



# Change Inside China

## How Falun Gong practitioners' activism is reshaping China

■ **In the summer of 1999**, when then-Chinese Communist Party leader, Jiang Zemin, launched the campaign to “stamp out” Falun Gong, he declared it would be done in three months. Fifteen years later, the persecution of Falun Gong has lasted longer than the Cultural Revolution.

With tens of millions on the ground inside China, Falun Gong's resistance is one of the largest peaceful civil disobedience efforts in history. What is behind this unprecedented resistance, and what are the ramifications for China? The following examines two catalysts for, and three ramifications of, this unprecedented grassroots movement in China.

### **Catalyst 1:** **Underground, Grassroots Media...by the Millions**

In a country where nearly all information — from movies, TV and print media, to websites, blogs, and text messages — can be monitored and censored, the opinions of even the most educated and independent thinkers can be swayed. With Falun Gong, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) pulled out all the stops, ranging from falsified news reports, to vilifying opinion pieces, to Cultural Revolution-style bullhorn and placards. The Chinese people have been surrounded by anti-Falun Gong propaganda for 15 years.

From the very beginning of the campaign, however, Falun Gong practitioners from all walks of life have been chipping away at the propaganda. Notably, today in China, tens of millions of people are known to participate in a grassroots effort to print fliers, newspapers, informational DVDs, posters, etc., and deliver them to every house in every village, town and

city in China. Most printing is done in the back rooms of private homes, and the materials are then distributed, often at night, by volunteers throughout the local area. It is a grassroots media effort that is unprecedented in scale.

A majority of these fliers, newspapers and other materials contain reports about the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners across China, combining personal testimonies from victims with various third-party reports from Western news outlets, human rights organizations as well as Western government reports. When presented with this type of information, especially in juxtaposition to CCP propaganda that is filled with obvious fabrications, the effect is a Chinese populace that is increasingly aware they have been deceived and gravely so.

## Catalyst 2: Sophisticated Software

As the persecution advanced, so did China's (and the world's) Internet traffic. From early on, Internet control was imperative. To combat the Great Firewall, a Falun Gong practitioner-led team of computer scientists, including Ivy-League graduates, formed the Global Internet Freedom Consortium in the U.S., and produced some of the most successful circumventing software in the world. It has helped millions in China access Falun

Gong-related websites, as well as the wide array of sites blocked by the Chinese firewall. Notably, their software was used during the Iranian Green Revolution of 2009 to provide uncensored access to the web.

Armed with uncensored reports in their hands or on the web, Chinese citizens are taking unprecedented steps towards freeing themselves from the CCP's thought control.

# Ramifications:

## 1 Tens of Millions Withdraw from the Chinese Communist Party

In 2006, the *Epoch Times* newspaper published a series of in-depth essays on the CCP's history. Collectively known as the "Nine Commentaries," these essays divulge a history of the CCP in extreme and often horrifying detail. As a result, tens of millions have sought to withdraw from the CCP, and its affiliated organizations. To date, 160 million people have withdrawn from these organizations.

## 2 Lawyers Highlight Illegal Nature of Campaign

Soon after the suppression of Falun Gong was launched in 1999, an edict was issued from Beijing forbidding lawyers from taking Falun Gong cases. In recent years, however, lawyers have defied CCP policy and stood up to defend Falun Gong practitioners in court, often at great risk to themselves. In a system where "verdicts" are often reached before a trial begins (imposed by CCP authorities), these lawyers are highlighting the immoral and illegal nature of the violence against Falun Gong practitioners. Many of these lawyers faced imprisonment or torture themselves. Still, the number of lawyers taking such cases continues to grow.

## 3 Citizen Petitions

A growing number of ordinary Chinese citizens are signing their names to petitions – sometimes thousands per petition – calling on the authorities to release a neighbor or friend imprisoned for practicing Falun Gong or otherwise redress an injustice against him or her. Such an open and public display of protest against the regime was completely unheard of up until 2011. The historic significance of petitions is not lost on Communist Party leaders. In May 2012, reports surfaced that a petition for a Falun Gong practitioner with 300 signatures and thumb prints had been circulated among top-level officials. The petition, one source revealed, had stirred fierce debate at the highest levels of the Party, with some officials advocating a peaceful end to the Falun Gong persecution campaign.