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Trends. Immaterial Materialism: The Communist Party Confronts Falun Gong and Qi Gong in the People's Republic of China

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After considerable analysis and planning following the April 1999 demonstration by members of the Falun Gong sect outside the Zhongnanhai compound in Beijing, the top leadership of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has authorized the detention of the sect's leading members.

Falun Gong members practice martial arts, related movements, meditation, and breathing exercises in conjunction with belief in what many Westerners might term exemplars of mysticism. One central tenet--qigong--involves the putative channeling of "vital energies" to improve health and even to heal others. The Falun Gong leadership and membership claim not to be a political movement, but this claim has not stopped PRC leaders from closely monitoring the sect and from the recent detentions of sect leaders. (Interestingly, some PRC leaders may be at least personally attracted to Falun Gong practices and beliefs, if not outright practitioners.)

As with almost all PRC crackdowns, there has been accompanying and supporting government-sponsored propaganda. One propaganda theme has been that Communist Party members must be "thoroughgoing materialists." The rationale behind the theme probably includes the notion that materialism is a tenet of combinations of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and their approaches to understanding history and life itself. Many experts on the PRC might counter, however, that propaganda based on largely discredited ideology may have little effect on behavior--save as a reinforcer of the political authorities' current line against Falun Gong. In this respect, Falun Gong as immaterialism, i.e., as metaphysics transcending the material, may prove materially resistant to the Communist Party's materialism as propaganda and may render both Party and propaganda as immaterial, i.e., as inconsequential.

And so, Falun Gong believers might submit, qi demonstrates its material and immaterial powers. (See Burkitt, I. (1998). Bodies of knowledge: Beyond Cartesian views of persons, selves, and mind. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 28, 63-82; Fisher, A.M. (1997). Modern manifestations of materialism: A legacy of the enlightenment discourse. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 17, 45-55; Jost, J.T., & Hardin, C.D. (1996). The practical turn in psychology: Marx and Wittgenstein as social materialists. *Theory and Psychology*, 6, 385-393; Landler, M. (July 21, 1999). Beijing detains leaders of sect, watchdog says. *The New York Times*, p. A1; A6.) (Keywords: Falun Gong, Materialism, People's Republic of China, Political Psychology, Propaganda, Qigong.)