems, because all these hardships were there for his own cultivation:

YX: Dividing this into two parts, I cannot use their supernormal ability to solve my hardship. One part is, this hardship is to enhance my mind-quality. The second part is how can I find a true and false one [*qigong* or religious master]? [...] Sometimes, however, you will consider him at a higher level than you because of his supernormal abilities. But it is hard to say and his real spiritual quality is not necessarily higher than yours. So I have used the principles of *fa* to understand it [consulting *qigong* or religious master with supernatural abilities] (Fieldnotes_130803_002).

My response to YX's interpretation was initially one of surprise. I have never associated the scriptures with my own life experiences. Rather, as a scholar trained in a Western university, I had always situated *qigong* as discussed in Master Li's scriptures in historical and geographical contexts. Nevertheless, as YX made clear to me, studying scriptures includes reflecting upon and internalising these principles, which is a dialectical process. Studying *fa*, therefore, does not mean learning it as factual knowledge or examining it as a historical material, an approach I had taken for two years before discussing this concept from the perspective of a cultivator. At the same time, YX's personal connection with the scriptures is *individualised*, and this corresponds to the relationship between true teachings and self-care in Foucault's discussion, whereby individuals assimilate and constantly reflect upon teachings, and adjust their conduct accordingly.

At the group level, studying the *fa* principle of the universe as revealed by Master Li in the scriptures is so important that every *fa*-study and experience-sharing group that I visited started its section with reading Master Li's scriptures. The reading normally

lasted an hour and a half, but can vary from one hour to two hours depending on each group or the length of the section of the scriptures. After the reading, cultivators started to share their experiences with each other. I was also in one group comprised of elderly people, which did not have a group discussion after reading the scriptures (Fieldnotes_140117).

During my field research, one problem was identified by cultivators on different occasions, that is, the difference between reading and knowing on the one hand, and internalising *fa* to begin self-reflection and daily cultivation on the other. When cultivators only commit themselves to reading the *Zhuan Falun*, and do not reflect upon what they read, they do not internalise *fa*, they cannot progress in the upward spiral of self-cultivation. For example, I was in one *fa*-study group which read two chapters of *Zhuan Falun* at a very high speed every day, which was about twice as much as the other groups I attended. During my participation, one woman raised the issue that internalising *fa* (or *xuefa ruxing*, 學法入心) was also important but could not be guaranteed with such high-speed reading. Other participants agreed with her and decided to read one chapter, instead of two, at every meeting. That session started to read only one chapter at a lower speed and they started to express their understandings of the scriptures and their cultivation afterwards.

The difference between reading and internalising *fa* was also discussed in an article written by a Chinese FLG cultivator called: ‘We Should Study the Fa with Our Hearts and It Should Not Become a Formality’ (October 28, 2012). I found this article on the FLG’s website, Minghui.org, where FLG cultivators around the globe submit their experiences of cultivation. The article was highlighted and the editor added his/her comments to highlight the difference between ‘reading words’, which he/she associates with knowledge, and ‘understanding with their heart’, which he/she associates with cultivation:

I have joined other Fa-study groups, shared with them in this regard, and found out that quite a few cultivators had the same problem. They were still confused about the basic Fa principles after many years of reading *Zhuan Falun*. Some young cultivators as well as elderly veteran cultivators still didn't know the two main reasons 'Why Doesn't Your Gong Increase with Your Practice?' (Editor's note: Another situation is that, although cultivators superficially read the words, they fail to understand with their heart. In other words, they have understood the superficial meaning of the words, but have failed to use the Fa principles as the guide to find their attachments and cultivate their hearts. They merely treat the principles as 'knowledge.' But 'knowing' is not the same as 'cultivating'. Many ordinary people have read *dafa* books and some can even repeat a portion of the content of the books, but they use the principles to examine others and not themselves, and that is not cultivation.) (Minghui.org, 2012).

This passage identifies the problem of studying *fa* only. It strongly underlines that a cultivator internalises *fa* to guide a more reflexive cultivation process. This section also confirms that understanding of *fa* works at different cultivation levels and varies among different individuals. Ultimately, FLG cultivators need to go beyond 'knowing' the *fa* and must dedicate themselves to self-cultivation (Stage 3 of Figure 5.14). The idea of internalisation echoes Foucault's discussion of the learning process of 'caring for the self' (see Section 4.1) which discusses how individuals would not be considered saved if they only *have* or *possess* the knowledge of salvation through reading and memorizing the teachings and scriptures. Here, Foucault argues that individuals need to assimilate the knowledge, through self-examination and the adjustment of their conduct to continually work on perfecting the self. The intensive learning of *fa* does not imply absolute obedience. Nor is it a compulsory and codified precept.

Another interesting point from this passage is that there were still many FLG followers 'confused about the basic *fa* principles after many years of reading *Zhuan Falun*'. Confusion about the scriptures is tolerated in the FLG; there was no compulsion to set up a clergy system to clarify this confusion. This echoes Foucault's discussion of self-care as a counter-conduct to pastoral care, where he suggested that scripture, or the text, 'even when confused, is nothing other than what God wanted to reveal of Himself to man' (Foucault, 2007: 213).

The main issue that this conversation enabled me to understand during a fieldwork trip to Taipei City in the summer of 2013 was that one of the functions of studying *fa* is to provide guidance for FLG followers to cultivate themselves. Two FLG cultivators told me on different occasions that ‘(t)he Fa can break all attachments, the Fa can destroy all evil, the Fa can shatter all lies, and the Fa can strengthen righteous thoughts’ which was cited directly from Master Li’s scripture (2000a). The following is a case how *fa* study had these effects.

In an interview, a Taiwanese cultivator M reflected upon how studying *fa* made him reflect upon himself and the nature of his work. The following citation demonstrates how this process, studying *fa* and reflecting upon the self, may lead to an internal transformation whereby an individual’s use of cultivation helps him address personal and work challenges with an open mind and heart. M was a person of dark blue background, or Chinese National People’s Party (KMT); the colour green refers to Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). He was very close to the central political power in the government.

M: I started cultivation in the year of 2001. At that time of the beginning phase of cultivation, [my] blue and green were still dominant [caring about party politics], even though I tried to eliminate it consciously. In 2004, the year of the presidential election, I was going to host a TV program on that day of election [...]. I was organizing that special program discussing the presidential election in Taiwan, which was a program by the New Tang Dynasty Television channel broadcasting to the world. On that day, after voting, I needed to prepare something for that program in the evening, discussing the election. Then, I remember, when stepping out of the house, my heart was still restless and anxious, not knowing whether Lian Chian [blue candidate of the 2004 presidential election in Taiwan] would be elected or what would happen to Chen Shui-bian [green], whether they were going to use dirty tricks. I was thinking about this. But in between, I went to Y road to copy something. I went in to copy and watched the TV broadcast, and my heart was restless. Then I took the Taipei City metro. As it would take a while, I took out the *dafa* scripture to read. I read and read, and read it into my heart. [Afterwards] I almost had no feeling [for the election]. Then I arrived at Z road. When I entered the studio, I completely calmed down, like talking about an election in Ireland, or like an election in the U.S. I didn’t have any feeling [of attachment]. Like I was standing outside talking about ‘their’ election. It was totally different. To this kind of degree (Interview_130816_009).

This interview not only demonstrates how influential studying *fa* is considered, it also illustrates the power of self-subjection into a spiritual subject, a process that empowers individuals to break, resist or transform bonds with exclusive and dominant categories of social identity. The power of self-subjection enabled this FLG cultivator to transcend his political background, ‘dark blue’, to transform himself into another one, a FLG cultivator who would not attach too much importance to political gains and losses. This subtle self-transformation was totally dependent upon his own reading of the scriptures without external guidance; an individualized process without a shepherd.

Individuals’ understanding of *fa* may change over time. I will now provide a story of a FLG follower with a ‘dark green’ background. ZX and his transformation from a political activist to a cultivator. ZX had been the green leader of Chen Shui-bian’s important think tank. When Chen was running for the position of Mayor of Taipei City in 1998, ZX also became a FLG cultivator in that same year. ZX was quite happy that he didn’t need to get involved in the election campaign for Chen Shui-bian. It was not difficult for him to give up political activities, e.g. supporting a DPP candidate on the stage. However, in the interview, ZX told me that his withdrawal from politics at his earlier cultivation stage was too extreme. Later, as a cultivator in ordinary society, he thought he still had the responsibility to expose the (blue) KMT’s party-state capitalism in Taiwan as an economics academic. Since then, he has dedicated himself to explaining the [KMT’s] political economic problems (Fieldnotes_140122). Since starting FLG cultivation, ZX still engaged in politics but with a transformed attitude. Rather than be a political activist, he engages with politics as a cultivator who carries out his social duty as an academic. In the above two cases, both FLG cultivators were the judge and instructor of their own thoughts and conduct.

This section has discussed the first steps of cultivation: reading *fa* (scriptures); understanding, reflecting and internalising *fa*, or *xuefa ruxing* (studying *fa* with the heart), which is termed *fa*-study by FLG followers. The next section will introduce the third step of cultivation: applying *fa* as part of one's daily cultivation process.

5.3.2 Applying Fa in Daily Life

This section outlines what self-cultivation means by examining such practices as: applying core FLG principles to daily life; giving up attachments and negative personal qualities; and self-diagnosis which leads to an elimination of negative qualities and the attainment of peace in everyday life.

Firstly, FLG cultivators should apply the core FLG principles of the universe, that is, truth, compassion and forbearance, to their daily lives. One male FLG cultivator MZ, an ex-purchasing agent in an electronic company, told me how he applied the principle in his business:

MZ: Before [I cultivated FLG], taking the example of work, I spoke indiscreetly [to clients]. In order to get punctual or speedy delivery of goods, I would use nasty methods.

WL: For example?

MZ: For example, 'if you don't do etc. etc., I will do etc. etc. to you'. For example, 'if you don't deliver today, I will sue you.' That was really unkind. And all the clients were afraid of me. But, it [the threatening method of business] was not effective.

WL: Not effective?

MZ: No. Because they didn't want to help you from the heart. After [FLG cultivation] I changed. Now that I have left the job, they [the clients] still have good relationships with me and talk with me sincerely. They said, I am the clean part of that company. Purchasing/Procurement is very dirty.

WL: After starting FLG cultivation, how did you treat them?

MZ: [...] I always tried to figure out a win-win solution (Interview_130716_004).

The principles MZ applied to his life were very simple: truth, compassion and forbearance, whereas the actual practices are more complicated, and are fully dependent upon MZ's own calculation, decision and action.

Secondly, in addition to applying truth, compassion and forbearance to their interactions with others, FLG cultivators are encouraged to give up attachments to eliminate what are perceived to be negative qualities in themselves. The negative attachments mentioned by interviewees are more varied than the attachments outlined in Master Li's scriptures. Those discussed by cultivators in my field research ranged from the very specific, such as being jealous of other FLG members who had successfully persuaded Chinese citizens to renounce their CCP memberships, to the more general: anger; hostility towards others; competitiveness; hatred; possessiveness; preferences for certain things, foods or people; sentimentality; laziness; showing-off; and greed.

Using another example from a group practice session, M also analysed how he spoke with others and recognised his own anger in a response, even though his initial intention to speak was well-intentioned. He explained:

M: One day I participated in a *fa*-study group. They invited some new cultivators to come. They were very new *tongxiu* [fellow cultivators]. On the day, the person in charge told the new cultivators that 'you should take *fa* seriously, earnestly and respectfully, like washing your hands before studying at home every day. After washing them clean, you may open the book(s) respectfully, and so on and so on.' Then I jumped up and said, 'You shouldn't say that, it's not right. You will scare people away saying it that way.' I said 'Master Li doesn't order us to do that. I found that in all cases, you just have to have a respectful heart. And that is fine.' On that day, unexpectedly, I realised that I spoke with anger. Immediately, another *tongxiu* said with kindness, '[Interviewee M] is right, we shouldn't do that. But, it is not necessary to be so harsh.' All at once it was revealed. When I spoke, I discovered it. He/she too, even pointed it out to everybody. It was clear; this was an attachment of mine. This is an attachment – that I insisted on 'right and wrong' (Interview_130816_008).

In M's case, doing the right thing is not enough for cultivation. Cultivator M paid attention to his manner and regarded the anger in his talk as a sign of the vanity of his

attachment to right-and-wrong, although he still considered his understanding was correct – that FLG cultivators should not follow too much formality.

In a similar fashion to some of my other research participants, FLG-cultivator, YS, had initially refused to change his way of doing business at the beginning of his cultivation. However, after a dream, in which he realised he should trade fairly, he decided to point out his fake goods to his customers, thus reducing his profit from 100% to 30%.

YS: Before, I sold an item with profit. If the profit was not 100%, I wouldn't sell it. Then, the second time I started to cultivate, I realised it couldn't continue like this. Before then I had even sold fake goods; [real] goods mixed with fake ones.

WL: You can identify fake goods?

YS: Certainly! I know fake goods. I've been in this business for twenty years. Suddenly I had a dream. The dream is too long to describe right now, but it reminded me that one should be frank and honest [...]. In *Zhuan Falun*, the Master said, you can be pure of heart, no matter what business you are doing. Trade fairly and everything is OK. I thought of this sentence. So I thought, I should identify the fake goods as fake and the real ones as real. [...]

WL: You also sell and exhibit fake ones?

YS: I exhibit fake ones. If you want cheap goods you can still buy the fake ones. But they are fake, so I don't make any guarantees. But if you buy real ones from me, I guarantee them for life (Interview_130907_002).

YS became the instructor of his own conduct and an observer of his social surroundings. However, YS's cultivation did not stop with identifying fake goods. What I found distinctive in learning about how FLG cultivators define and discover attachments or negative elements was the diverse spectrum of attachments, and how cultivators self-diagnose, self-examine and self-judge, the latter of which I discuss below in more detail.

5.3.3 Self-Examination and Self-Diagnosis

This discussion of self-examination and self-diagnosis casts lights on the relationship between self and self. In other words, individuals are both the subject and object of their

cultivation; they are equipped with an understanding of *fa* and are capable of diagnosing themselves without external spiritual experts.

Recently, cultivator YS also realised that he should not lie to customers even if it was a white lie for his own convenience. For example, he should not tell the customer that an item is sold out when it isn't, just because he didn't want to sell the item to that customer. He decided that he should endure the continual haggling from the customer and see it as a test of cultivation.

YS: Since October last year until this year, my mouth hurt when I slept at night. This condition recovered in June. Strange, right? My mouth. Then I kept searching inwards, and I found the reason, but I could not do it.

WL: What was the reason?

YS: It [the pain in the mouth] told you not to lie. Before, I always lied when doing business. [...] But I could not change it, and procrastinated until this June. It hurt for a very long time [...] (Interview_130907_002).

In this case, YS is the doctor of his own soul. In another case, the woman, JY, who associated her atopic dermatitis with her self-blaming, asserted that she tried to eliminate her negative thoughts by identifying and controlling these, but using a compassionate state of mind to do so. As she explained:

JY: After passing the illness-*karma* test, I knew that I should not blame myself. So I told myself: 'You should not blame yourself'. Yes, you kept repressing, repressing it without self-awareness. I don't know whether you blame yourself very often, like me, repressing it for years. But it became something extreme. So, once you see any bad feeling or bad thought emerging, you need to control, deny and eliminate it, so it won't influence your compassion and peace. [...] Righteous thought, peace and compassion [...] is the best for physical health; the immune system is at its the best (Fieldnotes_130818_001).

This woman first discovered the negative element of self-blaming, and then, to preserve inner peace, she knew that she should control and eliminate it. In so doing, her body could transform itself into one of higher energy. One fights with the negative nature of the self, in order to elevate the self. Her explanation also demonstrates that maintaining

the body should be coupled with care of one's mind, such as freedom from disturbances and excess

The above examples reveal that self-diagnosis of one's physical pain is linked to one's own wrong-doing. This art of self-diagnosis and self-examination is a process that transforms negative attachments into a higher form of energy and is a third aspect of cultivation of the heart and mind. In FLG teachings, it is said that physical sufferings or accidents in daily life can be the result of one's wrong-doing in this life or in previous lives, and that one must accept suffering as payback for the past. However, FLG cultivators examine their behaviours to reflect upon wrong-doings *in the present-day*. This focus upon current failings was evident in a number of cases: one woman associated her atopic dermatitis with her self-blaming, which kept her from being at peace with herself (Interview_130818_001); a married man associated a minor traffic accident he had with his feelings for a woman other than his wife (Fieldnotes_130807); a woman associated an allergic reaction on her face and eyes with her attachment to skincare products and caring too much about others' opinions (Interview_130825_001); a further woman associated the case that another FLG cultivator was refused entry into Hong Kong airport, with her unstable cultivation condition (Fieldnotes_130830).

These examples suggest that FLG cultivators turn their gaze inwards towards themselves and associate sufferings or accidents with their own wrongdoings or bad elements within themselves in this life. Through this practice, they see these sufferings or accidents as tests of their cultivation, and in this way can become both their own judge and doctor. No spiritual specialists are required to diagnose the past and explain the causality of the sufferings and accidents in this life. FLG cultivators focus on their own actions in this life rather than turning to external specialists for help.

Moreover, FLG cultivators' self-examination appears to be a continual process without end. I was amazed when talking to the retired woman CB, who theoretically has

less complicated interpersonal relationships to cultivate, how she pointed out some bad elements, e.g. ways of speaking to others, dominating personal relationships, or greed, within herself that she wished to eliminate.

CB: So-called cultivation is to modify [the self] slowly, slowly. When you encounter something, you remind yourself that ‘oh, I have done something wrong with that’.

WL: Did you modify anything?
[...]

CB: All kinds, even regarding the pursuit of profit. You won’t pursue things that don’t belong to you.

WL: But you are already retired!

CB: You can still experience the desire to pursue profit, even when you are retired. You still have that. For example, it is a very simple principle, very simple. You go to eat at a buffet. The buffet has meat stew in soya sauce. Before, I always picked the lean meat out, excluding the fat - tearing them apart. Only lean meat without fat. Later I discovered that, if I do so, who will eat the fat part? So I shouldn’t do that (Fieldnotes_130731_003).

I was amazed by this woman’s analysis of self down to such a micro-level. Another important point raised by this retired woman is that she remains watchful all the time to examine herself and modify herself gradually, ‘slowly’ in her terms. This self-examination in the mode of self-care is in strong contrast to the parents’ continual gaze upon their children.

What to examine and how to modify the self concerning cultivation are not specified in Master Li’s scriptures, but are defined and diagnosed by FLG cultivators themselves. From the diversity of these examples, one can conclude, moreover, that cultivation of the self is not a codified, ritualised, structured or collective practice, but based upon highly individualised exercises that require individuals’ understanding of basic teachings of *fa*, self-examination and self-judgement. As one elderly male interviewee explained: ‘The techniques of martial arts, you see, originated from only two hands, but its variations are endless. Cultivation is the same, its variations are endless’ (Fieldnotes_130727_002). The variations of ‘endless’ cultivation are therefore

related to a process in which one can continually readjust the self according to the principles of truth, compassion and forbearance. Diagnosing bad elements or demonic natures in the self does not lead to denial of the self in the FLG. Instead, it motivates the cultivators to work toward peace by taking a contradictory stance, namely to create a combative attitude of self-mastery,³⁷ towards the negative parts of the self in order to transform them into better or divine ones. Self-Mastery will be discussed in the following section.

5.3.4 Self-Mastery and Enduring Suffering

According to FLG belief, cultivation needs to be progressing (Stage 4 of Figure 5.14), or elevating in cultivation levels.³⁸ Cultivators are expected to take a combative attitude to transform parts of themselves into better or divine ones, and to cultivate at higher levels. Indeed, cultivator LL even used the expression ‘fighting a war’ to describe one of his cultivation activities of reading scriptures. He told me he sometimes stood up in the *fa*-study group or used cold water to wet his head in his work place to stay awake when reading scriptures (Fieldnotes_130821_001).

The practice of FLG cultivators’ endurance of physical pain without being attended to by a physician has been severely criticised by the CCP as discussed in Chapter 2. In FLG practice, there are no standardised solutions as to whether and when one should see a doctor and receive medical treatment. According to cultivators, the extent to which a person endures physical suffering is an individual’s choice, because only he/she knows what his/her cultivation level is.

As Master Li (2008 [1996]: 31) repeatedly states: ‘[T]his Fa transcends both Buddhist and Daoist. Different understandings are found at different levels, and different manifestations appear at different levels’. Different cultivation levels not only

³⁷勇猛精進 in FLG terms.

³⁸向上提升 in FLG’s terms.

influence cultivators understandings and attitudes but also their ascetic challenges, for example, how far a FLG cultivator should endure physical suffering in this life to pay back *karma*. During my field work in the summer in 2013, I got to know a young woman working in the NTDTV, who just had an operation and was being cared for by her mother, who was also a FLG cultivator. The mother's special diet followed traditional Chinese medicine principles. Before the operation, the daughter's vagina had been bleeding for some time and she had been refusing treatments, which had worried other FLG cultivators a while. I have heard of another similar case in Changhua County. FLG cultivator YS told me his wife's vagina had been bleeding for three months. He told her she could decide whether or not to go to hospital depending on her understanding of her cultivation level. She decided not to go to hospital and not be diagnosed by medical doctors. After three months, her body recovered. In both cases, the two women possess control over their own bodies; they decided on their own ascetic practices of refusing treatment; their mothers, husbands or even other FLG followers did not make their decisions for them.

In another example, a FLG cultivator in a *fa*-study group and a dentist, LZL, had the opinion that cultivators should not completely refuse treatments. He shared two experiences with two FLG followers in this meeting. When one Taiwanese FLG follower came to his praxis with a tooth problem, he suggested to pull the tooth out. This FLG follower refused the treatment, went home, kept sending out righteous thought and recovered. In another case, a Shen Yun dancer from North America visited him to solve the tooth problem. As the dancer would have the performance next day and the tooth seemed difficult to deal with, the dentist refused to pull the tooth out. But the dancer asked the dentist to pull it out as the tooth had bothered the dancer's 'truth-telling' activities and the dancer might not come to Taiwan again. In the end, the dentist

pulled the tooth out and the extraction was quickly and easily done. The dentist argued further:

LZL: It is not about the act of pulling out the tooth, it depends on where your bottom line is and how you position your heart [...]. When the same thing happens to different people, one's cultivation conditions and understandings of *fa* are different, all different. Cultivation has no one model. It depends on how you position your heart, your mood, when facing difficult tests. It depends on how you study *fa* solidly and steadily. If you study *fa* well and thoroughly, you know how to position yourself when facing tests. If you don't study *fa* well, didn't understand it thoroughly, and insisted in following others to pass the tests, then, unfortunately, you won't pass it [...]. Gods have no illness, so gods don't go to doctors. The problem is whether you are a god now (Fieldnotes_130825_003).

As this cultivator and others with whom I spoke clarified, it is without question that what FLG cultivators take is a combative attitude, not pastoral obedience from a medical professional, when enduring physical suffering. However, as this passage indicates also, the concern among FLG cultivators is whether one should still insist in refusing treatments to pay a *karma* debt when the individual cultivator and his/her family members and friends face the risk of losing his or her life when refusing treatments. Enduring physical suffering is similar to Foucault's (2007: 205-208) concept of asceticism. Foucault regards asceticism as a contradictory logic to the obedience of pastoral power. It is an exercise of self upon self with increasing difficulty, whereby an individual desires to overcome his/her present limits and proceed to the next stage of testing. It requires a combative attitude challenging one's own limits, such as periods of fasting (see Section 4.1.2). Both FLG cultivation practices and Foucault's discussion on asceticism reflect the progressive perspective of self-care and the characteristics of 'becoming', rather than 'being' of spiritual subjectivation. The next section will discuss the horizontal relationships among FLG followers.

5.4 Horizontal Relationships among FLG Followers

Weekly ‘*fa*-study and experience-sharing’ meetings and groups are important occasions for FLG followers to share their cultivation experiences with each other. The weekly *fa*-study groups that I visited were voluntarily organised by individual FLG followers. Either they owned the space or they booked a room in their workplaces for *fa*-study. This meeting provides fellow cultivators with an opportunity to examine and reflect upon the self and to learn from others through speaking about self and listening to others’ experiences.

In one interview with a FLG cultivator, BM, she spoke about the process of identifying negative qualities in a speech she gave in front of others at a *fa*-study and experience-sharing group. She denounced her adoration for her boss as an unhelpful worldly attachment, but also spoke of the will, righteous thought and ability to combat that attachment she developed as a cultivator. In the manuscript, she cited Master Li’s scripture and one reference from the Minghui.org as guidance (I marked them below in italics). I quote part of her speech as it also provides an illustration of the three stages of cultivating the self that I have discussed in Section 5.3:

BM: Recently, [I] experienced bad sentimentality – an adoration of the chief, an ordinary person, in the work place. When the chief was kinder to me at work, I developed complacency. [...] A *tongxiu* [fellow cultivator] reminded me I could memorise Master Li’s *fa* in the *Zhuan Falun*, ‘*Your Main Consciousness Should Predominate*’. [...] However, it [the adoration of the chief] was not eliminated in one or two days and I continued to struggle with the process of eliminating. Then I found a text from a colleague cultivator on Minghui.org: ‘*Cultivators all have human minds [human attachments]. But you cannot let human minds evolve without end, you should keep control, give up, clear it. It is cultivating.*’ Afterwards, I discovered, one’s righteousness can suppress hundreds of demons. [...] I should not have greedy thoughts, the greed for achievement and the greed for superficial vanity. I dependably do my job and do my duty. [...] I asked myself whether truth, compassion and forbearance are applied, whether the standard of cultivator is appropriate. Following this, every sentence spoken or movement can lead to the right result.

First, BM diagnosed herself and discovered her negative thoughts and regarded them as *thought-karma*. Second, she cited Master Li’s scripture and identified a reference from

the Minghui.org as guidance, not somebody else' instruction. Third, rather than compliance, this person shows a pro-active attitude, exercising power over her desires, resisting temptation, and taking control over her anxieties. Such an approach contrasts strongly with Foucault's rendition of the Roman Catholic Church sacrament of confession where the penitent submits to the instruction of the priest. It better illustrates Foucault's discussion regarding self-mastery that demonstrates individual's control over self. No one directed her speech and she was not asking for forgiveness. Although she denounced her thought-*karma* to the audience, at the end of the topic she positively reaffirmed herself as a progressing cultivator of righteous thoughts. She became the truth of her own discourse.

She also had a specific orientation towards speaking the truth about herself before others:

BM: When we write texts for experience-sharing, especially when others encourage you do to do so, you can try to write it down. But whether you want to talk about it or not, is another issue. When you write it down, when you are finished and you have finalised it, you've actually already identified your problems. Yes, but later, I discovered, when you talk about it, it is already in the past [...]. When I finished presenting my manuscript, I felt like I had passed the test (Interview_130825_001).

BM analysed herself as having recognized her problems simply by writing and talking about them, a process that enabled her to 'pass the test'. Both the process and evaluation of experience-sharing is described according to her own understanding of *fa* and not according to an external authority. To discuss, reveal and confess the self voluntarily is not to ask for forgiveness, but to leave things behind and move forward. Most importantly, to confirm the self, in her terms 'I passed the test', is similar to Foucault's (2005) discussion of *parrhēsia*, which demonstrates one's courage to confess the wrong and resolve to improve oneself. When an individual speaks the truth about himself or herself, whether pointing out the wrong or good deed, he or she becomes a speaking subject of truth and is thereby able to position him or herself in the true discourse, that

is, subjectivation through one's own true discourse (Foucault, 2005: 365f.). One who is capable of telling the truth in this way is also encouraged to have sovereignty over the self. Cultivator BM had the courage to demonstrate the wrong and determined to improve herself. She became the speaking subject of her own discourse and this discourse revealed her sovereignty over herself, hence she stated that 'I passed the test'. Thus, the person who speaks the truth is the example of the truth.

I asked one FLG cultivator LL, who has hosted different *fa*-study groups, to explain the role of the host and his experiences of meetings for FLG cultivation. I asked LL whether he had any expectations for a fruitful discussion in a *fa*-study group. LL was reluctant to comment on other cultivators at meetings. To speak or not to speak are all practices of cultivation at the meeting. There is no right or wrong way, as he pointed out, because each participating individual has different levels of cultivation.

In other cases, because of different personal interpretations of activities, cultivators may choose not to broadcast their experiences in sharing groups. This was the case for a FLG woman who was very efficient at fund-raising from non-cultivators for FLG activities and who has her own understanding of the arts and of Shen Yun. I asked her whether she shared her methods of fund-raising and opinions about arts with other cultivators. She said she only shared them within a small circle of cultivators; not everyone wanted to listen to her. She also noted that someone might be at high cultivation level but yet could not express themselves well (Interview_140121_005).

Based upon my short fieldwork observations, I found that intense or drastic debates were unusual in sharing groups. In a typical regional *fa*-study exchange group discussion for example, the practice of worshipping ancestors at home was discussed. This is a common social and ritual responsibility in Taiwanese society. However, religious rituals are in general discouraged in the FLG scriptures. Some FLG cultivators who had special social positions but little or no power within their families, such as the

oldest daughter-in-law, continued ancestor worship rituals as their social responsibility. Some FLG cultivators who had some power within their families demolished the family altar in their houses (Fieldnotes_140111). Whether or not to stop the practice of ancestor worship has been continually discussed among FLG followers in Taiwan for at least a decade.

However, I experienced intense discussions twice. In one session at an annual *fa*-conference for FLG cultivators from North Taiwan, some cultivators present worried about a female FLG follower who didn't ask her daughter-in-law to give up her CCP membership after marrying and moving from China to Taiwan. The meeting holder kept asking her for further details. Although the mother-in-law did give the daughter-in-law materials concerning 'telling-truth', she said that due to religious freedom, she didn't want to push her daughter-in-law to renounce her CCP membership. Two out of more than ten participants became nervous. One regarded the mother-in-law's carelessness as [demonic] disturbance; another expressed the concern that the mother-in-law should persuade her daughter-in-law to renounce her CCP membership, because this was believed to save the life of the daughter-in-law. The mother-in-law remained quiet and did not respond. In the end, the host K said that the mother-in-law needed more time to think about things at home. In addition, the host mentioned an experience where she had successfully made a Chinese woman in a shoe shop quit her CCP membership, and then bought a pair of shoes from this shop. The host concluded the meeting by stating that she was always happy whenever she wore that pair of shoes. I didn't see the host K attempt to contact the mother-in-law after the meeting. K from Taipei city also told me, she didn't know the mother-in-law (Fieldnotes_130817).

During this discussion section, I was quite impressed by the two participants' nervous tones, which was unusual during my fieldwork. For the two, this mother-in-law probably did not know the scripture well, according to which the daughter-in-law might

be eliminated when CCP collapses. At a later stage of my fieldwork, I thought this nervous tone reflected more personal issues regarding the two participants' cultivation levels. To speak gently is also part of cultivation, which was also raised by other FLG cultivators, such as cultivator M. When I discussed this meeting with host K later, she explained to me that she thought she should let the mother-in-law know her problem regarding the situation, based upon the principles of truth, compassion and forbearance [here, truth was the focus]. Whether the cultivator changed her mind or not did not matter. What was important, she stated, was that she should be aware of the problem. Host K also said, that if cultivation had ten thousand levels, then, this mother-in-law might be at ten, one way to help the mother-in-law advance herself was to present B's own experience as an example. Whether or not K's experience really helped and what the mother-in-law's decision would be, were not followed up after the meeting. Host B's action in the meeting was similar to Cynic's *parrhēsia*, whereby they 'used their own conduct to demonstrate, promote and persuade others to adopt a model of truthful living'.

Another intense discussion happened during my second research trip, this time in another regional two-day *fa*-conference for FLG cultivators from different parts of Midwestern Taiwan (Fieldnotes_140115). After a discussion about whether one should continue ancestor worship as a FLG cultivator, an old illiterate woman raised her concerns. She was given to another family as a child; now her brother was preparing the funeral of their mother and indicated that he needed money from her. But this elderly woman was in financial difficulties. I thought her concern was more practical, rather than a discussion of how the FLG scriptures discourage rituals. In my view, as this old woman did not have much money and was not close to her mother; she might not wish to pay for the funeral. Meanwhile, another young cultivator immediately responded with a lengthy argument that cultivators should maximally conform to ordinary society, and

that it was important not to have trouble with relatives. Another elderly woman joined the conversation and said that the first old woman had financial difficulties. And the young cultivator continued her previous view and emphasized that cultivation was the priority. Finally, the session holder said that the illiterate woman could listen to the scripture tape and she would then know what to do. In comparison to the case concerning the mother-in-law, I was not surprised by the young speaker's tense tone, and I thought that she had missed the point. I learned from my first research journey that people who speak out loudly were not necessarily correct or better. In addition, the mother-in-law and the illiterate woman appeared to be inexperienced or less dedicated FLG followers in my view.

As individuals are expected to be equipped with the knowledge to cultivate themselves at different levels, a standard or unified path for FLG cultivation is impossible. In Taipei City, I especially liked to go to a *fa*-study group, because the discussion topics there were often associated with current social and political issues in Taiwan. At one meeting in August 2014, the discussion concerned Taiwan and China's Service Trade Pact that allows capital from China to invest in Taiwanese service industries, including media and communications industries. At this meeting, one professor said that he/she was working against the government's plan. Three other cultivators, with higher academic backgrounds or professional careers, expressed their opinions concerning the Service Trade Pact and its consequences for Taiwan. O said that the environment for cultivation would become more risky and dangerous. P said that FLG cultivators would need to save the people of Taiwan and tell them the 'truth' about the CCP. Q said that it was not a big deal and that if it did happen, what cultivators wanted was to cultivate back home (back to the divine world). Immediately afterwards, another older female began to share her daily 'telling-truth' activities and the discussion regarding the Service Trade Pact ended. There was no final conclusion

about the Service Trade Pact and its potential influence on the FLG followers in Taiwan. After the meeting, I heard that the professor said that he/she felt he/she was fighting alone against the government's plan. P is an active speaker used to discussing social issues and also provided the space for this *fa*-study group. I asked him whether he wanted to spread his views to wider FLG audiences outside this *fa*-study group. He said no and mentioned that he was even told that his cultivation level was not high enough. I didn't find a shepherd in this discussion.

Now, I will discuss the organisation design of the FLG's regional *fa*-conference in Taiwan, which reflects an interesting aspect of flexibility and non-hierarchy. Regional *fa*-conferences offer the possibility to learn *fa* and to exchange experiences with other FLG followers from different regions. Based on my observation of the organisation of regional conferences, I would argue that their purpose is not only building a collectivity, which is Chan's (2013) interpretation of FLG conferences following the absence of Master Li in China beginning in 1999. Instead, I would argue that I noted that a goal was to create as *diverse* a sharing experience as possible.

In a North Taiwan *fa*-conference that I attended, groups of 8-9 cultivators were formed and each group was not divided according to age or gender, and no uniforms were worn to distinguish groups or individuals. Instead groups were either 'fixed groups' (they stayed in the same hotel room for the whole conference), or 'moving groups' (they changed rooms for different sessions that lasted for three hours). This meant that every combination of two groups in each hotel room changed after each three-hour session. In the North Taiwan *fa*-conference, I always stayed with one group on the first day, and on the second day I randomly joined other groups, as there was no attendance-check or gate-keeper controlling the entrances and exits to the conference. I had a strong impression that it was not easy for the organiser to find a discussion holder for each group. I met two group holders, LL and K, at this conference so I asked them if

I could interview them after the conference. Discussion holder LL told me that he didn't really want to be the group discussion holder at this conference, as it needed some preparation. Discussion holder K proudly told me that she never rejected the organiser's request to act as a group discussion holder, which was not an easy job in her view. I found that the conference encouraged learning from a range of cultivators' unique experiences rather than emphasizing similar values. A form of voluntary, open and non-judgmental self-cultivation was facilitated with this model of conference, in the sense that one 'told the truth' about the self and one's conduct as an example of one's own subjective truth.

Experience-sharing also takes place in virtual spaces, the most important of which is the Clear Wisdom website (Minghui.org). This website was launched on 30 May 1999 by FLG followers (Ownby, 2008: 201). Ownby (2008) considers the Minghui.org to be a censored website because editors with academic backgrounds are believed to select texts from submissions. However, the Minghui.org does offer a platform for FLG cultivators to exchange their cultivation experiences and it is indeed embraced by Taiwanese FLG cultivators, who read certain texts on the topics that concern them most, such as illness *karma*, cultivation for beginners, or 'telling the truth' and saving lives. Many Taiwanese FLG cultivators told me that they loved to read texts on the Minghui.org website, and eight of them recommended that I should read the texts available on the site too because, according to one cultivator, what I wanted to know was all covered on the website. Two FLG cultivators told me that they were inspired by some texts written by cultivators in China who had higher-level understandings of *fa*. One told me she cried when reading texts by cultivators in China. When reading texts on the webpage, I found that the style of the texts to be similar in expression to some of the written texts read at *fa* sharing groups. Texts concerning sex or lust, for example, don't specify details about the self, but instead emphasise how an individual cultivator

discovers his/her attachments to lust, sexual desire, and adoration for others in the self, and how the cultivator subsequently eliminates attachments to become better cultivators.

Individualism at the collective level also shows regional differences. The North Taiwan *fa*-conference is organised annually, whereas the Midwestern Taiwan *fa*-conference is organised about once every three months. At county level, some counties are active in FLG popularisation, such as Yunlin county; some counties focus more on ‘truth-telling’ activities. In one *fa*-study group in Taipei City, the problems created by ignoring popularising the FLG to more Taiwanese and its negative impact on ‘truth-telling’ were raised. I asked the FLG representative in Taiwan, ZX, about the strategy of national promotion and media advertisement. He replied that if anyone had the money, energy and time, he or she could do that; if not, they do not (Fieldnotes_140122). The organisation of FLG followers is not hierarchical and is less a top-down management model than a bottom-up initiatives model.

5.5 Conclusion

The will and power of individuals plays a key role in this research, as it is the core impetus for the individual practices of FLG followers who choose to challenge the CCP through cultivation and the care of others. The decentralised, non-institutionalised and individualised model which exists among FLG followers is not well discussed in the current literature analysing the FLG. My ethnographic fieldwork data in Taiwan and Hong Kong offer rich details of the FLG cultivation, in comparison to the general description in Master Li’s scriptures. This chapter has described: the reasons individual FLG followers chose to enter the FLG movement; the ways that followers ‘resonate’ with Master Li’s message and scriptures, rather than obeying codified rules; how

followers cultivate and transform themselves into what they perceive to be better and 'divine' beings; how FLG followers interact with each other.

The Taiwan FLG followers and some Chinese in Hong Kong, whom I interviewed, have diverse motives for pursuing their FLG practices. They are active in seeking this-worldly salvation, including not only their physical and mental well-being and, but also, in some cases, other-worldly salvation. They started to resonate with Master Li and his teachings and to dedicate themselves in their spiritual subjectivation. Master Li's position within the FLG is impregnable. But cultivation, self-transformation and improvement depend mainly on one's own will and power. Reading and memorising the scriptures comprise only the first step of cultivation. FLG followers constantly reflected upon *fa* and applied *fa* to their daily lives. They tried to give up worldly attachments and negative personal qualities without having been subject to external surveillance. They were also able to diagnose themselves based upon their own knowledge without external spiritual expertise. Diagnosing bad elements or demonic natures in the self did not lead to denial of the self; instead, it motivates the cultivators to work toward peace by developing a combative attitude of self-mastery. Both FLG's cultivation practices and Foucault's discussion on asceticism reflect the progressive perspective of self-care and the characteristics of 'becoming', rather than 'being' of spiritual subjectivation.

FLG cultivation presents a strong counter-conduct to those that characterise pastoral care. Firstly, individual FLG followers possess authority over their own thoughts, body, their relationships with the scriptures, and their cultivation process and fate. No shepherd will guide them to heaven; FLG followers need to walk on their own path to their own destinies, either transforming into divine beings or becoming stronger in this life. Secondly, some FLG followers had mysterious or spiritual experiences that resulted in their voluntary and heartfelt commitment to the FLG as true teachings for

their lives. Thirdly, their individualised relationships with the scriptures enable them to become the examiners and instructors of their own conduct; they are both the shepherd and the sheep at the same time. The relationship among FLG followers is also individualised (not equal); each of them has his/her own path of cultivation, '[c]ultivation has no one model'.

The diverse ways that FLG followers cultivate themselves should offer a new research perspective for all social disciplines, namely, that the body and the self are not only the object of power relationships or governmentality. Following certain guidance, individuals can have power over, can transform, and can stylise the self without any external coercion. This progressive and diligent cultivation empowers individuals not only to subjectify themselves into becoming spiritual followers, self-carers or other-worldly divine beings, but it also challenge and even transforms this-worldly geopolitical space(s); a topic I now turn to in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6:
***FLG Geopolitical Practices ‘Telling-Truth/Saving-Life’:
When the Care for Others Coincides with the Care of the Self***

Chapter 5 discussed different aspects and examples of FLG followers’ individual cultivation practices, including their reasons for joining the FLG; learning and internalising the scriptures; and self-constitution and self-transformation. I also described the dynamics among FLG followers according to a decentralised, individualised and bottom-up initiated model, which I contrasted to a hierarchical structure governed by pastoral care (Chapter 4). This chapter explores how and why followers become motivated to exercise ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ as cultivation practices that also challenge the CCP. I argue that the power of cultivation is exercised by individuals not only to subjectify themselves into becoming spiritual followers and self-carers, but also to care for others and to become other-worldly divine beings. In this way, the FLG’s *parrhēsia*, or ‘truth-telling’, is also a geopolitical practice at individual and collective levels that confronts and may even transform this-worldly geopolitical space(s).

In this chapter I consider two key questions: 1) How are individuals mobilised to commit to these ‘truth-telling’ projects? and 2) How are these projects coordinated among FLG followers? With respect to the first question, some scholars have attempted to address why and how individual FLG followers commit themselves to diverse geopolitical practices. For example, Fisher (2003) discusses the practice of ‘forbearance’ as an effective means by which FLG followers resist the PRC. S. Palmer (2003: 356) and Ownby (2008: 211) also assert that Master Li’s message advocates martyrdom by followers. Junker (2014) further regards FLG’s ‘clarifying truth’ as a collective action based upon ‘a shared moral imperative to engage in activism’ (p. 433). While Junker mentions that FLG followers’ attempts at ‘clarifying truth’ were ‘a form of

self-cultivation’ (p. 434), he did not explain how ‘clarifying truth’ and ‘self-cultivation’ were linked to each other. These scholarly works, moreover, do not explore how *individual* FLG followers’ interpretations, experiences and cultivation practices of Li’s teachings evolved *after* 1999, nor do they explicitly examine the relationships between FLG followers, the PRC citizens and the CCP related actors, themes I discuss in Sections 6.2 and 6.3.

With respect to the second question, most of the existing literature examining FLG resistance to the CCP describe the collective strategies that create a global community through the media and the internet. Indeed, the internet has facilitated the dissemination of Master Li’s teachings, online-experience sharing and the exposure of PRC repression to a global public. Bell and Boas (2003), for example, highlight the importance of the internet for the development of the FLG movement at the global scale. McTernan (2004) regards the FLG as a combination of traditional Chinese spirituality and modernised technology. Chen et al. (2010) analyse how the FLG deploys the internet to establish a collective identity as a ‘Qi-Gong, religious, and activist group’ (p. 2). Thornton (2010) describes different syncretic sects, and includes the FLG in contemporary China as a ‘cyber sect’ that pursues projects at the global level through the internet. Likewise, web-based technologies have helped with the distribution of spiritual information and enabled the FLG’s international human rights campaign. Through an analysis of the FLG’s different internet and media strategies, Zhao (2003) describes the FLG as a ‘global media activism’ (p. 215) and concludes that the FLG is ‘by far the most mobilised and steadfast’ (p. 214) group in responding to the PRC media’s ‘symbolic violence’ (p. 214).

However, the FLG’s later developments after the CCP’s expulsion are not only significant in the domains of internet or media; diverse ‘telling-truth’ activities have been initiated by individuals who have a range of social and professional knowledge to

bring to these projects. As I discuss in more detail in this chapter, every FLG follower has his or her special ‘telling-truth’ project and his or her own standard of telling ‘truth’. Educated FLG followers may commit themselves to *The Epoch Times*, *Sound of Hope Radio* and New Tang Dynasty Television (NTD TV). A good illustration is the case of a FLG human rights lawyer I interviewed who was also involved in organising the World Organisation to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong. This group brings legal charges of genocide, torture, killing and hate crimes against certain CCP officials. Meanwhile, FLG doctors have organised Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting. Still other FLG followers are busy taking part in street demonstrations, delivering ‘truth-telling’ materials to tourist sites, persuading Chinese citizens to renounce their CCP membership at tourist sites or over the internet, performing in the Tian Guo Marching Band, or attracting audiences to Shen Yun performances. According to Master Li’s scripture, these projects were all founded by FLG followers, without third party financial support.³⁹

In this chapter, based upon the results of participant observation and interviews in Taipei, Hong Kong and Dublin, I adopt Foucault’s concept of *parrhēsia* and the integration of care of others into self-care to explicate the complex relationships between individual FLG followers’ cultivation, PRC citizens, and the Chinese Communist Party. In addition to Ownby’s (2008) and Junker’s (2014) understandings of the FLG’s activism as decentralised and voluntary, I highlight the spatial dimension of the FLG ‘truth-telling’ activities that are at once multi-nodal (using urban landscapes, virtual spaces, artistic performances and UN Human Rights mechanisms), crosses political boundaries (transnational), and is horizontal (creating emotional connections and cooperation with other followers, while remaining highly personal and non-hierarchical). FLG spiritual practices of ‘truth-telling’, as both individual cultivation

³⁹ ‘[...] we haven't received a single penny from any country, any government, any organization, or any company. Everything we've done has been funded by Dafa disciples' using their own salaries, incomes, and earnings.’(Li, 2003b).

and shared activities, multiply the points of conflict between FLG followers and the Chinese Communist Party.

This chapter presents an understanding of religious geopolitics based upon horizontal cooperation, whereby activities are organised globally beyond national boundaries (Kong, 2010) and are connected through individual bodies. My fieldwork shows that the coordination among different ‘truth-telling’ projects is based on both cooperation and disputation among FLG followers. By horizontal cooperation, I refer to the social relationships within the FLG movement that are characterised by non-hierarchical cooperation, a perspective supported by Ownby (2008) and Junker (2014). I also highlight the emotional connections among FLG followers. The coordination among the FLG’s diverse ‘truth-telling’ projects follows the anti-pastoral self-care mode that I discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. By paying attention to forms of horizontal cooperation, this chapter also highlights social actors’ ability to transgress local and/or national boundaries (Leitner, 2004).

I base my analysis upon the results of qualitative field research about FLG followers in Taipei, Hong Kong and Dublin (2012-14) as described in Chapter 5. Section 6.1 focuses on transnational ‘truth-telling’ projects, which are supported by horizontal cooperation among FLG followers worldwide. I describe the range of these activities by focusing on how places and urban landscapes, the media, Shen Yun performances, and the UN Human Rights system facilitate different ‘truth-telling’ projects, all of which create geopolitical challenges yet offer followers a range of possibilities for individual cultivation. The second half of this chapter explores how individual FLG followers experience their relationship with the CCP and among FLG followers themselves. Section 6.2 explores on how FLG followers experience and encounter CCP authorities, or ‘evil forces’. I also describe the manner in which they have emotionally connected with other FLG followers, in particular those who have

suffered from government repression. Section 6.3 describes how individual FLG followers transform the ‘truth-telling’ practices into their own personal cultivation. I argue that FLG followers integrate the care of others into their practices of self-caring.

6.1 Transnational ‘Truth-Telling’ Projects: Horizontal Cooperation

This section introduces the FLG’s diverse transnational ‘truth-telling’ projects by focusing on four types of practices. Firstly, I discuss how FLG followers use *urban landscapes*, such as through street parades in Hong Kong or by occupying public spaces full of Chinese visitors in Taipei, Dublin or New York to tell the ‘truth’ (Section 6.1.1). Secondly, I analyse how they use *virtual spaces* to deliver information to PRC citizens and global audiences, using such media as the internet, satellite TV, radio or phone calls (Section 6.1.2). Thirdly, I describe how the FLG uses *artistic performances*, in particular in the staging of Shen Yun to represent their spiritual discourses in global cities (Section 6.1.3). Finally, I explore their approaches to *UN Human Rights systems* as they to gain support and put pressure on the Chinese government (Section 6.1.4). These group-based, yet local and international projects carry out important geopolitical functions regarding human rights in China, including freedom of religion and of expression. In particular Sections 6.1.3 and 6.1.4 reflect upon FLG followers’ self-determination, that is, how followers, rather than passively waiting for actions to be taken by the UN regarding human rights, opt to take action themselves.

6.1.1 Urban Landscapes

The built environment of the urban landscape in itself does not have political or spiritual meanings for ‘truth-telling’. However, urban landscapes *outside of China* have a powerful political significance: religious freedom. Urban spaces in Hong Kong, in

Taiwan and the rest of the world offer FLG followers a relatively safe public space to expose themselves in the exercise of *parrhēsia* in front of hundreds, if not thousands, of the PRC visitors or passers-by. FLG followers use their bodies to occupy and call attention to their activities, such as by participating in demonstrations in cities with Chinese populations, such as in Hong Kong (Figures 6.1 and 6.2). In Figure 6.2, for example, the banner shown reads: ‘returning to Chinese *shen yun* [divine culture]’. In this way, FLG followers are able to counter the CCP’s narrative about the FLG as an ‘evil cult’ and offer bystanders an alternative understanding.

Figure 6.1: The Tian Guo Marching Band in a FLG street Demonstration, Hong Kong. Source: Weihsuan Lin, 01 September 2013.



Figure 6.2: The FLG’s Waist Drum Team in a FLG Street Demonstration in Hong Kong. Source: Weihsuan Lin, 01 September 2013.



Hong Kong is an important space for the FLG followers to tell the ‘truth’, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Hong Kong is a critical place within the PRC’s territory where the FLG is still legal. This fact was clearly outlined by an interviewee in Taiwan, when I asked him if he joined FLG demonstrations (Interview_130824_001). He stated:

WR: Sure, I have to. The purpose is not to demonstrate. The purpose is to let the Chinese tourists see the truth and let them renounce their party

membership. Some renounced their membership immediately. Some would say ‘Oh, why can people demonstrate openly in Hong Kong, when it is impossible in China?’ Yes, some FLG followers will tell them ‘Heaven eliminates the Chinese Communist Party, so the CCP membership renunciation can secure your own safety’. Some of them would agree to renounce. [...] It is because the Chinese citizen doesn’t believe it [God/gods will destroy the Chinese Communist Party] in that kind of closed environment in China, if he hasn’t seen it. And when he arrives in Hong Kong, and sees our open and mighty demonstration, he will change. His thoughts will be strongly influenced. Why is it different [in China] than what he sees in Hong Kong? Then, they [PRC citizens] will start to think whether the CCP lies to them.

As WR argues, joining ‘demonstrations’ in Hong Kong creates opportunities to present a different alternative than what the CCP presents as truth for Chinese tourists. Another cultivator, LL, told me how:

LL: Two years ago, I started to realise that I should go to Hong Kong to join the parade of renouncing CCP membership. Before that, I had never done anything abroad, like popularising *fa* or joining a *fa*-conference [that Master Li might attend in New York], because I felt I was already so busy. Two years ago, because of one e-mail from a *tongxiu* [fellow FLG cultivator], which touched me so much. [It said that] there were so few *tongxiu* in Hong Kong, so they needed support from Taiwanese *tongxiu*. So I decided to go to Hong Kong. [...] I always go to Hong Kong and return on the same day, because I have lots to do in Taiwan. Since then, I have gone to Hong Kong very often. Basically, I have participated in every demonstration there in the past two years (Interview_130818_003).

For some FLG followers, seeing Master Li in a *fa*-conference [in New York] would be their greatest wish, but LL felt he didn’t even have the time to fly to the U.S. to do so. However, he was inspired by his FLG colleague’s email to go to Hong Kong. In this example, it wasn’t Master Li’s charisma that motivated him to cross the national boundary, but the emotional connection made with another FLG follower that inspired him to create time for regular trips to Hong Kong.

Another young male Taiwanese FLG follower also described his voluntary journey to Hong Kong as follows:

HX: Before the departure, I always felt tired because one had to get up early and come back around midnight. But I felt fulfilled after coming back. Sometimes, I went and returned on one day. I visited Hong Kong quite often [...], already four times this year. I work now, so I can pay for the trip to Hong Kong. [...] Flying to Hong Kong is really tiring. But every time after the return, I would still register for the trip next time (Fieldnotes_130714).

Similar to LL, HX regularly went to Hong Kong to participate in demonstrations, despite the physical demands of travelling. Both of these followers were clearly ‘fulfilled after coming back’. They felt the need to join their fellow cultivators in alerting passers-by to the presence of the FLG and their message about the CCP’s persecution. In addition to supporting FLG colleagues, or *tongxiu*, in Hong Kong, Taiwanese cultivators indicated that they are motivated to demonstrate because of their knowledge of the suffering of *tongxiu* in China. Another female Taiwanese FLG follower I met in Hong Kong explained to me:

ML: I benefit from FLG, should I not step out? *Tongxiu* across the strait have been persecuted, caught by the CCP and suffered torture. The truth has been covered up. I came to Hong Kong to let the Chinese tourists know that the CCP persecutes good people. [...] So we are saving with regards to money or food in order to come. My *tongxiu* asked me, ‘Are you going [to Hong Kong] again?’ I said, ‘Sure, I am.’ Because here they urgently need support to tell the truth. This time, nobody from [X] area [in Taiwan] came with me (Interview_131228_006).

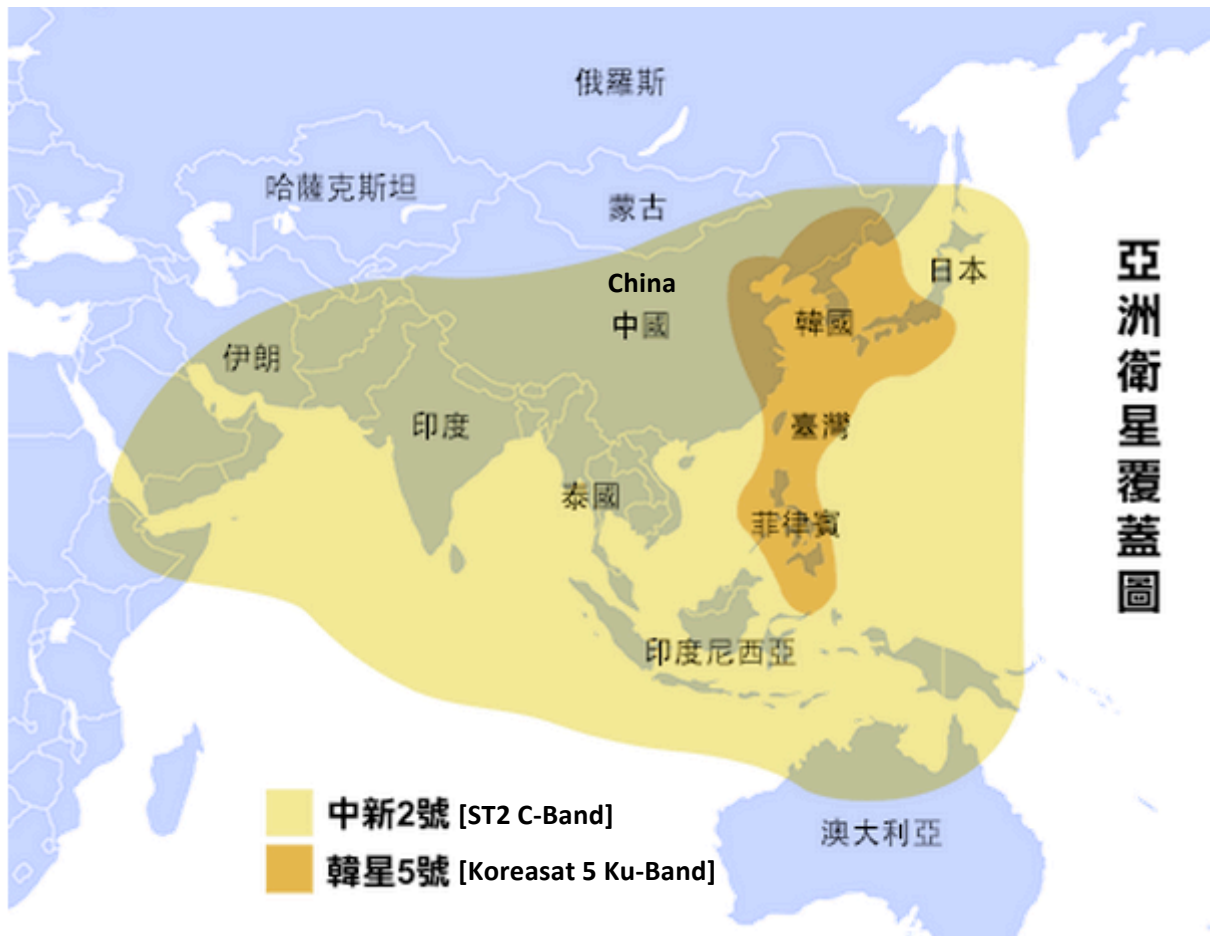
From the quotes above, we can see that these three FLG followers may personally struggle with having enough time and money to attend the demonstrations in Hong Kong, yet as ML states ‘we are saving with regards to money or food’ by saving lives. They all come to Hong Kong voluntarily to tell the ‘truth’, be seen, and ‘let the Chinese tourists know that the CCP persecutes good people’.

Although my observations highlight the role of Hong Kong and other urban landscapes and tourist sites in Taiwan, similar activities can also be found inside China, spanning not only the urban but also rural areas. Tong (2012) documents the underground FLG activities in China from 1999 to 2011 using sources from FLG communication websites. He documented FLG followers delivering ‘truth-telling’ materials in urban housing blocks and offices, as well as in mountain areas or villages, sometimes located fifty kilometers away from their homes.

6.1.2 Internet and Media Projects

The FLG's internet media, including television, news and radio, has become the most significant and studied project for combating the state-controlled and censored media that exists within China. Regarding television, FLG followers hacked into the official party cable and satellite networks in China between 1999 and 2004, to broadcast footage asserting that the FLG was not an evil cult (Zhengjian.org, 2012). Concurrent to this, FLG followers in the United States have also established two television stations: Fang Guangming TV (FGM TV) in Los Angeles, established in 2001, and New Tang Dynasty Television (NTD TV) in New York, established in 2002 (Thornton, 2010: 231). FGM TV's most influential production was the video 'Self-Immolation or Deception?' which was successfully used by FLG hackers to create embarrassing media incidents in China (Zhao, 2003: 218). After 2005, FLG members no longer hacked satellite and cable in China, but instead purchased satellite channels to broadcast NTD TV directly in Taiwan, which can be accessed also in China. Figure 6.3 shows the satellite coverage of the NTD TV in Taiwan, whereby ST2 C-Band covers the most part of China; Koreasat 5 Ku-Band covers the North-East Coast of China. The programme not only tells the 'true' story about the Falun Gong, but also collects news from human rights activists in China and other neutral third parties.

Figure 6.3: New Tang Dynasty Television (NTD TV) and its Satellite Coverage in Asia (ST2 C-Band and Koreasat 5 Ku-Band).
Source: NTD TV (2015).



With regards to news media, *The Epoch Times* was established in August 2000 in New York and subsequently became one of the largest newspaper groups in the Chinese language outside of China a mere two years later (Zhao, 2003: 218). Not only do they publish a newspaper online every day, but they also deliver a printed version of local editions to various international locations that have a Chinese readership including in: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Western European countries, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong (Zhao, 2003: 218). A human rights lawyer and a FLG follower, ZU, clearly illustrated how the media was part of ‘truth-telling’ activities in Taiwan. I quote her at length below as she indicates both the geopolitical significance of these activities to the Chinese people, and the flexible media strategies of the FLG. In our interview, she explained the practice of FLG ‘truth-telling’ through the media, described the CCP

counter attacks, and then told me of the new media strategies adopted by the FLG in response to the attacks:

ZU: We have *The Epoch Times* newspaper, so internet users inside [China] can break the firewall to read our news, and it is faster to disseminate information. But we are also afraid that if a gigantic transformation happens in China, that the internet will not work, and satellites won't either. What can we do? Shortwave! That is radio. You can see that during the Sichuan Earthquake, some victims told the *Sound of Hope Radio* [run by FLG followers] that they were in *tofu-dreg projects* [poorly constructed building], using batteries and a radio in their pocket to try and understand the outside world. They depended on the *Sound of Hope Radio*. So the mission of the *Sound of Hope Radio* is to cover China.

WL: Is satellite unable to do that?

ZU: Regarding satellite, IT [of the CCP] can hijack satellite. We have been hijacked. They bribed some people and used specific technology for satellite-hijacking. You should have known that FLG followers hijacked the CCP's satellite in 2001 or 2002 [...]. That was an anti-persecution activity from FLG followers inside [China]. At the end, more than ten were sentenced to death. The most famous one was Liu, Chenjun. They hijacked the television in Changchun, North China. [...]. They successfully inserted clips about how the FLG was practiced worldwide and about the self-immolation hoax on Tiananmen Square.⁴⁰ Later it [the CCP] took action against us. They also hijacked our satellite. For example, they asked Chunghwa Telecom [the largest telecommunications firm in Taiwan] not to provide ST-2 satellite to us, etc. But it can do nothing with shortwave. [...] They cannot stop us from spreading the truth (Interview_130712_003).

As this discussion indicates, what motivates FLG followers to run their own media is the fact that the media in China is owned and controlled by the CCP and its government, which resulted in China being ranked 176 of 180 countries in the 2015 World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2015). To tell the 'truth', FLG followers use all kinds of resources, including internet, television and radio, to disseminate their message.

I never received a response when I asked for an interview with the Taipei newspaper headquarters of *The Epoch Times*. However, FLG followers working for the

⁴⁰ Whereas the Chinese government broadcasted the footage of the self-immolation of FLG followers in Tiananmen Square on 23 January 2001 nationwide as evidence that FLG was an evil cult, FLG followers outside China denied the self-immolation and claimed that it was staged by the CCP.

media, including *The Epoch Times* or New Tang Dynasty Television (NTD TV), shared their experiences with me in private. During my fieldwork in 2013, there were full time, part time, paid and volunteer FLG followers working for NTD TV and *The Epoch Times*. Usually more professional jobs are occupied by full time and paid FLG followers. According to Master Li, these FLG media groups should function as normal companies in ordinary society. Therefore, a hierarchical decision-making structure *within* the company is accepted. In NTD TV in Taiwan, decisions are made by a manager and this person has higher pay, although it is still relatively low in comparison to the wage standard in Taiwan. However, how and whether the Taiwanese FLG followers should run the NTD TV, is up to themselves, not Master Li, which is evidenced in Master Li's talk in 2009:

I was really happy when I heard that Taiwan's Dafa disciples had started up a station and that the resources are better than over here in the U.S. But then, later on, I heard that you didn't want to do it anymore. Since it's you validating the Fa though, after all, it's left to you to do if you want to, and if you don't want to, you don't have to. It was something you had wanted to do originally, after all. But I think that you shouldn't be so lacking in resolve. What makes you think you can't do well or cooperate well? Why can't you work hard to ensure that financially the station is sound enough to keep running? In Western society our Chinese Dafa disciples are culturally disadvantaged [and yet still get things done], so how could it be that you can't do well in your own backyard? (Li, 2009)

Li's response to the opening and possible closing of a TV station reveals that it was the Taiwanese FLG followers, rather than Master Li, who initiated the project. Later, they were also faced with hardship and planned to quit. While Master Li suggested that Taiwanese FLG members 'shouldn't be so lacking in resolve' and should 'work hard to ensure that financially the station is sound enough to keep running', he also stated that ultimately it is the followers' choice: 'if you don't want to, you don't have to'.

In terms of internet communication, FLG followers have developed different websites with different foci (Zhao, 2003: 217). These include:

- www.faluninfo.net, which serves as an official press office;

- www.minghui.org, which includes Master Li's new teachings and cultivation of exchange in experiences;
- en.minghui.org, an English equivalent website of [Minghui.org](http://minghui.org); and
- www.zhengjian.org, a website for new scientific findings from archaeology to biomedicine.

FLG followers have access to these resources around the world. In addition, FLG members who are IT engineers have developed circumvention tools, such as Freerate, Dynaweb, Ultrasurf, and Ultrareach (Interview_130712_003; MacKinnon, 2012: 189). Now software programmes such as these have become some of the most important tools for 'truth-telling', enabling people inside China to browse the internet outside of China freely. They also serve as important players in combating what Mackinnon (2012: 32) calls China's 'networked authoritarianism', which carries out censorship and surveillance, represses dissident expression and spreads pro-government commentary.

As these examples illustrate, FLG followers use cyberspace to exchange not only cultivation experiences, as discussed in Chapter 5, but also to engage in 'truth-telling' activities. The internet has become an important space for information exchange and connecting across national borders among FLG followers. While seemingly disembodied, those connections may be quite personal and emotive. One female Taiwanese cultivator told me that some texts written by FLG followers in China on the Minghui website made her cry (Interview_130829_008). Another Taiwanese cultivator (Interview_130824_001) told me he was inspired by one text on the website. In that text, he learned that a Chinese FLG follower was sent into prison. This individual refused to take food as a form of resistance and thus was forced-fed by an officer. Accidentally, this person vomited and soiled the officer's clothes. The cultivator apologised to the officer, which surprised the officer, who knew he had been hated by other FLG followers who received injections and forced-feeding. As a result, the officer left this Chinese FLG follower alone. In reading this account, the Taiwanese FLG follower was struck by the high level of compassion shown by this Chinese FLG

cultivator, who understood that this officer was just carrying out his duty. This story and the FLG follower who relayed it to me highlight three important points. Firstly, even when facing the CCP directly in prison, FLG cultivators can still cultivate themselves according to the principles of truth, compassion and forbearance. Secondly, different cultivation levels can be learned from the Minghui website, which provides a virtual space of different cultivation examples. Although the texts are selected by the Minghui editorial board, they do not offer ‘correct’ answers or suggestions for cultivation, but only give examples. The final and most important point is that through cyberspace, FLG followers worldwide can connect with each other, even with someone who has been in prison or *laojiaosuo*.

6.1.3 Shen Yun Performance

As already discussed in Chapter 3, Shen Yun Performance has developed as a way to ‘tell the truth’ publicly after 2006. With its slogan ‘reviving five thousand years of civilization’, Shen Yun is believed to be promoting a renaissance of traditional Chinese culture that is distinct from the national story communicated by Chinese Communist Party, which eradicated traditional Chinese ideas during the Cultural Revolution. I watched Shen Yun in multiple cities in 2013, 2014 and 2015, including Dublin, Berlin and Taipei; each of the performances comprised of different pieces of professional dancing, solo vocals, musical pieces with the Chinese instrument *erhu*, dramatic theatrical stage sets, and elegantly dressed hosts, that, taken together, evoke legendary and epic stories from Chinese folk legends. In the last two years, from 2013 to 2015, the final piece of Shen Yun performances presented an apocalyptic scene. First, symbols of the CCP, such as Tiananmen Square, were destroyed by natural disasters, such as by an earthquake or a volcanic eruption. This was then followed by a new era in which FLG followers could freely engage in their practices again.

Shen Yun Performance is therefore a new FLG ‘invention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983); it stages classical Chinese cultural traditions and beliefs through dance, song and music, while at once situating the FLG within these ancient spiritual stories. The choreography and movements of the dances draw greatly upon elements of traditional Chinese culture, such as classic Chinese dancing techniques, folk legends, ancient histories and even ethnic minority performances. Modern and Western influences are also present, such as on-stage creative modern computer animation that enhances more classic landscapes, and the use of a Western symphony orchestra that includes Chinese the instruments *erhu* and *suona*. According to Master Li (2011), Shen Yun is helped by divine beings and therefore radiates the energy of ‘truth, compassion and forbearance’. For Li, the dance and music should be staged magnificently to impress a range of international audiences; once the onlookers are convinced by the brilliant performance of Shen Yun, they will not have hostile attitudes towards the FLG and thus ‘can be saved’ in the future. FLG geopolitical discourse (as discussed in Chapter 3) is materialised and enacted through Shen Yun performances which take place in elegant and prestigious theatres around the world, for example at the Lincoln Center in New York. Figure 6.4 depicts the location and frequency of Shen Yun performance from 2005 to 2011, with the highest concentration in the U.S., followed by European countries, Canada, East Asia and East Australia. This map demonstrates how cultural theatres in different capital cities outside of China offer spaces to communicate the FLG’s alternative religious geopolitics, as well as to confirm their performance credibility and position in the world.

Figure 6.4: Frequency of Shen Yun Performance worldwide, mainly Shen Yun Performing Arts, 2005-2011.

Source: Zhengjian.org (2012).

Map: Weihuan Lin.

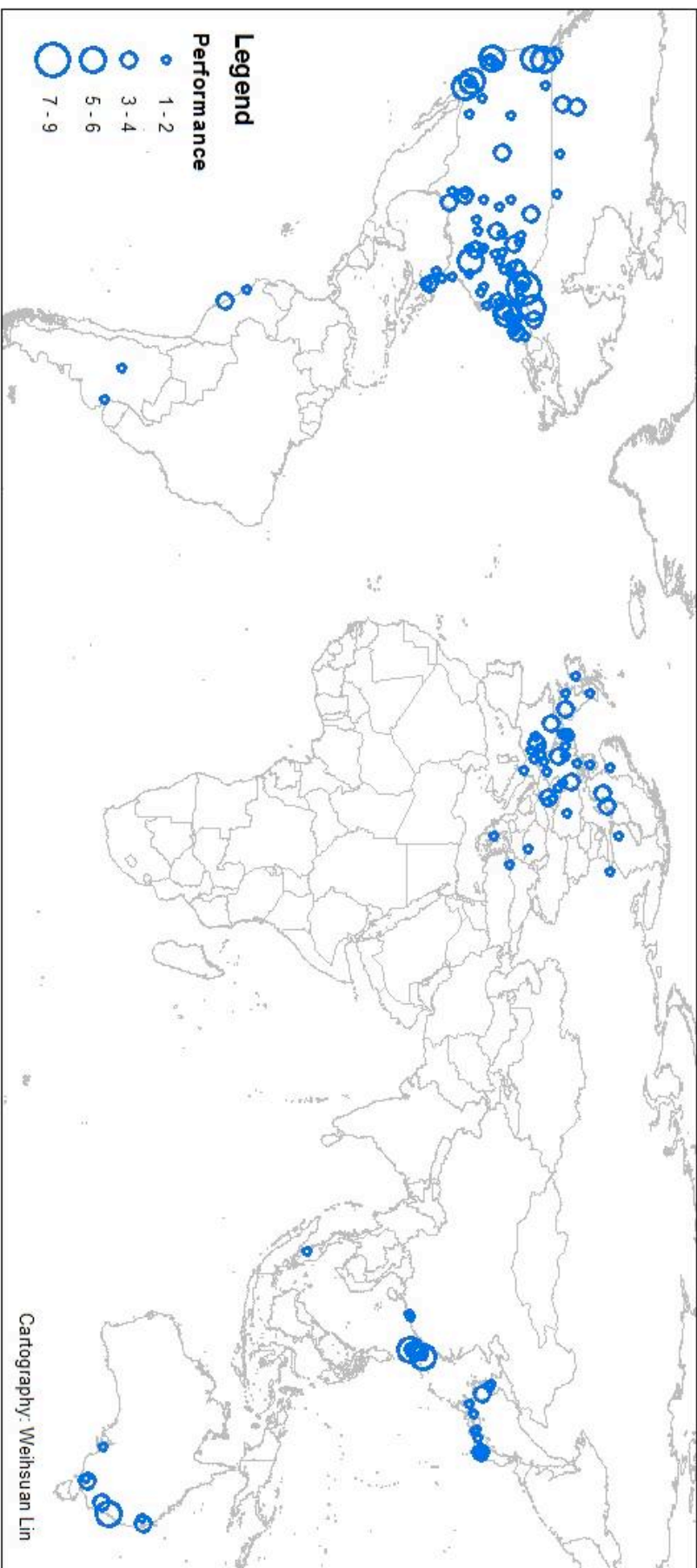


Figure 6.5 presents an example of the professional staging by Shen Yun performance at the Palace Theater in Waterbury (U.S.) in 2014; the standing ovation that the impressed audience gave the performers of this Shen Yun production is precisely what this form of ‘truth-telling’ aims for. Anecdotal evidence suggests that audiences are impressed with these shows. For example, after I presented my research about the CCP’s religious geopolitics at the Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting in Chicago in 2014, a U.S. academic geographer, who did not know that my project primarily focused on the FLG, passionately commented that he had watched Shen Yun back in 2013 and was very impressed by the performance and had become curious about the FLG as a result.

Figure 6.5: Shen Yun Performing Arts and the audience at the Palace Theater in Waterbury, U.S. (on 8 March 2014).
Source: *Epoch Times*, 2014a.



Whereas audience members outside of China, including FLG followers themselves, need to buy tickets in order to attend live performances, the Waterbury

performance was recorded and distributed in DVD format within China. In 2013, an American friend of mine who was currently living in Qing-Dao city at the time in China received a copy of a Shen Yun performance DVD through his front door in the middle of the night. We can see how radical geopolitics are made available in a DVD format and circulated within the PRC's territory. The FLG's claim to represent and embody an ancient past and millennial future through Shen Yun illustrates how the FLG creates their own space artistically, communicates their stories theatrically, and also uses popular formats (DVDs, magnificent professional dance-theatrical performances) to transgress state boundaries and persuade others with their own discourses about the 'truth'.

6.1.4 UN Human Rights Mechanisms

This section will explore how the FLG uses UN Human Rights mechanisms to exercise pressure on the Chinese government. In comparison to the European human rights regime, which is relatively strongly enforced, there is 'no international enforcement' when it comes to UN human rights legislation (Donnelly, 2003: 130, 135). Nevertheless, the UN serves as a significant and credible international source of information about human rights internationally.

Some research reports have analysed China's role in the UN human rights system. China continually insists on the non-interference principle of the Charter of the United Nations (Weatherley, 2014: 1). China also legitimises its human rights efforts based upon its economic development, whereby it prioritises the state, the majority and stability over individual political rights (Sceats and Breslin, 2012: 7f.). My examination of the UN's document also supports this view that China is unwilling to compromise its sovereignty in order to grant individuals absolute political and spiritual freedom. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in the latest Human Rights Committee's Universal Period Review (UN Human Rights Council, 2013: 20), the U.S. accused the Chinese

government of using extralegal means to detain human rights activists. Chinese officials firmly denied this accusation:

Not Accepted. There are no arbitrary or extrajudicial detentions in China. All criminal and security detentions are decided on and implemented based on the Criminal Procedure Law and Law on Public Security Administration of China. [...] Illegal and criminal activities shall be prosecuted according to law (UN Human Rights Council, 2014: 9).

Canada also advocated that the Chinese government should stop the prosecution and persecution of people for their religious practices, including the Falun Gong (UN Human Rights Council, 2013: 21). Chinese officials opposed this accusation and argued that the FLG was a cult (UN Human Rights Council, 2014: 11). As these examples demonstrate, the UN HRC has a limited influence in implementing legal changes at the national scale within the current system that grants sovereign states powers that supersede any power given to the UN to conduct international reviews of human rights abuses.

The FLG has also noted these limitations. In 1999 immediately after the official ban on the FLG, Master Li expressed that hope that ‘international governments and human rights groups can help keep the situation guarded and under control, and that it [the FLG] will be given a fair treatment’ (Schechter, 2001: 177). By 2003, Master Li was critical of the ability of the UN Human Rights Committee to implement change or penalise those states breaking internationally agreed conduct. Consequently, Li urged FLG followers to rely on their own ‘truth-telling’ projects instead of depending on third parties. He argued:

And some think, “There are so many democratic countries in the world. Why don't they raise their voices? What's the United Nations doing now?” And that's how things look on the surface. But actually, I can tell you what that reflects: We're too dependent on human beings. If human beings were to end the persecution, what a disgrace that would be to Dafa disciples! We wouldn't have validated the Fa, we wouldn't have established mighty virtue in the persecution, and our Dafa disciples wouldn't have blazed their own path. [...] And as you kept putting your hopes in ordinary people they made it so that your resolution couldn't even be raised and so that the U.S. was

kicked out of the Human Rights Commission. You still placed your hopes in ordinary people, so they made a country that violates human rights the chair (Li, 2003c).

Despite the lack of implementation powers, the UN Human Rights Committee still functions as a credible, non-biased source of information that is made available to politicians and general publics around the world, and can be used by states, activists or social groups to pursue their own goals. For example, Manfred Nowak, the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, made an on-site visit to China in 2005 at the invitation of the Chinese Government (UN Commission on Human Rights, 2006). He interviewed detainees in Beijing Municipal Women's Re-Education Through Labour (RTL) Facility. Detainees stated that 'Falun Gong practitioners who had not renounced their beliefs after six months in detention were placed in the Intensive Training section until they were "reformed"'; one FLG detainee said that the majority of detainees are Falun Gong followers (UN Commission on Human Rights, 2006: 45). This report was later quoted by a judge of the Argentinian Federal Criminal and Correctional Court in 2009 (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2010: 12). Although the Argentinian court does not have judicial power in China to issue arrest warrants, such as to interrogate the two high-ranking CCP officials regarding the persecution of the FLG in China, due to the UN's informative and highly credible function, the judge could refer to the UN report as evidence based upon a credible source. FLG followers also gain access to UN reports and in this way can strategically use the UN Human Rights systems. In Manfred Nowak's 2006 report, FLG followers made up 66% of the total victims of the alleged torture out of a total 1160 individuals (from 2000 to 2005) (UN Commission on Human Rights, 2006: 13). At the same time FLG followers can try to appeal to the UN. In 2013, the FLG-affiliated organisation, Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting (DAFOH), collected nearly 1.5 million signatures worldwide for a

petition addressing the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that called for an end to forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience in China (DAFOH, 2013). These signatures were collected by individual FLG followers from passers-by on the street worldwide, including in Dublin city where I observed these initiatives.

As examples in this section have illustrate, FLG followers initiate and participate in a range of ‘truth-telling’ activities through the public spaces of the city, media outlets, Shen Yun performances and the UN Human Rights to pursue the geopolitical goals of challenging CCP persecution and saving sentient lives. In the next section, I describe FLG followers’ indirect and direct experiences with the CCP, which they consider as ‘evil forces’. I then conclude the chapter by examining the spaces through which FLG discourse circulates among followers, as well as the ways that individual bodies connect to others in this and other-worldly realms.

6.2 Emotional Connections Among FLG Followers and the Encounter with ‘Evil Forces’

I begin with the story of a female Taiwanese FLG follower in her seventies, W, whom I interviewed in Hong Kong. W started her FLG cultivation in 1998, when Master Li came to Taiwan and gave lectures. She met Master Li at that time. Immediately after the CCP’s repression of the FLG, she also flew to Hong Kong and to New York to join demonstrations. But she stopped joining the FLG’s public activities in 2001, because she didn’t want to commit to the practice of ‘sending out righteous thoughts’⁴¹ when Master Li’s scriptures instructed FLG followers to do so.

W: I didn’t feel right about ‘sending out righteous thoughts’(laugh).

⁴¹ As discussed in Chapter 3, when FLG followers send out righteous thoughts, they should cite the following formula in their minds: ‘The Fa rectifies the cosmos; the evil is completely eliminated’; and ‘The Fa rectifies Heaven and Earth; immediate retribution in this life time’.

WL: What do you mean ‘I didn’t feel right’?

W: I felt, I felt it [the principle of ‘sending out righteous thoughts’] wasn’t the same as what Master [Li] told us. What I didn’t feel was right was that [...] Master told us [to follow] truth, compassion and forbearance, right? How could you eliminate others? [...] Then, a colleague said, ‘They [the evil forces to be eliminated by righteous thoughts] were in another dimension’. I said, ‘You cannot even do that. You can see it, so you treat others nice; you don’t see it, so you want to eliminate others. How can it work in this way?’ This was my thought. I said I was right. Master [Li] said truth, compassion and forbearance. I thought I was right.

WL: Then?

W: So I didn’t come out [to join public activities] (laugh). Afterwards [...] I didn’t come out. I just practiced physical exercises and learned *fa* at home. I didn’t come out (Interview_130831_002).

In 2009, W began to have difficulties with her daughter-in-law, who moved in to her house. She decided to leave her daughter-in-law and son alone. One day she went out with a friend dancing:

W: At this time, I was not on the *fa*, not on Master’s *fa* [she was not cultivating herself according to FLG standards]. I went to a dance with another mother, a friend. I danced as a male and she as female; we went dancing (laugh). At that moment, I cultivated ‘non-self’. At that moment, I didn’t want to care about you [her family and her daughter in law and family]. I cultivated ‘non-self’. [...] This ‘non-self’ made me suffer from old threatening forces. I danced and danced until the muscle and bone of my leg broke. I suddenly realised that it was the old forces; it was old forces. I felt the CCP, the re-education through labour camps and the repression. It was at that moment that it [her leg] broke. The muscles and bones broke inside, as did the skin outside. I walked so slowly, every step hurt. Such an extraordinary pain!

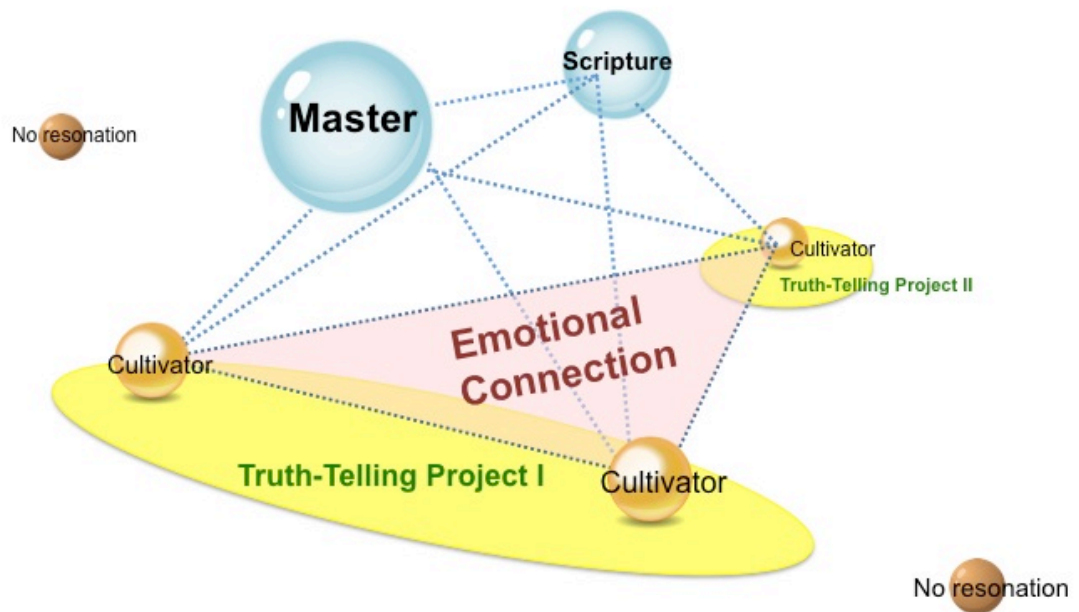
So, that was the year of 2009, when for the first time I came [to the street demonstration again]. I endured the pain in every activity, until this year [2013], the 21st July, it was totally ok. You see, it was four years. So I endured it for four years. At the time I thought: ‘See, China, those [FLG followers in China], ten years. They have been repressed for ten years. My case counts for nothing at all!’

So, I decided to think righteously and act righteously. So if there is any activity [public activities, even in Hong Kong], I just come. [...] I felt, you [other Taiwanese FLG followers] know the old forces through reading these books. I know old forces by experiencing them. For righteous thoughts and righteous deeds too, you just read these righteous thoughts and righteous deeds in the books, whereas I am an actual example. [...] Now when facing things, I use righteous thoughts to face them (Interview_130831_002).

These interview passages reveal four important points. First, even when Master Li was absent in the public view immediately following the ban in 1999, W continued her faith in the FLG and travelled abroad to demonstrate her belief in the truth of basic FLG teachings of *fa*, specifically of truth, compassion and forbearance. Master Li's charisma played a minor role for her at this stage. Second, despite her beliefs, she stopped her public engagements as she thought the principle of 'eliminating evil forces', as written in the scriptures and published on the FLG websites in 2001, contradicted her belief in the principles of 'truth, compassion and forbearance'. She had doubts about the newly published scriptures. Third, when she decided to only care about herself and not care about others, including her family members, but by implication also other FLG followers – what she called 'non-self' – she experienced extreme physical pain. She interpreted this as the result of old forces: 'This "non-self" makes me suffer from old threatening forces'. Following this experience, she returned to her cultivation practices and decided to again participate in street demonstrations including sending out righteous thoughts. She realised that one should not only care about oneself, but also about others. Fourth, and significantly, W connected the physical pain she experienced with the suffering of other FLG followers in China, which, I believe, indicates the strong emotional bond that exists among FLG followers.

Figure 6.6 shows the shared emotional and spiritual connection among FLG followers, regardless of where they are. When W walked through the street demonstration for a couple of hours, she believed her ongoing struggle with pain was a form of fighting with the old forces in other dimensions. By fighting evil forces, when she demonstrated she believed herself to be connected with FLG followers who suffered in re-education through labour camps in China.

Figure 6.6: Spaces of Horizontal Cooperation and Emotional Connections Amongst FLG Followers.
 Source: Weihsuan Lin.



W’s personal story demonstrates how she chose to continue her practices of ‘telling-truth/saving-life’, such as through public marches, after what she perceived to be a battle with evil forces. Another similar case in which a follower associated pain with CCP evil forces was revealed in an interview with another elderly Taiwanese female FLG cultivator at a Taipei demonstration (Interview_130720_003). She was in the US to join the *fa*-conference in 2013. As there is a 12-13 hour time difference between the U.S and China, she stopped using the computer program Skype to tell the ‘truth’ to people in the PRC. Later, she discovered that she couldn’t get out of bed. She understood her experience as evidence of her having been taken advantage of by demons. Immediately afterwards, she asked her daughter to set up Skype for her, so that she could again call the Chinese in the PRC and tell them the ‘truth’. On the same day, she recovered from the abnormal physical condition.

These examples were typical of other FLG followers I met in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Dublin (cities outside of China) who not only knew, understood and thought about the

CCP through their ‘truth-telling’ activities and emotional connections with other FLG followers, they also felt that they had direct experience of the presence of the CCP, even though they themselves did not live under the CCP regime. Some encountered the CCP directly through non-life threatening examples of FLG persecution in their own countries. For example, at a political level, the PRC embassy in Germany attempted to pressure the Stage Theater in Berlin to stop their contract with the Shen Yun performance in 2014 (Schütze, 2014). Similarly, the PRC embassy in Ireland denounced the FLG as an anti-society cult and claimed that Shen Yun performance was a political tool of the FLG to preach about their cult (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Ireland, 2014). Or, for examples, in Taiwan and Hong Kong, two active and distinguishable groups opposing the FLG are the Concentric Patriotism Association of R.O.C. in Taiwan (CPA) and the Hong Kong Youth Care Association Limited (YCA) (see Figures 6.7 and 6.8). According to a lawyer who is a FLG follower, these two associations are financially connected to the CCP and have been targeting FLG followers in Taiwan and Hong Kong in recent years (Interview_130712_003). These two associations have been an important topic in some *fa*-study groups: FLG followers discuss what the two associations have said, and done to FLG followers and how a FLG cultivator could deal with them.

Figures 6.7 and 6.8: The Hong Kong Youth Care Association protestors (with green uniforms). In Figure 6.7, the left flag states: ‘The Falun Gong evil cult, inciting hatred and separation of the state’; the right flag states: ‘The Falun Gong is not a religious group, but a hooligan political organisation’.

Source: Weihsuan Lin, 01 January, 2014, Hong Kong.

Figure 6.7



Figure 6.8.



One Chinese woman who had immigrated to Hong Kong shared her experience of the Hong Kong Youth Care Association Limited (YCA) with me:

MN: Before, I used to distribute newspapers in Canton Road. Distributing newspapers is not such a sensitive task like this [telling-truth to the passers-by and urging them to renounce CCP related membership]. I started to come out, tell the truth and pursued renouncement of the CCP membership because of the arrival of the YCA in Hong Kong. [...] If they had not come, I would have possibly not dared to come to the telling-truth site.

WL: Why not?

MN: Because of fear and shyness. Delivering newspapers was also saving lives. But actually, it [delivering newspaper] doesn't have that mighty virtue. You just gave people the newspaper; you didn't talk. Here, during our action of telling the truth, we are also elevating our minds [...] The YCA was everywhere, my heart felt this was unbearable. So, every time [when I saw or heard the YCA], I decided to come out [to get in touch with the public] (Interview_131227_003).

In the case of MN, a FLG follower, her personal encounters with the YCA changed her decision to participate in ‘truth-telling’ activities with a more ‘mighty virtue’, including talking to people and asking Chinese citizens to renounce their CCP memberships (see

Section 6.3 below). Before, she was passively delivering newspapers ‘because of fear and shyness’, but later, the presence of the YCA ‘everywhere’ triggered her resolve to engage with the public more actively and fearlessly. Personal experiences with the CCP-related elements, such as encounters with the YCA, can strengthen FLG followers’ commitment to ‘truth-telling’ outside of Mainland China.

Another case highlighting the presence of the CCP in FLG followers’ lives was revealed through participant observation at the border at the Hong Kong Airport, when Taiwanese FLG followers tried to enter Hong Kong to join the street demonstrations (Fieldnotes_130830). I was flying with a FLG follower from the Tian Guo Marching Band, Taiwan, to Hong Kong to participate in a demonstration in August, 2013. On the airplane, she kept reading the scripture and told me three times that I should wait for her on the chair beside the luggage claim in the airport. She asked for my telephone number and told me how to get to the hotel by bus. I wondered why I would need to know how to get to the hotel if we were both supposed to be going together. In the Hong Kong airport, we lined up in front of two Passport Control counters at the same time. I was passed immediately, but she was taken away by an airport official. I did what she told me and waited for her by the luggage claim area. After thirty-five minutes, she came out with a peaceful face. She told me she had been asked several routine questions and she believed that the official did not know she was a FLG follower. I only then realised that in the airplane she had been preparing for the possibility of being questioned by customs. That same evening, some other Taiwanese FLG members of the Tian Guo Marching Band were denied entry into Hong Kong and had to return to Taiwan.

In the evening when we arrived at the hotel in Hong Kong, our roommate from Taiwan, SL, arrived. SL told us that another female member from Tian Guo Marching Band, Taiwan, who flew with SL, was sent back to Taiwan. SL said that the follower that was turned back seemed to be in a good state of mind. So SL assumed that the

return of the other follower was associated her own, SL's, cultivation level; SL mentioned that she had some issues on her mind recently. The atmosphere was quiet but heavy for everyone that night, including me. After midnight, another member from the Band, D, arrived. She told us that another member was called to a small room in the airport. D left a note and came to the hotel by herself. The three female FLG followers were silent for a while. One commented that D's friend needed to stay in Hong Kong for one night, because there was no return flight to Taipei. Another one said there was still a flight to Taiwan. The three of them didn't discuss it any further and we just went to sleep. On that day, I didn't hear a word about the CCP or the police in Hong Kong, although these authorities had controlled the FLG followers' entrance into Hong Kong. What also surprised me was that SL looked inwards at her own cultivation, instead of examining her friend's cultivation or blaming the customs police at the Hong Kong airport, when trying to understand the reasons why another follower travelling with her was denied entry.

Taiwanese FLG followers experienced the CCP authority in other, more indirect ways. FLG follower LL (Interview_130821_001) used an internet forum in China to tell 'the truth' to the Chinese in the PRC. He was especially unlucky because his account was regularly blocked or cancelled, meaning that he lost all previous contacts and conversations with forum users in the PRC. As a result, he constantly needed to apply for new accounts. According to him, his account was blocked by the CCP; he thought that it was his own cultivation level that resulted in the CCP so often blocking his accounts.

Although the experiences of FLG followers who came from places outside of China were telling examples of CCP repression, these cannot compare to those who suffered extreme persecution. The most painful moments communicated by FLG followers about such experiences with the CCP in my research was silence, that is,

when those affected could not talk about their experiences. In Dublin and Hong Kong, I met three Chinese people, aged between thirty and forty years, who had been sent to re-education through labour camps or *laojiaosuo*. All three were unable to talk about what happened to them in the camps. Normally, FLG cultivators liked to share their stories and thoughts on life or about the CCP with me. But not these individuals. The two male FLG followers in Dublin always kept a distance from me. In October 2012, one FLG follower spoke to a small Irish group in the Houses of the *Oireachtas*, the National Parliament of Ireland in Dublin. At his talk, he mentioned that he had spent two years in the *laojiaosuo*. He said his days comprised of hard labour from 5.30am to 5pm in a factory. One audience member asked him how far away the labour camp was from (location D). He said it was a one-and-a-half-hour drive and that the journey was the darkest part. Then, he stopped talking. After a couple of minute's silence, he started to talk again about general human rights issues but never came back to his personal experiences in the *laojiaosuo*. The 'darkest part' was not explained. After the meeting, I talked with another FLG follower from China. She said he should tell the Western audience about what happened to him in the *laojiaosuo* because his story was unique and touching. I said that he might need more time or just didn't want to talk about it; I suggested that she was being too impatient. She replied, 'Impatient? Since the repression in 1999, how many chances have passed? How much time do we still have? [...] His story is what the Irish like to hear. But we can do nothing if he does not want to talk about it. [...] He didn't mention the key points' (Fieldnotes_121010). Even in the National Parliament of Ireland in Dublin, this male FLG follower still could not talk about the 'darkest part' or 'the key points' of his experiences in the *laojiaosuo*.

Another case was in Hong Kong, where an elderly female FLG follower pointed to a young FLG woman and told me that the latter had been sent to *laojiaosuo* and that I should talk to her. I turned to the young woman; she smiled but declined my request by

shaking her head. She pointed to the poster, which showed pictures and illustrations of various kinds of torture, and said, ‘I was pretty much the same’. She continued to deliver flyers to passers-by without talking to me. This incident, as well as the examples above, indicated to me that the experience of the *laojiaosuo* may have been too painful to remember. Yet their silent, but physical presence in a group of FLG followers were important reminders of the reasons for ‘truth-telling’.

Another way that FLG followers discussed and confirmed their interaction with ‘evil forces’ was through their belief in divine retribution. The concept of divine retribution, which would result in the ultimate collapse of the CCP, is a widely accepted concept in Taiwanese society. One Taiwanese interviewee, MZ, told me:

MZ: In the past 60 years, it [the CCP] has done so many bad things. Since the Cultural Revolution, it killed so many Chinese. And something that’s even worse: the one-child policy. The one-child policy has aborted so many lives. Those children there, they were all lives. The Communists have done so many bad things. Actually I believe that good and evil will always be rewarded. It needs to pay for what it has done. The time is coming soon. The time is coming soon. [...] If you believe that good and evil will always be rewarded, you can believe that the Communists cannot get around it. If the Communists have no problem [are not punished], this earth cannot be lived, right? It [the CCP] has killed so many people, destroyed morality, and denied the gods and Buddha. That is a tremendous crime. It cannot always get away with it (Interview_130716_005).

One common piece of ‘evidence’ mentioned by FLG followers as the coming of the CCP divine retribution is the existence of a stone in China that allegedly reads ‘The Chinese Communist Party Collapse’⁴². This mysterious stone was first reported in 2002 and has since been discussed by *The Epoch Times* (Yang, 2014). One Chinese interviewee in Hong Kong always showed *The Epoch Times* photo of stone’s imprint to other Chinese tourists at ‘truth-telling’ sites to provide evidence of the destined collapse of the CCP (Fieldnotes_131226). Other supernatural phenomena, which were reportedly witnessed by FLG followers in Hong Kong, were also mentioned during my fieldwork (Interview_131230_001). One FLG follower saw the eye of Lion Rock turn red in

⁴² 中國共產黨亡.

December 2013 and took a photo of it with her smart phone. According to folklore, and as published in *The Epoch Times* (08/01/2014), a lion associated with Bodhisattva once warned people of flooding (Zhen, 2014). These unusual phenomena were discussed and accepted among the FLG Followers in Hong Kong as signs that the time of the CCP's collapse was coming (Interview_131230_001).

The collapse of the CCP and the coming of a new era are also represented in Shen Yun performances, as previously mentioned in Section 6.1.3. According to an interviewee (Interview_130716_005), and as witnessed in my field observations (2014), the tsunami or earthquake represented in Shen Yun performances destroyed many things, including Tiananmen Square. In the performance, a new order was re-established.

As these examples demonstrate, although Taiwanese FLG followers have never lived under the CCP regime, they encounter the CCP's existence when they: tell the 'truth' to Chinese citizens in tourist sites in Taiwan, demonstrate in Hong Kong, or chat with PRC citizens via internet. They not only read about 'evil forces' in Master Li's scriptures or in the media, but also associate the struggle with the CCP as part of their cultivation at an individual and bodily level through direct and indirect experiences. Every encounter with the CCP is nonetheless personal and unique. Master Li's scripture lays out a foundation and explanation of the logic behind the current social and political scene, and FLG cultivators connect with other followers, and interpret the scripture and experience evil forces through their own understandings. The resonance between Master Li, the scriptures and the cultivator is empowered by the cultivator's unique active participation in FLG activities.

This section presented a varied picture of the interactions between FLG followers and the CCP. These FLG followers experienced the CCP's presence either directly or indirectly, resonated with FLG followers inside China, and circulated geopolitical discourses among themselves and to non-FLG followers. The next section

will introduce how FLG followers practice ‘truth-telling’ and how they associate this geopolitical practice with their own personal cultivation.

6.3 ‘Truth-Telling’ as a Part of Cultivation

As discussed in Chapter 3, Master Li’s scriptures describe how telling the ‘truth’ that the FLG is not an evil cult can save lives. Those who have hatred towards the FLG are believed to be against *fa*, which, as I have previously discussed, is held to be the fundamental origin of all cosmic matters. In the period of ‘*fa* rectifies the human world’, people who have hatred towards the FLG will be weeded out (see Figure 3.5). Telling these people the ‘truth’ so that they can change their minds and no longer have hatred towards the FLG is considered a means through which they can be saved. Similar, but slightly different to Foucault’s discussion of the Cynics, *parrhēsia* of life might change other people’s behaviour (see Section 4.1.3); in this way the care of the self and the care of the other coincide. In the case of the FLG, ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ is tied to a FLG follower’s personal cultivation, which means that the care of others is integrated into the care of the self. Below I discuss ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ activities, including the renouncement of CCP memberships. I then analyse how this activity is tied to personal cultivation.

One middle-aged woman, S, who migrated from Beijing to Hong Kong in 2007, was telling the ‘truth’ to Chinese tourists in Hong Kong. She came to this tourist site every day except on weekends. I interviewed her and asked her whether she had met any CCP officials. She answered:

S: Yes, Party members and high ranking officials. [...] Some others just wandered around and kept looking at me. I said, ‘I don’t care who and how you are, you need to protect your own safety and life. We understand that you have to have a job to sustain your life. Buddha and gods look at people’s hearts. People who are kind are safe.’ I’ve also met police [officials] before. After membership renouncement, I followed one. He said: ‘Don’t follow me. Do you know what we do? In Beijing, I am the one who would arrest you.’ I said, ‘Even if [you] arrest us, you should protect your life. I

also know the police who arrest us, some high ranking officials, even those from the Political and Legislative Affairs Committee or 610 offices who are responsible for monitoring FLG followers or thought-work. They've also renounced [their party memberships]. You are [just] a police officer; don't be afraid. You are now in Hong Kong, you still hide yourself when speaking? Is it so scary? As if there was a ghost haunting you? You should be more relaxed here [in Hong Kong]; breathe some fresh air; don't feel so constrained.' That young guy also renounced his party membership. In the past six years up until now, a total of 15,000 people [the number of people S successfully persuaded to renounce their party memberships] (Interview_131230_001).

Although her stories about confronting CCP and police officials are strong, when relaying this to me, S's tone was very gentle and soft. Even when facing CCP officials, her attitude was: 'Buddha and gods look at people's hearts. People who are kind are safe.' Her way of talking was so approachable and trusting, that I did not find hard to believe her claim that she had persuaded about 15,000 PRC citizens to renounce their CCP related memberships in the past six years.

On several occasions, I witnessed FLG followers in Dublin, Taipei and Hong Kong successfully persuading some Chinese tourists to renounce their CCP memberships. One of the most impressive cases was a woman who migrated from Guangdong province to Hong Kong and spoke Cantonese. After interviewing her, we went out of a shopping mall and she started to talk to people sitting outside. At the beginning, one person took her *Epoch Times*, and then she started to talk to him. However, after listening to her talk, he returned the newspaper, turned his back to her and waved his hands to refuse her. But she continued to talk for about two minutes. Suddenly he nodded his head. Within fifteen minutes, I saw four other people also nod their heads, indicating that they agreed to renounce their CCP related memberships. She then wrote down a pseudonym for each of the five. This female FLG follower told me she was more successful in persuading others to renounce their CCP membership when she herself was in a peaceful mental state. If she felt anger or worry, no one would listen to her, even when her intention was to save them (Fieldnotes_131230). In the most

cases, if PRC citizens did not nod their heads, the FLG follower did not count them as ‘renouncing’ their Party memberships and did not write down any pseudonyms for them. For FLG followers, each person should be responsible for his or her own decision.

According to another interviewee (Interview_130712_003), 60,000 Chinese have renounced their CCP memberships in the Taipei 101 Financial Center (Figures 5.3 and 5.7) between 2008 and 2013, when PRC citizens were allowed to visit. Another FLG follower in Sun Moon Lake in Taiwan told me that each day she persuaded around twenty Chinese tourists to renounce their CCP associated membership (Interview_140110_001).

As these and numerous other examples indicate, ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ is a very personal and highly individualised FLG action. It can include handing out flyers, talking to people, or participating in demonstrations. I noted that about half of the FLG followers on the ‘telling-truth’ sites in Taipei, Hong Kong and Dublin did not talk directly with tourists or passers-by from the PRC, so they didn’t ‘actively’ persuade them to renounce their CCP associated membership. These FLG followers stand passively and quietly on the site and either hold a poster or deliver FLG materials that are critical of the CCP. One Taiwanese FLG follower, HS, who is a nurse and whom I interviewed in Hong Kong, did not participate in directly asking PRC citizens to renounce their CCP memberships. When I asked her why she didn’t talk to Chinese citizens, she said:

HS: Probably it needs to be learned gradually. I don’t have many experiences, so I don’t know how to talk to them. We [Taiwanese] don’t really understand their [people from the PRC] thoughts. The ways of thinking in Taiwan and China are still different. So it is not easy to talk with them. [...] Telling them [people from the PRC] what is written on the [FLG] newspaper is ok [to me], but not membership-renouncement (Interview_131229_002).

I have already suggested that ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ activities are part of self-cultivation. For example, in the case of W who experienced evil forces through bodily pain after dancing with her friend (see Section 6.2), she described her pain as resulting from her own *karma*:

W: At the time, oh, my leg, the bumpy motorcycle ride really hurt. Yeah, because it was broken, the muscle and bone, wrapped by skin. That pain. And my ass, when I lay down with pain, I had to sleep lying on my front. For example, you don’t see it in this dimension, because it is in another dimension. Really, you feel, that the old forces were punching you to death, punching you. You experience it. Oh, really, punching me to death, kicking you this way. [...] When a colleague told me to deliver the newspaper, or do other sorts of things together, if they called me, I always said OK. I never mentioned my leg pain or whatever, never. Actually you don’t know how painful it was, so deadly painful (laugh). I can’t really describe it, really. It was, anyway, it was eliminating *karma*, so I endured it.

WL: Why did you say it was eliminating *karma*? You just said it was due to the interference of old forces? Why was it eliminating *karma*?

W: [...] Both *karma* and the interference of the old forces [...] Anything that happens is not singular; it involves many factors. It depends on how you understand it. Somebody might understand it incorrectly. It has many aspects. It is easy when it is singular, but it is not singular. Anything that happens is not due to a single reason. This is my understanding (Interview_130831_002).

FLG followers like W experience the CCP’s presence, either directly or indirectly in their lives, although they might not discuss it openly with others. They also associated these evil forces behind the CCP with their own *karma* and their personal level of cultivation. As in the case of those denied entrance at the Hong Kong Airport mentioned above, SL assumed that her friend’s return was associated SL’s recent imperfect cultivation practices. Because both W and SL felt like they didn’t cultivate themselves well enough, these evil forces were able to ‘take advantage of the gaps in their state of mind’.⁴³

Other followers also described how ‘truth-telling’ activities were linked to self-care and cultivation. The following discussion will show how FLG cultivators associate

⁴³ 鑽空子.

telling ‘truth’ activities with their personal journey of self-care and cultivation. The young Chinese woman who migrated to Hong Kong, MN, shared her different understanding of telling ‘truth’ activities with me:

MN: Before coming here [this busy traffic spot], I just did the three things because Master Li told us to do, quite mechanically like finishing some duties. Because Master asked for it, we could not avoid it. But now, I feel, if I don’t come, then, so many lives will not be saved. I feel sorry for them. They have watched TV in China that criticised us, *dafa* [great *fa*]. We are Buddha *fa*; Falun Dafa is Buddha *fa*. If a sentient being has bad thoughts about *dafa*, he will be eliminated as the universe goes through the process of formation-stasis-degeneration-destruction. If I tell a person that *dafa* is good, that person knows it, and [if he/she] renounces the CCP associated membership, his/her life can continue in the future. So I am happy. I hope they can all be saved. Now, it is from my heart. Everyday I come here to save people. So is it (Interview_131227_003).

This interview reveals two possible modalities of ‘telling-truth/saving-life’: one as a follower’s duty under Master Li’s instruction, and another as caring for others according to scriptural principles, which are individually interpreted. MN indicated that she chose the former, but then, after coming to a ‘truth-telling’ site, she began to feel responsible for saving lives. After interacting with passers-by and practicing ‘truth-telling’ for a period of time, this woman from China was now acting as an independent subject and enacting the scriptural principles from ‘her heart’ to save people.

At the same ‘telling-truth’ site, I asked another Taiwanese female FLG follower, ML, whether and how ‘telling-truth’ was associated with cultivation. She replied:

ML: When I told the truth to others, some waved their hand and rejected me. I would think that I want you to understand the truth and you don’t want to. This involves my state of mind. I will think about it again: ‘Am I here for something? Asking for something? Or should I use the attitude of letting things take their own course and compassion to face people?’ If I felt impatient, I told myself immediately, ‘No, I am here to save people.’ I adjusted my mind; I would use a smile to face the sentient beings. This is my compassion. So we ask for nothing. It is not that I do this because I want something. It is by these small details, I am not asking for elevating myself, but the elevation of self happens naturally. [...]

As a cultivator, [...] you should find your own faults, not those of others [...]. People can be relaxed by letting things take their own course. What can you do if you want something, but you can’t get it? Like you want to get your

degree, you keep wanting it. But what if you are predestined not to get it?
(Interview_131228_006).

The action of ‘telling-truth’ is tightly associated with cultivation. Rather than ‘asking for something’, ML adjusted her mind and practice compassion and ‘use[s] a smile to face sentient beings’. At the same time, by telling the ‘truth’, FLG followers like ML continue to cultivate themselves. For ML, when telling the ‘truth’, the follower should have no purpose in mind, but, as she said twice in this passage, cultivators must be relaxed by ‘letting things take their own course’⁴⁴. In this case, although she reminded herself that she was there to save others and let others know about the ‘truth’, ML continually looked at herself, not others, and adjusted her attitude towards others accordingly.

FLG cultivators often interpreted their experiences of similar issues differently; each person understood different aspects of their encounters with the CCP or what ‘truth-telling’ activities meant to them according to one’s own cultivation at different stage. As part of their own practices of self-care, they were extremely self-reflective. For example, cultivator LL told me about his changing attitudes towards approaching the Concentric Patriotism Association of the R.O.C (CPA), a group mentioned earlier in this chapter, and depicted in Figures 6.9 and 6.10 I will discuss LL’s story below, but first wish to provide some background information about the CPA based upon my research. This group disturbs the FLG’s activities in Taiwan continually. During my fieldwork in Taiwan, I encountered the same four people from the CPA several times. It was a very small group, in comparison to the larger YCA in Hong Kong. They displayed hostile messages against the FLG in front of PRC tourists, mainly in Taipei City 101. For example, the message shown on the pink paper on the van in Figure 6.9 reads: ‘Taiwan needs peace and safety; supporting one country, two systems; and peaceful unification [with China].’ In Figure 6.10, the man wearing the green shirt was

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waving a PRC flag. The message on the pink paper in the image reads: ‘FLG, evil cult! Get out of Taiwan’. In July 2013, they stayed mainly in the van for less than one hour (Figure 6.9), whereas in September in the same year, they also occupied a space next to the FLG and stayed until evening (Figure 6.10). From my own personal and research experiences, the messages shown in these two figures are obviously not Taiwanese mainstream opinion. Moreover, unification with China had very low rates of support in Taiwan (Figure 6.9); Taiwan also has another national flag instead of the red five-star flag (Figure 6.10). As already discussed in Chapter 2, the CCP’s language of ‘evil cult’ or the CPA’s discourse of ‘get out of Taiwan’ are extremely unlikely to be used by average Taiwanese person against the FLG (Figure 6.10).

Figure 6.9: Concentric Patriotism Association of R.O.C (the car) and the FLG ‘Truth-Telling’ Site (right), Taipei City 101 (17 July 2013). The message on the van reads: ‘Taiwan needs peace and safety; supporting one country, two systems; and peaceful unification.’ Source: Photo taken by Weihsuan Lin.

Figure 6.10: Concentric Patriotism Association of R.O.C Occupies a Public Space next to the FLG, Taipei City 101 (02 September 2013). The man wearing the green shirt is waving the PRC flag; the message on the pink paper: ‘FLG, evil cult! Get out of Taiwan’. Source: Photo taken by Weihsuan Lin.



When LL described his initial attitudes towards the CPA, he stated:

LL: In my previous stage [...] when they [CPA] came, I sent out righteous thoughts by hoping a car would crash into their van and then the shouting and blaming person would immediately collapse or lightning would strike him. So, I thought of these kinds of things (Interview_130821_001).

Later, he explained why he developed a different attitude toward the CPA, which he related to his personal cultivation:

LL: If you understand it [*fa*], [you] don't hate these people. It is not the problem of these people, but the evil factors behind them, which are manipulating them. Once you clean out the evil factors, these people will be awakened. You still need to eliminate these evil factors. This is [what] the Master's *fa* [tells us]. But sometimes we cannot control ourselves and have sentimentality. Some *tongxiu* [fellow cultivators] said they were hurt when hearing them [CPA members] insult the Master and they would cry. At the same time, I was thinking, sure we don't like that they insult Master [Li]. But will anything happen when Master Li is insulted? Actually no, it is not a big deal -- not because of these people. These people insulting the Master are like seeking one's own doom. So how should we treat this issue, with what kind of attitude? We should get rid of sentimentality, get rid of it. Like when others insult your father in public. Definitely [you will] feel sad, and arguing is necessary. But it is sentimentality. We should be clear and not to be moved or influenced by sentimentality (Interview_130821_001).

When facing the CPA, LL discovered that he needed to control his 'sentimentality', including his anger and hatred, as well as his attachments to Master Li. His self-analysis indicates that there is no one correct attitude towards the CPA, as the different attitudes one takes, including emotions like hate or acceptance, originate from one's different cultivation levels.

Another elderly educated Chinese woman, TL, who I interviewed in Hong Kong told me more about her understanding of 'telling-truth' from a cultivation perspective (Interview_131225_002):

TL: You need to cultivate yourself higher, level after level. Every day when I meet these people, I think, they were great gods before. In order to obtain *fa*, they have now stopped here, becoming poor beings. They become like this, know nothing and even insult you. What will happen to them? So, you feel sorry for them. Actually, compassion, in my common language, is to have pity for [...]. Because you are higher, you feel compassion to those who are below you. You wouldn't feel compassion for Buddha who is higher than you, right?

This woman was expelled from China to Hong Kong three years before I interviewed her. However, as she states here her 'truth-telling' actions are not targeted at the CCP per se, but those 'poor' sentient beings 'below' her now but once being 'great gods

before’, whom she pities. After 1999, Master Li’s scriptures and ideas position FLG followers in a ‘higher’ position in relation to PRC citizens. In other words, Master Li’s discourse activates FLG followers to ‘rescue’ those perceived to be lower than them. This discourse has a scale strategy that focuses not only on the powerful Party-State, but also on the ordinary citizen in China.

Similar to TL, most of my interviewees at ‘truth-telling’ sites were concerned mainly with how to tell the ‘truth’ better in order to save ordinary lives, not with overthrowing the CCP. They didn’t regard their action as ‘political’. When I talked to an eighty year old FLG follower who had fled to Taiwan in 1948 as a KMT party member, he told me ‘I don’t participate in politics. I don’t talk about politics. I only do CCP associated membership renouncement’ (Fieldnote_130731). Another interviewee, WR, objected to the use of the term ‘protest’ to describe the FLG’s demonstrations (Interview_130803_001):

YX: Protest is more like a political action. For example, if my rights are violated, you need to compensate me with money or something else. I don’t think this is the case. It [a FLG street demonstration] is more about telling the truth. Let them [especially passers-by from PRC] know the truth. That is it. No other purpose. That is why I went into the streets for demonstrations.

YX’s view and his bodily participation in the street demonstration in Hong Kong echo the Cynics, who used their own conduct, *parrhēsia* of life, to demonstrate, promote and persuade others to follow one model of ‘true’ life or an alternative mode of life to that of most people. In the case of the FLG at the current moment, followers attempt to demonstrate their lives as a true mode of life through speech, their physical presence, and their care of others. They attempt to demonstrate that the FLG is not an evil cult but a spiritual practice embraced by many ordinary people.

When I told TL, the elderly educated Chinese woman in Hong Kong who witnessed the Cultural Revolution, that ‘you have experienced political turmoil twice in your life’, she corrected me:

TL: This [the CCP's repression of the FLG] is not. How can this be political? They are totally two different issues. The Cultural Revolution depended on human minds. Now, everything has *fa*. And Master [Li] looks after you. Unless you don't cultivate; the evil won't repress you if you don't cultivate. Now Master Li is looking after you. You are afraid of nothing, even death (Interview_131226_003).

Significantly, after reading Master Li's scriptures, TL elevated a this-worldly political issue to an other-worldly spiritual level that is even beyond life and death. TL's faith in *fa* and Master Li reflect Foucault's (2011: 331f.) discussion of religious *parrhēsia*, which is that of 'a tongue full of courageous boldness', or in TL's words, 'You are afraid of nothing, even death'. In TL's case, Master Li's message did not encourage her to commit martyrdom, but advocated courage and being fearless.

Being fearless towards 'the evil' is encouraged by Master Li: 'If the evil has already reached the point where it is unsavable and unkeepable, then various measures at different levels can be used to stop it and eradicate it' (Li, 2001a). Such a provoking message, for Ownby (2008: 211), could easily be considered as an encouragement to martyrdom. However, the act of suicide is rejected by the FLG scriptures: 'committing suicide is sinful' (Li, 1996c). Master Li's scriptures discourages killing in general: '(f)or practitioners, we have set the strict requirement that they cannot kill lives' (Li, 1996e: 229, 2000d: 133). However, I understand Master Li's (2001a) as an encouragement of an attitude, in particular courage, in the face of CCP persecution. For example, on March 5, 2002, some FLG followers in Changchun, a city in the northeast of China, broadcasted FLG documentaries over China's State-run airwaves. The officials reacted with the imprisonment of more than fifteen FLG followers and the death of at least six FLG followers (Minghui.org, 2004). While these followers most likely did not anticipate such brutality, they were prepared to give up everything for what they considered to be the truth.

Although FLG followers regard their ‘telling-truth’ actions as non-political, they still believe they are fighting against evil forces at other cosmic levels. As one cultivator explained: ‘At this [earthly] level we are letting sentient beings know the truth; in another space there is a war between righteousness and viciousness’ (Interview_130801_006). One Taiwanese FLG follower who played an instrument in Tian Guo Marching Band, Taiwan, told me that some FLG followers with open celestial eyes saw the Tian Guo Marching Band in the parade flying into sky (Interview_130901_010). For her, demonstrations in Hong Kong were very sacred. FLG followers send out righteous thoughts to fight with evil forces at other cosmic levels.

Being courageous is also part of cultivation. One migrant from the PRC to Hong Kong, MN, told me how she started to participate in the ‘telling-truth’ to passers-by in a very busy public space. She was reluctant the day before, and hesitated about whether she should show up in the public space or not. That night, she had an unusually vivid dream and she understood the dream as Master Li hinting that she should go:

MN: The Master revealed it to me that I should go. Why were you still hiding at home, when *dafa* [great *fa*] has suffered, people came to insult you at your door? So I came out. [...] I was quite afraid at that time. Now, I have already eliminated that fear. Every time in the bus, I memorise *Hong Yin II* [Master Li’s short writings dated from 1999 to 2004], because it was written by the Master during the severest repression. I always memorised ‘What’s There to Fear’. So, I am not afraid of the evil here (interview_131229_003).

MN’s process of eliminating fear was accompanied by her learning and memorising the scripture, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. She was not afraid of ‘the evil here’ because she could remember Master Li’s writing ‘What’s There to Fear’:

If you have fear, they will grab you
Once your thought is righteous, evil will collapse
People practicing cultivation, filled with Fa
Sending righteous thoughts, exploding rotten ghosts
Gods are in the world, validating Fa (Li, 2004b).

Through intensive learning of the scriptures, these messages can evoke the cultivators’ courage to challenge the seemingly unshakable state authority. In other words, the

techniques of cultivation imbue cultivators with energy and courage to challenge the external world.

I have described examples of how individual FLG followers integrate ‘truth-telling’ into their own *personal* cultivation practices. Now I will turn to a brief discussion of how different ‘truth-telling’ projects are coordinated at a *collective* level, even though they are characterised by individual initiation and non-hierarchical characteristics. As I have indicated in this chapter and in previous chapters, FLG followers coordinate projects among themselves instead of waiting for top-down instructions. Taking the examples of fund raising for ‘truth-telling’ projects, at least four FLG followers have shared their experiences on how to gain support, such as financial funding from VIPs (Very Important People) with me (Interview_130818_001, Interview_130901_010, Interview_130904_009, Interview_140121_006). In these four cases, their successful actions were all initiated by the followers themselves. They didn’t actively pursue other FLG followers to take the same steps as them. This is because, according to two of them, that they don’t know other people’s levels, which may be higher than theirs (Interview_130818_001, Interview_140121_006). These four people also mentioned disagreements between themselves and other FLG followers, such as whether certain projects deserve as much energy or input as others. They also disagreed with one another about the cost and availability of Shen Yun tickets.

Another example is the organisation of ‘truth-telling’ sites near tourist spots. One young male FLG cultivator (Fieldnotes_130714) commented on certain FLG followers as being ‘too active’; I believe he meant that some FLG followers made physical contact with Chinese tourists, which I also observed. For this young man, a direct physical approach might put pressure on the Chinese tourists and thus result in negative effects. He had already spoken to these FLG followers about this, but nothing changed, so he stopped trying to pursue them. In another case, a female FLG follower,

who initiated a ‘telling truth’ site on one side of the Sun Moon Lake, felt uncomfortable with the aesthetic layout of another ‘telling truth’ site on another side of lake. However, she did not get involved with the other’s affair.

Coordination among different ‘truth-telling’ projects also completely depends on each individual’s choices and time and financial constraints. At a *fa*-conference in 2004, when a FLG follower reported to Master Li that more manpower turned from TV program production to other ‘truth-telling’ projects, Li answered ‘I see that all of you are truly busy, and each person is working on multiple projects. Coordinate among yourselves, Master can't say anything specific’ (2004a). In this quote, there is no clear or direct information from Master Li about which ‘truth-telling’ project is more important. Occasionally, I heard debates from interviewees and in *fa*-study groups that certain ‘telling-truth’ projects should gain more attention: ‘one should work more on VIP’ [Very Important People, like politicians or businessmen] (Interview_130818_001), one should go more often to some ‘telling-truth’ sites (Fieldnotes_140115); one should promote the FLG TV and newspaper more (Fieldnotes_130810); one should put more effort on Sheng Yun (Fieldnotes_130804). Deciding on how much time and energy to invest in different ‘truth-telling’ projects is a challenge for every FLG follower. Ultimately, the coordination of different ‘truth-telling’ projects by followers remains an individual choice first, and then the group’s decision, if there is a coordinated collective project. I found no evidence to suggest that FLG followers were pressured to make decisions, or that their coordination was the result of a hierarchical or institutionalised decision making process.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the diverse ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ activities of FLG followers; they are multi-nodal, transnational, and yet intensely personal. The diverse strategies of ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ include using urban landscapes, such as street demonstrations and tourist sites; the internet and media; and promoting Shen Yun performances. At a collective level, they have developed impressive horizontal spaces of cooperation among themselves, which further enables them to approach the United Nations Human Rights systems to support their cause. Most of these ‘truth-telling’ activities are initiated by individuals from the bottom-up, except for Shen Yun performance, which is supervised by Master Li; projects are individually created and horizontally coordinated among the FLG followers, each of whom faces specific time, budget or other constraints, and constantly struggle between participating in different ‘truth-telling’ projects.

The effects of transnational activities are significant in terms of religious geopolitics. Originating from the cultivation practices of individual FLG followers, challenges to the CCP coincide with self-care and the care of others. Their direct and indirect experiences of evil forces in this and other worlds resonate emotionally and spiritually with the experiences of FLG followers who are struggling within China. Moreover, FLG followers continually cultivate themselves during their interactions with others through ‘telling-truth/saving-life’ activities. Chapter 5 described how individuals exercise power over their bodies to cultivate themselves. This chapter revealed how individuals ‘telling-truth’ to others is integrated into individuals’ bodily experiences of pain, cultivation and how they connect emotionally and spiritually with other FLG followers, Master Li and *fa*. This data also presented the *parrhēsiatic* dimension of ‘telling-truth/saving-life’, or the courage of individual FLG followers. They develop

this courage through their daily cultivation to confront external social and political pressures through their daily cultivation practices.

I have shown in Chapter 5 that the self-care is a continuous and dynamic process of self-transformation, and in this chapter how the care of others is integrated into the self-care. Combining these observations, I argue that the care of others is part of a *perpetual* process of self-cultivation. The energy of ‘truth-telling’ is thus, never-ending, and perhaps offers at least a partial answer to a key research question introduced at the start of this dissertation: how are FLG followers mobilised to achieve these astonishing global FLG ‘truth-telling’ projects, and in so doing, challenge the hegemonic CCP’s legitimacy.

Chapter 7: Concluding Comments

This PhD has analysed an ongoing struggle between continually evolving forms of the Chinese Party-State's religious geopolitics, its repression of non-conforming religious activities, and FLG followers' self-cultivation and strategies of resistance to the CCP. The proportional importance of ideas and practices discussed in this research is illustrated in Figure 7.1. Along with analysing official ideologies and the FLG's discursive strategies and spiritual teachings (depicted by the small orange circles in Figure 7.1), this research particularly focused on the practices of governments and individual FLG followers, including the Party-State's tactics of governmentality and sovereignty on the one hand, and forms of individual spiritual self-cultivation and horizontal cooperation among followers on the other (indicated by the big blue circle in Figure 7.1).

This research further examined how the practices of different players intersect at at least three different scales: the nation-state, the group and the body-self (illustrated in Figure 7.2). The Party-State's oppressive religious governmentality is continuously challenged by the diverse actions of self-care, self-mastery, ungovernability and non-compliance by individual FLG cultivators, resulting in multiple sites of confrontation. The sovereignty and legitimacy of the Party-State are most directly contested through FLG 'telling-truth/saving-life' activities, including demonstrations, alternative media, and Shen Yun performances, which, while based upon the principle of caring for others, have resulted in spaces of global networking and alternative geopolitical discourses, such as apocalyptic themes.

Figure 7.1: Relative Emphasis on Ideas and Practice, as Discussed in this Research.

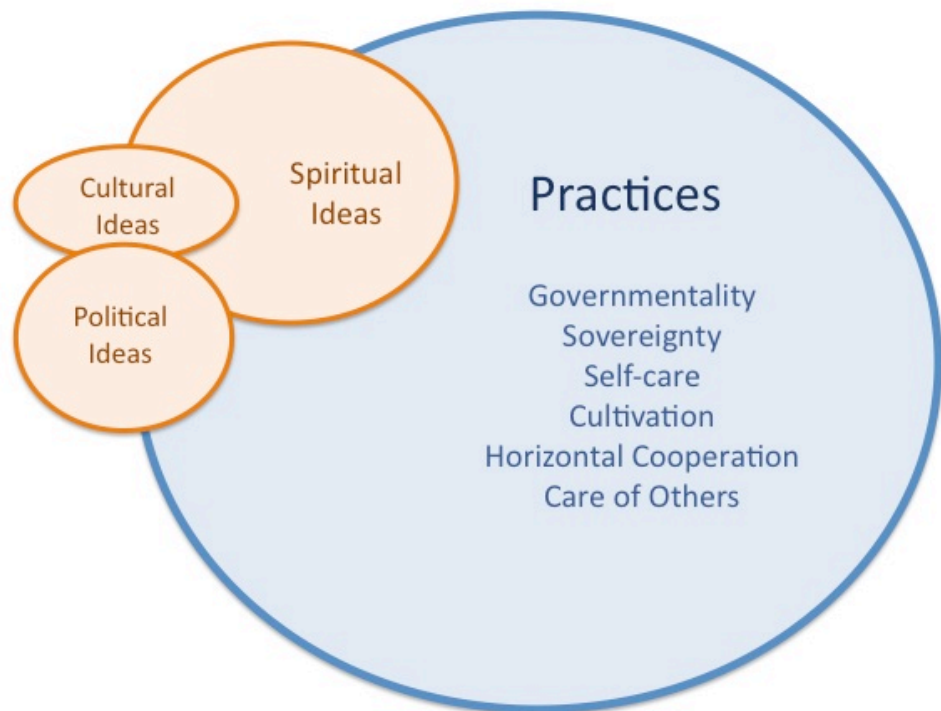
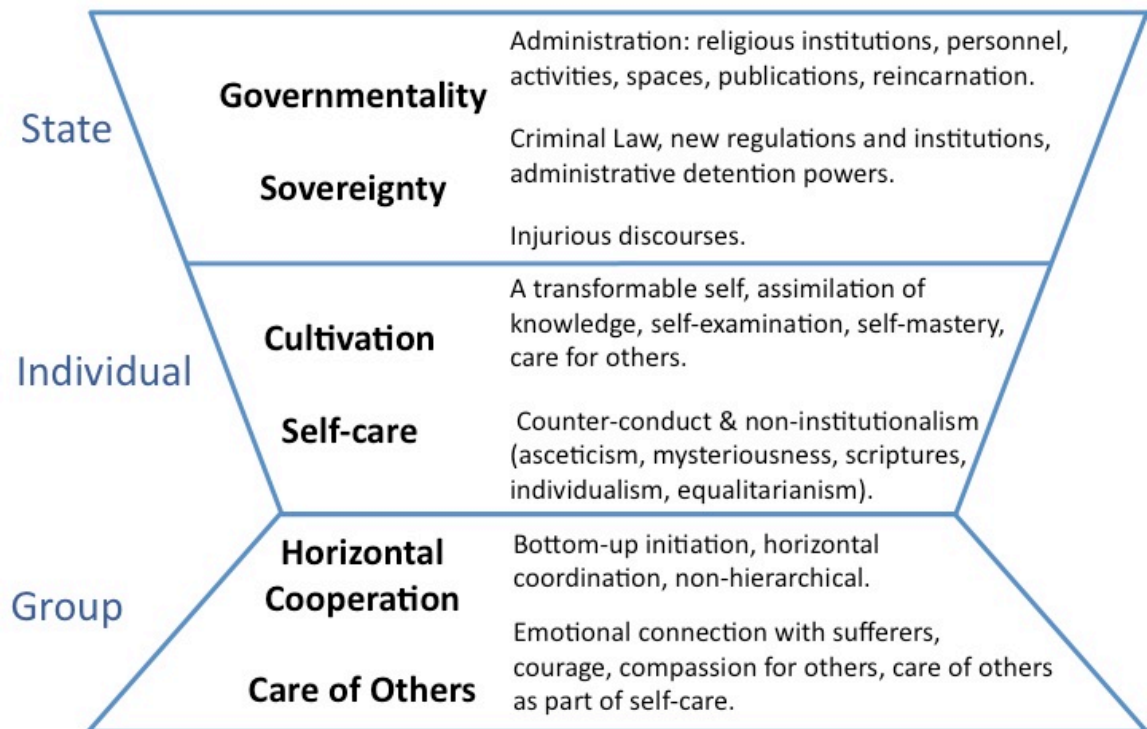


Figure 7.2: Practices Deployed by Different Players at Three Different Scales in this PhD.



Chapter 2 investigated the PRC's religious geopolitics after 1978. Drawing upon Foucault's discussion of governmentality and Agamben's view of sovereignty, the Chinese Party-State was shown to have subtly deployed different administrative frameworks and spatial strategies to regulate religious institutions, personnel, activities, spaces, publications and even the concept of reincarnation. The Party-State also exercises sovereign power in a grid-like fashion through diverse channels in order to suppress non-conforming religious activities, including through: Criminal Law, new regulations and institutions (e.g. the 610 Office), and administrative detention powers (e.g. the incarceration of FLG followers in *laojiaosuo* or mental hospitals). The CCP further applies its sovereignty by disseminating 'evil cult' discourses that project negative characteristics onto FLG followers and thereby legitimate its claim that the FLG is an unwanted, irrational and dangerous element in Chinese society.

However, the Chinese Party-State's governmentality lacks the ability to govern each individual's body. This was clearly demonstrated during the events which took place in Beijing on 25 April 1999, when tens of thousands of FLG followers had the courage to directly challenge the state by demonstrating near the central Party compound (D. Palmer, personal communication, 23 February 2016). The CCP also failed to completely eliminate FLG activities both within China and beyond even after 1999. The attempt of the Chinese Party-State to police its citizens has failed to completely eliminate FLG activities both within China and beyond. Chapter 3 explored how FLG teachings responded to the Chinese Party-State's persistent religious geopolitics. Drawing upon Laclau and Mouffe's discussion of discourse, I described how resistant ideas, including other-worldly spatial imaginaries and this-worldly caring for others, were created or absorbed into Master Li's new scriptures and spiritual discourses (see the orange circles in the Figure 7.1, which highlight the discursive perspectives of a religious movement). Before 1999, the FLG had created a legitimate

space among a number of pre-existing and diverse spiritual and religious practices, in particular Buddhism, Taoism and *qigong*. Following the ban of the FLG in 1999 and a series of lectures delivered beginning in 2001, Master Li's teaching shifted to highlight the antagonistic relationship between the CCP and the FLG, which was framed through '*fa*-rectification' millennial discourses. Li also emphasised the new and vital relationship between each FLG follower and the citizens of the PRC through 'telling-truth/saving-life' practices, which included 'Party membership renouncement' practices. In addition, FLG geopolitical discourses were created and communicated through cultural and aesthetic practices that significantly sought to revive 'five thousand years of civilization' through promoting the Shen Yun Performance and in this way claim a China without the CCP.

After examining the structural political problems of the ban on the FLG, in the second part of the PhD I focused on the practices of individual FLG followers (the second level in Figure 7.2), based upon the findings of my fieldwork in Dublin, Taiwan and Hong Kong. This discussion was framed by Foucault's studies of the care of the self. In Chapter 4, I drew upon Foucault's later understanding of the body as both subject and object, whereby individuals choose teachings to guide themselves; exercise the power to modify and improve themselves; and also care for others. I adopted Foucault's work to illustrate how a person following FLG teachings can cultivate and believe that thereby they might transform themselves into divine beings. Although some of the spiritual ideas of the FLG about the body and cosmic nature may seem unconventional, strange or exotic to Western readers, I tried to show the similarity of between Foucault's discussion on self-care and Master Li's teachings, including: a transformable self, self-examination, and the possible and noble exercise of self-mastery. Both Foucault and Master Li are sceptical about hierarchical power-relationships; they emphasise counter-conduct as opposed to pastoral care through asceticism, mysterious

experiences, direct connection with scriptures and the individualism/equality of community members. FLG cultivators are urged to take a combative attitude toward the demonic nature of the self without submitting themselves to external authority. A mode of self-care which encourages an individual to have self sovereignty, along with the ungovernability of the FLG, has meant that the individual's will, interpretation of FLG scriptures, and resulting actions can be viewed as the most critical challenge to the CCP's governmentality and sovereignty.

Foucault also discusses the relationship between the self and others. *Parrhēsia* is when a person speaks the truth about oneself freely to others. For example, a person may discuss one's wrongs with another in the determination to improve oneself. In this way, one conducts oneself following the truth that one expresses, and in so doing, that person becomes a speaking subject of truth. Foucault also regards martyrdom as a form of *parrhēsia* within a religious context. The body enacts one's own faith and rejects dominant social and political pressures. I understand FLG cultivators' 'telling-truth/saving-life' activities as examples of self-care and *parrhēsia* practices. After 1999, Master Li encouraged FLG followers not only to care for the self (personal cultivation), but also to care for others; in other words, they should also tell the 'truth' to PRC citizens in order to 'save their lives'. As 'Fa-Rectification Period Dafa Disciples', Master Li states that they should not only aim at their own personal salvation, but tell the 'truth' to the public and demonstrate their faith in FLG teaching, thereby 'validating the *fa*'.

Chapter 5 explores FLG followers' practices of cultivation based upon my own fieldwork carried out in Taiwan and Hong Kong. FLG followers I interviewed were independent self-carers who were seeking either physical and/or mental well-being, or religious salvation. They started to connect spiritually and emotionally with Master Li and his scriptures and dedicated themselves voluntarily to FLG cultivation. Although

Master Li holds the supreme position when it comes to FLG teachings, it is the individual follower's own will and choice whether or not to pursue cultivation, self-transformation and improvement. Using FLG followers' own words, I described how cultivation is a continual and ever-evolving process. Along with reading and memorising the scriptures, FLG followers constantly reflect upon *fa* and apply *fa* in their daily lives. They diagnose themselves and modify their own conduct without external surveillance or the aid of an external spiritual expert. Such practices motivate each cultivator to work toward becoming the master of the self. A cultivator needs to walk on his/her own path towards his/her own destiny. In terms of the relationships among FLG followers, the FLG administrative organisation, which operates below Master Li, follows a non-institutionalised and bottom-up initiatives model. This decentralised model also characterises the coordination among diverse FLG 'truth-telling' projects, as I discussed in Chapter 6.

FLG followers have developed impressive and significant projects, such as various 'truth-telling' sites and activities in global cities, *The Epoch Times*, internet circumvention tools, satellite TV broadcasting of non-censored news, radio and even Shen Yun performances, all of which are based upon horizontal cooperation among FLG followers. They have also approached the UN Human Rights Committee, even though it has relatively limited influence on sovereign states. Instead, the research and mechanisms of the UN have mainly served as credible sources of information. Apart from Shen Yun performances, these 'truth-telling' projects have all been initiated by individual FLG followers. Through these diverse activities, FLG followers have been able to infiltrate national boundaries, and create and use different kinds of public spaces to deliver their information to Chinese citizens and global audiences within and outside of China.

Chapter 6 also reveals how 'telling-truth' to others is a central practice of

individual cultivation, which includes bodily experiences of pain and emotionally connecting with other FLG followers. Although Master Li's scriptures have laid out a framework and explanation for the current social and political scene, FLG followers in Taiwan, Hong Kong and in cities outside China not only know, understand and think about the CCP through reading scriptures,, they have also experienced the CCP and their 'evil forces' directly and indirectly in a variety of ways. They develop courage through their daily cultivation to confront external social and political pressures. My field data reveals that 'telling-truth/saving-life', as the care for others, is intrinsic to FLG followers' self-care. Their ability to confront Party-State sovereignty originates from the sovereignty of courageous and non-compliant individuals who ultimately become empowered to constitute and transform the body-self. Since self-cultivation is a continual, voluntary and evolving process, the energy of 'truth-telling' as care for others will be never-ending.

While one might make the argument that the FLG is a form of 'alternative governmentality' that is more powerful than the strategies of governmentality of the FLG (D. Palmer, 23 February 2016, personal communication), I prefer to emphasise the Foucauldian concept of self-care. In agreement with Harrer (2005), I understand Foucault's concepts of governmentality and self-care as two distinct phenomena, wherein the former focuses on how external power and knowledge mechanisms 'fabricate subjects', and the latter explores how 'subjects constitute themselves' (p. 76, italics in original). As I describe in Section 4.1, governmentality involves: 1) external experts, 2) knowledge owned by experts and 3) individuals who, often through subjectivation, become objects to be governed. Rose (1996) discusses 'advanced liberal governmentality' as a more individualised form a managing bodies/subjects through individual life-stylising projects that 'merge' with expert's advice, such as from counsellors, manuals or telephone help-lines. These experts, or service providers,

compete in the market of self-fulfilment (what can be considered a form of self-mastery) to attract autonomous and free individuals who choose to realise their own happiness through the marketplace. Expert service-providers offer all kinds of monitoring and evaluation schemes and advice to the consumer.

In contrast to this neoliberal model, FLG followers are both the object and the subject of their cultivation. No experts or priests provide them with knowledge or extract knowledge from them (only Master Li provides spiritual guidances). In addition, FLG followers aren't involved in a monetary exchange with Master Li. Therefore, as I have argued in this dissertation, the range of FLG cultivation, self-care and ungovernability pose a threat to the CCP's strategies of governmentality. FLG followers do not want to be governed by external experts: they are their own experts who possess knowledge of both themselves and the path to salvation.

Much has been written about the personal charisma of Master Li (Ownby, 2008), whose position in the FLG, as I have described in this thesis, is unassailable. In this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on the voices and experiences of FLG followers. I was not able to observe Master Li's personal charisma and the interaction between him and FLG followers in New York, which would be an interesting subject that could be further researched in the future. The research provided here suggests that Master Li's authority is geographically distant to many FLG followers, even though FLG followers interpret his writings as part of their personal cultivation. As such, FLG members' interactions with Master Li's rich and reactive discourses make the FLG movement unique from the ways participants of other Qigong movements may interact with a master. Whereas other Qigong practitioners might commit themselves to hours of daily Qigong exercises in the public parks, they may not integrate spiritual ideas into their daily conduct and cultivate their spiritual quality. In comparison, FLG followers need to internalise Master Li's discourses as part of their own personal cultivation on a daily

basis, in addition to practicing the five set bodily exercises.

In this dissertation, I have indicated the ways that Master Li's discourses play a central role in the FLG movement. To begin with, unlike other Qigong masters, I have argued that, through a close reading of Li's central texts, his politically bold and culturally creative ideas following the CCP State-led repression have been continually articulated. Secondly, FLG followers' distinctive interpretations, and physical-spatial forms of communication and dissemination have also developed. In addition to Master Li's discourses, the enduring commitment of FLG followers to the media (TV, newspaper and internet) has meant that Master Li's discourses were able to be disseminated directly to FLG followers all over the world. In this way FLG followers were able to exchange their experiences and further resonate with each other internationally, creating more horizontal forms of creative expression and resistance. This transnational connectedness, originating from one discursive centre (Master Li's message), also makes the FLG movement distinctive from Christian house churches in China, which are more spatially dispersed and not connected through a single spiritual authority. Third, Master Li's 'truth-telling' project became an integral part of the individual FLG follower's continuous, diverse and perpetual self-cultivation. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, 'telling truth' in FLG terms means that followers should tell the (mainly Chinese-speaking) world that the FLG is not an 'evil cult.' How this is the 'truth' is disseminated includes FLG media, which exposes the CCP's wrongdoings. As I have argued here, 'telling-truth/saving-life' is part of a practice of self-care that may take many forms in a range of contexts, including protests and parades in public spaces, encouraging Chinese nationals to denounce their Party membership (in person or online), giving talks, or sending out righteous thoughts with other members. At the same time, had Master Li not developed the post-1999 discourses, FLG followers might continue to cultivate privately at home only, without engaging

with other Chinese people, as indicated by the case of W who described her activities in this way prior to 2009.

My analysis of FLG follower's practices of self-care and *parrhēsia* underscores the inefficiency of the CCP's governmentality that the Chinese Party-State's complex political system, which, with its rich resources, is still unable to fully control individual bodies and minds. Each individual continues to possess authority over their own body and mind; he/she may choose their own ways to salvation and in this way may choose not to conform, even under severe political pressure and repression.

At a theoretical level, my research suggests that a Foucauldian approach, while premised upon historical European examples, can play a significant role in the study of Asian religions. As Chau (2011) argues, cultivation and self-transformation are the most important characteristics of 'doing religion' in the Chinese context. Building upon Chau's insights and adopting Foucault's notion of self-care as discussed in this thesis provides a useful analytical framework to investigate not only how a subject constitutes the self as a religious follower, but also how he/she may further transforms him-/herself into an ideal spiritual subject through diverse techniques of self-mastery.

As suggested in this dissertation, Foucault's concept of self-care may also be applied to study other Asian religious movements. A comparison with the FLG and the Modern Zen Buddhist Sangha Buddha (佛教現代禪菩薩僧團), founded by Li Yuan-song (李元松) in 1989 in Taiwan, provides a good example of such an application, while also providing insights into the similarities and differences between how such religious movements work in terms of power relations and organisational-administrative structures. Li Yuan-song first practiced Yiguandao when he was thirteen years old (Chen, 2011b: 246). Before founding the Modern Zen movement in 1989, he started to explore various Buddhist teachings and scriptures at age 22. He brings aspects of self-care into his understanding of Modern Zen. Master Li Yuan-song rejects organised

institutional religious precepts, asserting that a follower should act according to principles and the *dharma* (a universal natural law) that he or she understands. A follower should only memorise parts of the master's teachings that he or she feels most touched by. One should reflect upon one's daily conduct and thoughts of one's self, seeking to modify oneself if possible. If the follower cannot immediately adjust negative parts of the self, he or she can postpone such changes for the future (Chen, 2011b: 284). As this short overview indicates, some of the Modern Zen practices incorporated self-care characteristics in ways that are similar to those I described for the case of the FLG. A Modern Zen follower can self-learn the movement's teachings and practices, especially that of meditation, during which one focuses on the present moment and unifies the self with the universe (Chen, 2011b: 251). Ultimately, Master Li Yuan-song expects that a Modern Zen follower can become a Zen master to preach the *dharma* (Chen, 2011b: 285).

At the same time, Modern Zen deviates from what I would consider to be the self-care characteristics of the FLG, a group that is less tiered and centralised administratively and spiritually. Modern Zen has a strict, regulated teaching hierarchy that is divided into four levels based upon different spiritual quality, although self-learning is possible. To become a Modern Zen follower, one needs to go through a Zen-test that requires approval from the Modern Zen organisation. In addition, followers are examined by their religious colleagues or by followers of higher teaching levels to ensure that they are 'rational' enough: Master Li Yuan-song rejects mystery and the alleged medical functions of spirituality (Chen, 2011b: 256). Followers are also examined to ascertain whether they respect the ethical teachings of Modern Zen teachers and clergy, and if they are calm and undisturbed when answering questions (ibid: 256f). One can be dismissed from the Modern Zen movement if one fails an inspection (ibid: 286f.). In contrast, to become a FLG cultivator one needs no

examination or approval from anyone. There is also no formal spiritual ranking amongst FLG followers, and mysterious experiences are respected in the FLG (as mentioned in Chapter 1). Thus, a FLG cultivator's spiritual quality cannot be judged or conducted by another person. One can even become a FLG follower without devoting oneself to cultivation, as discussed in Chapter 4. A FLG follower is the only person to take the responsibility for himself or herself, in addition to Master Li, who exists in a distant geographical, but close spiritual relation to his members.

As Modern Zen utilizes a more institutionalised teaching and inspection system than the FLG to ensure the spiritual quality of its followers, it had a distinct development path under the leadership of Master Li Yuan-song, when compared to Master Li Hongzhi's active global truth-telling projects. In 1990, after only one year of its establishment, the Modern Zen already had 1500 class attendances and 200 participants within its clergy circle (Chen, 2011b: 264). It then started to expand quickly to hold Zen classes, organize Zen outdoor activities, publish magazines, among other activities (ibid: 272). Yet in 1994, Master Li Yuan-song decided to halt the expansion of the organisation because he felt Modern Zen's administration had gotten too large, and included people who did not sincerely and seriously want to cultivate themselves. Li Yuan-song made the organisation begin a two-year phase of cultivation with a much lower public profile, including not engaging in most of its previous public activities or accepting new followers (ibid: 273f.). In 2003, Master Li Yuan-song converted to become a follower of the Pure Land sect and gave his Modern Zen group a new name: 'Amitabha Buddha Recitation Society'.

As this brief overview suggests, Modern Zen provides an example of how self-care is relevant to Asian religions, but also how a group's founder can influence the development of a religious movement through his intentions and willpower. The Modern Zen example further shows how a relatively institutionalized religious

movement can limit its expansion under its founder's guidance. In contrast, following Master Li Hongzhi's creative ideas and persistent attitudes about combating the CCP, the FLG is based upon self-care practices of its members, and has become an active movement with diverse global truth-telling projects.

At an empirical level, the findings of this dissertation are also relevant beyond an Asian context. The FLG's practice of voluntary cultivation provides a case study which can be held in contrast to other more violent or militant religious political movements/groups, including the People's Temple of Jonestown which resulted in a mass suicide in 1978, or the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. Unlike the FLG, the latter two examples have strict hierarchical and authoritative organisational structures that attempt to govern individuals' lives in detail according to their religious doctrines. Followers of these two religious/religious-political organisations need to conform to codified ways of life and are not allowed to leave these groups. These brief comparisons illustrate how the FLG and Foucauldian scholarship are highly relevant to the broader field of religious studies in various cultural contexts at both a theoretical and empirical level.

This thesis also offers a broader research framework for examining geopolitics in religious fields by paying attention to both the discourses of and practices by which power at the state, group and individual levels may come into confrontation. At the individual scale, this research examined both the Master's religious discourses but also individual experiences: why followers are attracted to FLG principles and how they internalise these ideas. The fieldwork of this research reveals the rich, voluntary, non-violent and continually resistant practices of FLG followers, which do not indicate simple obedience to an authoritative religious figure. In short, the PhD sheds light on the dynamics and complexity of religious geopolitics, while contributing to Tuathail and Dalby's (1998: 5, 7) call for a geopolitics that broadens its concerns to include social

and culture practices through diverse techniques within and beyond the domestic realm.

Ultimately, I acknowledge the limits of academic research in trying to understand religion as a form of life guidance or in offering meanings about human existence. As Tolstoy said: ‘Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important for us: “What shall we do and how shall we live?”’ (Weber, 1922, cited in Gerth & Mills, 1948: 143). Nonetheless, the voluntary nature of FLG and the practices of self-care, as illustrated by my fieldwork in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Dublin, has not been documented in scholarly research. My hope is that my work has offered a new perspective of the range of subjectivities of FLG cultivators, and, in doing so, extend the scholarly discussions about religious geopolitics in an Asian context, as related to the care of self. I have tried to maintain an open mind about the FLG, as I was interested in learning more about this voluntary group which has diverse interpretations about cultivation resulting from largely individual motivation. One of my friends who is not a FLG follower and knows about my research, told me somebody gave her the scripture ZFL. I thought she was trying to find out what my opinion about the FLG was, so I responded: ‘You can take a look at it and decide whether you like it or not’. My response reflects my personal (less critical) attitude towards the FLG. I find that the FLG’s voluntary approaches to cultivation and spiritual fulfilment are impressive when compared to followers of more strictly organised religious groups, such as the Catholic Church. That the FLG’s public activism is both non-violent and non-compulsory, it is quite distinctive when considering China’s history, such as the Cultural Revolution.

7.1 Reflections after Research

After my fieldwork with the FLG followers and research about the CCP’s repression of

the FLG, I have some political and spiritual thoughts for myself. Firstly, the political figure of Machiavelli is still present in the modern Chinese political system. Within the PRC, ‘decisions’ rather than ‘rules’ govern many sensitive domains. In contrast, I have presented the current democratic state of Taiwan as an opposing, positive model to that of the PRC in terms of religious affairs. Taiwan’s model of religious freedom, which is associated with the ‘rule of law’, is unlikely to be fully implemented in the PRC, a state where a government official’s words have the effect of law. Considering the CCP’s extremely rich financial, political, military, technological surveillance resources and governmentality techniques, the popular and FLG belief that ‘God/gods finally destroy(s) the CCP’ is for me a relatively optimistic ideal at the moment. However, the Chinese Party-State should lift the ban on the FLG and other religious groups from practical and spiritual reasons. From a pragmatic perspective, Chinese Party-State violence has not ultimately succeeded in eliminating unwanted religious practices; instead, it has triggered long-term and steadfast counteractions from the FLG. I will explain the spiritual reason from my personal viewpoint later, which does not only apply to China but also to the rest of the world.

I doubt my research can really provide any solution to this situation, nor can it alleviate religious suppression inside of China. But I am deeply convinced that every FLG follower has achieved a lot in the fight against extreme injustice and state violence through the creation, development and personal use of diverse ‘truth-telling’ projects. Moreover, the efforts and effects of the FLG’s media systems, which has done much to expose the wrongs of the Party-State, are far more determined, long-lasting, impressive and significant than the previous 1989 student movements.

In conducting this research, I have learned that there is a power that is stronger than profit, hatred, violence or political idealism: the power of individual self-care, cultivation, compassion to others and spiritual perfection. Spiritually, after my

fieldwork with the FLG followers, I became more curious and started to pay more attention to my own emotional state and inner-world. I started to read *Letting Go: The Pathway of Surrender* (2014) by David R. Hawkins and *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* (2009) by Robin Sharma. I am convinced by each author's focus on inner-peace within the self, something which is quite similar to FLG followers' practices. I have also become convinced that one should pay more attention to the self, to observe the self more and to keep the self under his/her own control, instead of easily and vulnerably allowing the environment, either through TV, advertising, teachers or politicians, to influence the self. This is a mode of self-care practiced by FLG followers. Two weeks ago before writing this conclusion chapter, I talked with my mother on the phone and tried to convince her to let my niece learn Taiji later, although she is just 1.5 years old. Taiji is normally perceived as a sport for the elderly in Taiwan. Now, I consider Taiji not as a sport but as a practice that requires intensive awareness of one's own body and mind. If my beautiful little niece knew how to pay attention to her own well-being, she may become less vulnerable to external social judgements, classification and pressure. She would be able to treat her relationship with the world more calmly, instead of being overwhelmed by mainstream values or by commercial information. This is what I learned from the FLG followers; all of them individually walk their own particular path in our complicated world, even amidst severe political and social pressure. Whether my mother or my brother will really take my advice seriously is still unknown, but I do think learning to pay attention to one's own (spiritual or mental) well-being and training one's own strength should be given priority over receiving education or skill-training -- values thought to bring one 'success'.

I wish to end my study with the stories of a 73-year old Chinese female FLG follower living in Hong Kong, whom I met on 25 December 2013 and introduced at the beginning of this dissertation. In Hong Kong, she experienced many different

challenges to her personal cultivation, related to issues with her daughter, police officers, passers-by from mainland China and the members of the Hong Kong Youth Care Association. I offer two of her experiences that she shared with me to illustrate difficult interactions with others that allowed her also to practice self-cultivation.

At an early stage, just after she arrived in Hong Kong, she encountered a young Chinese woman at a ‘truth-telling’ site who she thought was associated with the Chinese Communist Party.

There was a beautiful, tall, young Chinese woman. She took off my sun-hat and threw it on the ground. The sun was strong at the time so I was wearing a sun-hat. At that time, I didn’t know how to react, so I picked it up and put it back on again (laugh). When I recall it now, it’s quite funny. Two people: one taking it [the hat] off and one picking it up (laugh). But actually I didn’t hate her, but viewed her with compassion. She started to recite some incantation which was directed at my horizontal flags. She didn’t use any hand gestures, only recited the incantation and spat. I wasn’t prepared at that time. [...] I wasn’t afraid of her. But, I had some attachment for fighting (laugh). I thought: ‘You have incantations and I have mine from Master [Li]’; I wasn’t afraid of any kind of incantation. So I gestured and loudly cited the formula, directing it towards her ‘*Fazheng qiankun; xie e quanmie. Fazheng tiandi; xianshi xianbao*’ [The *fa* rectifies the cosmos; the evil is completely eliminated. And the *fa* rectifies Heaven and Earth; immediate retribution in this life time.]. I had been sending out righteous thoughts for years and I hadn’t felt it as heartily as I did at this time (laugh). So heartily sending [out righteous thought] on the street.

Then, she softened. I defeated it [evil forces] in that [another] dimension. She said: ‘Can you stop doing it [sending out righteous thoughts] towards me?’ I said: ‘It is my business; I could do it towards whomever I want’. She said: ‘That sounds right’. She had softened; then, I stopped sending [out righteous thoughts]. I started to chat with her and we became friends, the two of us. She said she just lived nearby. I said: ‘You could come later. I would chat with you. I am here everyday. Come!’ We became friends. She didn’t come again later.

The interviewee was very relaxed recalling the above story. However, she gave me full details of another story that made her cry. Her experience below happened during the peak of the tension between the FLG and the Youth Care Association, when both sides occupied certain public sites in Hong Kong for twenty-four hours. I quote her at length.

I had always thought that I didn't have the characteristics of a show-off. [...] At that time, I needed to stay there [a truth-telling site in Hong Kong city centre] from 6 to 6.30pm, about half hour; I had been there before 6pm. I needed to leave at 6.30pm because *fa*-study started at 7pm. I filled in for a *tongxiu* [fellow cultivator], who went to dinner between 6 and 6.30pm. At 6.30pm, it started to rain heavily; the wind was very strong. [...] All the placards were toppled; I was alone managing all of this. After I had recovered all of it, my body was all wet. It was February or March. I wore two pairs of trousers. My whole body was wet and dripping. I didn't care about my body; a wet body could become dry, but [truth-telling] materials could not. So I worked very hard during this half hour and was very nervous. But the fellow cultivator was still absent.

The rain stopped at 7pm, it was like a typical summer shower. The *tongxiu* came and told me he/she had been dining in a restaurant. Dining in a restaurant usually takes longer. It was as if nothing had happened; everything was normal. I thought: 'You could have said "Sorry" or "I am late"'. Of course, I didn't want an apology, but his/her attitude could have been better. I didn't show any emotion in my face, as I am old and experienced. I didn't react immediately, although I was unhappy in my mind. I said: 'Hurry up'.

Then, I went to *fa*-study. I was already late. I could not sit in the tram, as I was all wet and water was dripping onto my shoes. [...] In the place of *fa*-study, somebody's room, I took off my shoes; there were water foot prints everywhere. I took off my socks. I couldn't sit and stood the whole time. After *fa*-study, less than two hours, I came back [to the truth-telling site in Hong Kong city centre] again. It was very cold. My clothes had dried gradually, but my trousers hadn't completely dried. I stayed until 12 o'clock midnight. Then, somebody came to take over from me.

I waited until 12 and felt I had suffered a lot. Actually this bitterness wasn't a big deal to me, because I had very often gotten wet in the mountains [in China as a geologist]. But I felt I should have not suffered this as the fellow cultivator [who had dined in the restaurant] should have suffered this. He/she gave me this problem [getting wet] without any emotion or feeling. I felt grievance. But at the same time, it was not a big deal for a cultivator. I wanted to tell somebody about that, but I was embarrassed to say that the fellow cultivator didn't come. The *tongxiu* [in *fa*-study] said: 'Sit down'. I replied: 'I cannot, my whole body is wet', hoping that this person might ask why I was all wet and I could show-off my suffering and bitterness, that kind of calculation. But nobody responded to me when I talked to them. Even the *tongxiu* with whom I often talked to didn't respond to my incident, just stopped the conversation and left. Nobody responded.

Then, I knew that it was the Master [Li] who let nobody respond to me, so that I would have nowhere to show-off. I realised that, but I still suffered in my heart. Master Li said that attachment is a kind of material, not a thought,

but a material. To eliminate the attachment is unbearable. It is painful, like cutting a part from your body. I felt I was crying when eliminating that attachment. I came back [from a city area] here in a tram to deliver the [truth-telling] newspaper. Tears were dropping as I delivered the newspaper. Tears were continuously dropping. It was dark so nobody saw it or felt it [her crying]. But it was bitter. I knew it was Master Li who gave me this chance. I should do this; others should not respond to me and that *tongxiu* should not have come. Everything should work this way. I realised it, but it still felt painful, quite painful. I kept delivering the [truth-telling] newspaper, crying in my mind and in my eyes until 12 o'clock midnight. Not until 12 o'clock, when I basically accepted all of this, [...] did I become calmer. Then, I went home in the tram happily (laugh).

In this narrative, external actors, including the hegemonic Party-State, are all incorporated into her own cultivation. She is a warrior, not fighting with external actors or with physical suffering (the heavy rain, or standing for many hours for 'truth-telling'), but combating the microscopic and infinite bad elements of the self and elevating the divine part of the self. She hopes to influence other people through her cultivated compassion.

I end my project with this cultivator's personal stories in the hopes that my sketch of these FLG followers can offer English readers a new understanding of FLG cultivators. These people are not merely a group of anonymous believers, nor should they be understood only as oppressed or dissident, but these are unique individuals with special stories, thoughts, struggles and courage. They walk on their own personal paths towards becoming an ideal or divine being who is able to save other people's lives, amid continual and severe Party-State repression.

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I mainly cite the English translation of these scriptures, since this dissertation is written in English. However, when the nuance of the Chinese language needs to be highlighted or there is no English translation of particular speeches, I use the original Chinese texts. In these cases, I cite the year of Li's speech, not the year it appears in an English translation, because the transcripts of Master Li's speeches in the Chinese are uploaded online in the same year his speech is delivered. These texts are made available for the global readership of FLG followers, who are mainly ethnic Chinese. Citing the year of a speech offers a more precise timeline of how FLG discourses evolve.

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