SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AND TRANSNATIONAL RESISTANCE: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF FALUN GONG

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ABSTRACT

This thesis shows how Falun Gong, as a transnational social movement, uses a horizontal structure to coordinate its campaign against the Chinese communist party. It presents the results of survey research conducted in Vancouver, British Columbia, illustrating that the group's horizontal structure promotes the growth of social capital, which it then applies to its struggle. In 1999, the Chinese government initiated a crackdown on the movement, denouncing it as an evil sect and a threat to single-party rule. Continuing repression has prompted Falun Gong practitioners in over forty countries worldwide to demonstrate against the Chinese government in an attempt to end the persecution. Traditionally, proponents of resource mobilization theories have focused on how social movements use centralized, vertically-arranged hierarchies to overcome collective action challenges and apply pressure on their targets. Strong central leadership, it is argued, allows movements to control flows of money, information and human resources that result in useful, effective forms of activism. This thesis does not reject the viability of vertical structures or resource mobilization theory writ large, but demonstrates the inability of these to account for political activism in an under-explored case.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

By eleven o’clock on Saturday, December 11, 2004, the corner of Vancouver’s Robson and Hornby Streets was a hive of activity. A large public demonstration on the steps of the art gallery in Robson Square was gathering attention. Passersby stopped to observe meditating practitioners of Falun Gong, (which literally translates as “Great Law of the Wheel”), a spiritual movement that originated in China, but is now active in forty countries worldwide. Others crowded around vivid photographs and torture re-enactment demonstrations detailing practitioners’ treatment at the hands of the Chinese government. One elderly woman was locked in a small cage with her meals placed beside her, just out of her reach. Another was chained to a wooden bench with her hands behind her back and beaten with a guard’s nightstick.

Similar demonstrations and vigils have been staged in major cities worldwide, including New York, Toronto, Atlanta, San Francisco, Singapore, Sydney and Tokyo. They are part of a strategy employed by Falun Gong to raise greater awareness of its spiritual message and the current plight of Chinese practitioners. Since the Tiananmen Square Massacre of June 1989, the communist party has become more sensitive to the presence of organized dissent and resistance within its borders. Falun Gong practitioners have been explicitly targeted by party elites and subjected to retribution running the gamut from financial ruination to abduction, imprisonment without trial, torture and death. Given that opportunities for justice within China are virtually non-existent, Falun Gong increasingly looks to its transnational practitioners to publicize its cause and mobilize support.
Falun Gong is a transnational social movement (TSM) made up of “rooted cosmopolitans.”

Individual participants in the Robson Square demonstration reacted against persecution in China, yet most were émigrés to Vancouver who have fully integrated into Canadian society. By staging protests in large North American cities, the practitioner-activists take advantage of opportunities for challenging their opponents unavailable to the group within China. They use resources in transnational space to call as much attention to their issue, win as much support and gain as much leverage over their target as possible. Although there are clearly different types of TSMs, I use the term “transnationalization” throughout this thesis to describe the behaviour of movements that remain focused on specific domestic problems or targets while using transnational organization and tactics to achieve their goals. Other scholars refer to this phenomenon as the “boomerang pattern” or “transnationalism from the inside.”

Transnationalization impinges upon communication processes central to the way movements form and operate. “Information politics,” understood as “the ability to quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move it to where it will have the most impact,” is a central feature of movement strategies. Contentious claims are framed in a particular way, creating the symbols, sense of belonging and common

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purpose that underpin collective identity, and hence, movement solidarity. Information flows are the primary means of disseminating the ideas, norms and values that provide individuals with the impetus to act and sustain interaction with opponents over time. Where information is incomplete or unclear, cognitive “moral maps” can guide individual decisions to participate in acts of transnational resistance.

The logic of collective action dictates that if every member of a movement contributed toward the common objective, all concerned would be better off. As noted economist Mancur Olson famously contended, however, incentives to participate “apply selectively to individuals depending on whether they do or do not contribute to the provision of a collective good.” The perceived benefits to each individual are often outweighed by the lure of free-riding on the actions of others. One could save the costs associated with participation and still share in the collective payoffs. In this case, defection becomes the rational behaviour and, in the end, no one participates because each individual expects that others will also abstain. Even if imperfect information leads Falun Gong practitioners to act in accordance with their own moral maps, they could be expected to abstain from participation in rallies, especially if they are thousands of miles away from the site of political contention. As ethically repugnant as it sounds, those who

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4 Effectively moving information is especially important for groups like Falun Gong because religious movements tend to have more fluid, porous identity boundaries. See Ron Aminzade and Elizabeth J. Perry’s “The Sacred, Religious and Secular in Contentious Politics: Blurring Boundaries,” in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, Eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 155-158.

5 In the opening chapter to their influential volume, Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane argue that “ideas influence policy when the principled or causal beliefs they embody are provide road maps that increase actor’s clarity about goals or ends-means relationships, when they affect outcomes of strategic situations in which there is no unique equilibrium, and when they become embedded in political institutions.” See “Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework,” in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change*, Goldstein and Keohane, Eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 3-8.

operate under the protection of law in Western democracies could theoretically practice their faith, enjoying the benefits of spiritual well-being without ever contributing toward an end to persecution in China. What, then, actually causes these individual practitioner-activists to participate in political demonstrations like the one in Vancouver’s Robson Square?

How Social Movements Operate: The Resource Mobilization Paradigm

Scholars have developed several theoretical approaches to the study of social movements. Some focus on how movements respond to opportunity structures, while others regard issue framing as central to understanding why individuals in groups become politically active. By setting agendas and controlling the images and information that individuals are exposed to, movements can socialize their members in useful ways. They can also directly prime individuals for action by instilling in them a sense of urgency around a given frame.⁷

Yet another branch of social movement theory focuses on “resource mobilization” (RM) to explain movement activism. According to this line of thinking, movements are interest-maximizers which pursue goals rationally. For purposes of this thesis, it is useful to think about movement interests as two-tiered. On one level, movements confront procedural dilemmas of collective action. Disseminating politically usable information or getting the greatest number of individual practitioners out to a rally are significant

⁷ Nelson and Oxley re-evaluate the frames-as-primes theory in “Issue Framing Effects on Belief Importance and Opinion,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61 (1999). They argue that issue frames not only affect the content of one's beliefs, but can also influence the importance individuals attach to particular beliefs. Individuals interpret information and extrapolate a sense of urgency from particular frames.
challenges and constitute goals in-and-of themselves. On another level, movements seek victory over their opponents. For Falun Gong, this means an end to persecution, the release of any and all political prisoners and a public record acknowledging the disappearances and inhumane treatment of Chinese practitioners. These are substantive goals that justify sustained activism. RM theory primarily addresses the pressing procedural questions that TSMs are confronted with. Specifically, it tries to explain movement behaviours by looking at how things such as money, people and communications technology are manipulated to produce outcomes that help them reach their more substantive goals.

Movement structures affect the way resources are used and distributed. Sociologists working within an RM framework have typically focused on the effect of centralized versus decentralized forms of organization. The prevailing hypothesis within this school of thought is that centralized movements restrict resource manipulation to elites, thereby ensuring precise information flows required for politically useful collective actions. Better used resources produce more effective information flows, which promote solidarity, stronger attachments to identities and sustained, robust forms of activism. Because information in these movements tends to flow from the top down and often must pass through formal, hierarchically ordered channels, I refer to such structures as “vertical.”

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8 Others, such as Luther Gerlack and Virginia Hine, have also looked at “segmented” relationships in groups which are “composed of a great variety of localized groups or cells which are essentially independent but which can combine to form larger configurations or divide to form smaller units,” and “reticulated” structures, “in which the cells, or nodes, are tied together, not through any central point, but rather through intersecting sets of personal relationships and other inter-group linkages. As cited in Tarrow, 1998, p. 129.
Leadership roles occupy a key position in much of the RM literature. Anthony Oberschall, who is responsible for developing the original theoretical tenets of RM, noted the pivotal role played by leaders:

The actions and decisions of leaders consist of goal-directed behaviour under conditions of considerable uncertainty. Outside pressures and internal constraints, incomplete information, the necessity to keep the movement from splitting up, the desire to maintain one's leadership position in the face of challenges, a precarious financial base and other similar factors weigh heavily on the overall strategy and the day-to-day tactics and moves.  

Zald and McCarthy similarly claim that "authorities do not just respond to social movements, but shape the direction or very existence of movements." Recent work by Mario Diani also makes a clear connection between centralized movements and elite actors, insisting that "occupying a central position in a movement network actually entails the assumption of leadership roles by the organizations concerned. Central actors will obviously be in a better position than peripheral ones to act as coordinators between different segments of the network." In this study, I take leadership to imply the ability of powerful people to determine access to resources, issue orders and directives and impose their will on subordinates. One expects to find such a leader, formal hierarchical

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11 See Diani’s *Green Networks: A Structural Analysis of the Italian Environmental Movement*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 108-109. Elsewhere, Diani suggests that where movements are comprised of multiple activist organizations, leaders sometimes fulfill "brokerage" roles, coordinating network strategies and campaigns. See "'Leaders' or Brokers? Positions and Influence in Social Movement Networks," in *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, Mario Diani and Doug McAdam, Eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 105-122. The notion of brokerage, however, has received scant attention from scholars compared to the more classic conception of a leader as someone who issues orders and directives that are followed.
channels or vertical structure within TSMs to ensure precise communication and the most effective resource mobilization possible. A number of religious organizations have used these structures, and they have proven effective for coordinating collective action in many cases. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, has been sustained by Papal authority for thousands of years. For this reason, I do not argue that horizontal structures are inherently superior to vertical ones.

This thesis shows how standard theories about leadership and centralization are false in the case of Falun Gong and that vertical structures are not the only way movements can get their members to participate in collective actions. The central question addressed here is "What accounts for the participation of Falun Gong practitioners in political demonstrations such as the one in Robson Square given the movement's lack of any vertical, centralized, hierarchical structure or leadership?"

Importantly, it is not simply the lack of hierarchy or centralization, but the presence of horizontal structure that produces the outcome. Horizontality refers to the structural characteristics of a movement where,

a) Association is informal and takes place between individuals of relatively equal status within a group;

b) Where information does not travel from a leader or central source, but instead is passed back and forth between equals.

In horizontal structures, information tends not to be as focused or controlled as under vertical arrangements. Individual activists in horizontal movements rely on their "moral
maps” to a far greater extent than do their counterparts in vertical movements where, at least theoretically, elites can mobilize resources to minimize entropy.

Horizontal forms of organizations are useful for promoting social capital—features of social relations such as reciprocity, trust and networks that build mutual consideration between actors leading to voluntary cooperation around collective action challenges.\(^\text{12}\) Conceptually, social capital is akin to other forms of capital in that it is productive. Just as financial capital can be redeemed for material goods, social capital is redeemable for social goods. Groups and individuals can cash in their social capital investments to help solve problems or achieve goals. There is also a path dependent component to social capital accumulation. The more an individual or group has, the easier it becomes to obtain more. In many cases, the presence of social capital is the result of previous experience with structures, institutions, norms or conventions that nurture its growth.

Social capital also comes in different forms and has many uses. It is at once a public and a private good. As a private good, it is represented by “thick” trust bonds between blood relatives and old friends where norms of generalized reciprocity are well-entrenched. Under these conditions, individual rewards may be postponed and favours done on the expectations that they will be repaid in kind later. People in close relationships rely on each other for help in times of crisis because they trust that their close associates would be there for them if the need arose. As a public good, social capital comes about when mutual expectations of reciprocal consideration lead to greater feelings about the trustworthiness of others and are widely shared among members of a

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group. Public trust generally implies the presence of thin trust relationships that are built between strangers—people who do not know one another personally but feel a sense of communal attachment toward those with whom they share beliefs, values and norms. A sense of public trustworthiness is encouraged in horizontal structures where power asymmetries between actors are minimal and cooperative participation depends more on reciprocal exchange than top-down enforcement. Public trust leads, in turn, to a greater sense of group cohesion and a deepening of engagement in collective pursuits, like political demonstrations and protests. In short, horizontality fosters a kind of social capital that movements like Falun Gong “spend” on political demonstrations aimed at reaching substantive goals.

My empirical discussion of Falun Gong demonstrates how transnational activism is sustained even in the absence of strong central leadership when individuals trust in the kindness of strangers. Practitioners in Vancouver and across the world demonstrate politically because they believe that their fellow practitioners would come to their aid if necessary. Thin trust bonds between practitioners in many different countries are a learned by product of the trust and reciprocity norms that developed between practitioners in China when the government crackdown forced the movement to create clandestine horizontal networks in the face of repression.

The case study I present is all the more compelling in light of other movements that use vertical structures but do not display tendencies toward political activity. The

13 There are also social movements that operate without leadership or vertical structures but whose recruitment methods neither reflect nor bolster social capital. Mario Diani notes that some left-wing libertarian movements reject centralized leadership as a matter of principle. He points out that their members “tend to be either weakly related to specific organizations (in the case of individuals) or formally independent from each other (in the case of organizations).” Activists in these movements “struggle to reconcile their aspiration to autonomous and independent action with persistent needs of coordination and public representation.” In other words, common recognition of grievances and shared historical
Baha’i faith, for example, is similar to Falun Gong in several ways. As a relatively new religious organization (the faith was founded in 1863 in Iran), Baha’i has grown rapidly and spread to more than two-hundred thirty countries and territories. Practitioners have also endured oppression in an authoritarian state. Anti-Baha’i sentiment was perhaps most intense under the Khomeini regime, which construed the group’s headquarters in the Haifa as evidence that Baha’i supported Zionism. More recently, Shi’ite clergy have denounced Baha’i as heretics and imprisoned many without trial. The group’s progressive stance on the role of women in Muslim society is at odds with more conservative viewpoints and, as a result of efforts by Shi’ite clerics to defame the group, it has had to overcome allegations that it is a cult.

Unlike Falun Gong, however, transnational practitioners of the Baha’i faith are not particularly prone to demonstrate against a powerful national government. It has a central “administrative heart” composed of formal channels and hierarchies to disseminate information on theological and practical matters to Baha’i worldwide. In fact, the Baha’i World Centre includes a number of holy sites and shrines to important religious figures, indicating that leaders play a major role in Baha’i history. Despite their similarities, the obvious structural differences between Baha’i and Falun Gong are an important factor in their disparate tendencies toward political activism.

experience take a backseat to political ideologies that stifle the development of generalized reciprocity and public trust. See Diani, 2003, pp. 105-106.

14 See the movements official homepage online at http://www.bahai.org/dir/administration
16 The central authority of the Baha’i faith is described this way on its homepage.
17 The Baha’i World Centre is described on the group’s website as the “focal point for a global community.” See http://www.bahai.org/article-1-6-0-5.html
Methodology

Every effort has been made to present this argument in a manner that is palatable to a broad academic audience. Some readers may prefer a methodological approach that contributes to a body of existing theory by considering the observable commonalities present across cases. Others may favour more narrowly construed emphasis on "constitutive questions" and the particularities of certain movements. Many social scientists consider these to be mutually exclusive approaches to conducting research. I do not, however. I attempt to strike a balance between epistemologies, one that allows me to consider the specific details of Falun Gong's history, the development of horizontality and social capital in light of other movements with which it shares some similarities. This approach introduces significant tensions to my research design. I

Specifically, it raises questions concerning the extent to which comparing Falun Gong to other TSMs is feasible or even desirable. On the one hand, approaches determined to coin law-like generalizations often neglect the important contextualizing factors that give rise to more obscure movements about which little scholarship exists. To date, Falun Gong has not been sufficiently studied to determine exactly how much or how little it has in common with other TSMs. To the extent that specific contexts shape the way movements approach collective action challenges and are important for understanding the nature of contentious claims, it is preferable to gather data as a cultural anthropologist might. Such an outlook also allows one to be more self-conscious about conceptual stretching and attendant problems of causal heterogeneity. On the other hand,

18 Credit for the term "constitutive questions" and for the methodological outlook stressing the "via media" between positivist and constructivist positions goes to Alexander Wendt. See Social Theory of International Politics, Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1999), pp. 40-44.
typologizing is an important step in the process of theory building and testing. Counterposing lesser studied cases with well traveled ones can be a major source of analytical leverage for investigations like this one.

My research design reflects a conscious decision to measure easy-to-observe variables. Communication processes factor heavily in the causal chain that connects horizontality and social capital but, as Ronald Diebert notes, communication itself is uncommon as an independent variable in international relations because its intangible aspects often make it difficult to observe directly. Other steps in the chain are more easily observed. Casual observation of the movement confirms its lack of vertical structure and "headlessness" which are suggestive of horizontality, but not proof of it. More telling are the observable flows of information passed between local practitioners via the internet, which figure largely in coordinating Falun Gong demonstrations. Social capital is a more abstract concept, but its presence can be confirmed by testing for levels of interpersonal and public trust. If a practitioner originally came to Falun Gong though word of mouth from a friend or relative, thick, interpersonal trust can reasonably be inferred. Public trust, understood as the proliferation of thin trust relationships based on generalized reciprocity between fellow practitioners, is gauged here by levels of participation in "virtual communities" where individual identities remain secret. Presumably, if practitioners have no way of identifying each other in cyberspace save for a chatroom moniker or email address, relationships in "online communities" are more likely to be thin trust exchanges between strangers than old friends.

The decision to use a questionnaire over other analytic probes was based more on necessity than desire. Face-to-face interviews might have provided the content-rich, detailed responses to very specific questions that are often better suited to small-N studies like this one. This was not possible for two reasons. First, association between practitioners is very loose and informal. There is no membership in the conventional sense—there are no rolls, mandatory meetings or donor records. This characteristic has been inherited from tactics employed in China where perception of high risks made more clandestine association necessary. Second, after communicating with a number of practitioners in different parts of Canada and the United States, it was discovered that many were reluctant to take part in interviews because they feared harassment if they were discovered. To secure their participation in the study, extreme measures to protect identities had to be taken. The questionnaire was circulated to practitioners across greater Vancouver on the condition that an intermediary from the movement provide access to an email listserv, keeping names, addresses and other pertinent information anonymous. Completed forms were returned directly to the investigator who had no other means of contacting participants.

Ethical and professional matters related to the survey investigation were taken very seriously. In the end, the email campaign proved effective for emotionally distancing the investigator from participants and vice versa. When one's investigation touches upon issues that are sensitive or disturbing for participants, such as the torture or kidnapping of friends and family, there is a natural temptation to sympathize. Good scholarship depends upon balanced accounts that are best obtained through some

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20 The questionnaire forms provided space for practitioners to respond with narrative details, in lieu of conducting interviews. The full transcription of the questionnaire form can be viewed in Appendix B.
mechanism to prevent over-sympathizing. The extent to which previous academic work on Falun Gong has suffered from this tendency is uncertain, though the issue was raised in a recently published piece. At the same time, researchers who deal with sensitive topics should not feel bullied into taking a certain position. Anthropologist Adam Frank claims that

At least one graduate student I know at a U.S. university was strongly advised by a dissertation committee member not get involved with Falun Gong research lest she lose the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in China on her dissertation topic. Others have reported persistent inquiries about Falun Gong from the U.S. government, a situation that has created both ethical and professional concerns. Despite these difficulties, scholars continue to conduct fieldwork, present papers, and write articles (as have foreign reporters in China, despite occasional harassment and detention).

I encountered no such obstacles while conducting research for this study. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the professional ramifications of outside pressures, not only because research findings can sometimes have far-reaching and incalculable implications, but because researchers are ethically bound to provide balanced accounts of the phenomena they study.

The survey has also given rise to some methodological issues worth noting here. By merely responding, practitioners were confirming the hunch that Falun Gong had a wealth of intra-group social capital. Given that active engagement is a key feature of communities and groups with healthy social capital stocks, it is perhaps not shocking that those who responded measured a high degree of interpersonal and public trust. The

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22 Frank, ibid.
survey questions significantly reduced the likelihood of receiving responses from any apathetic or casual Falun Gong practitioners. While this tempts one to conclude that Vancouver-based practitioners are enthusiastic and deeply devoted participants in the movement, it also opens up the possibility that there is a silent group of practitioners who do not feel a strong sense of communal attachment.23

There are also concerns that the Vancouver contingent is unusually active because it is drawn from the second-largest enclave of Chinese ex-patriots in North America. Other national contexts have not, as yet, been investigated with sufficient rigour to conclude that the results of the Vancouver survey are replicable across all shadow cases. There are likely to be similarities between the Vancouver sample and others that could be obtained in the U.S. and Australia, but the same may not be true for practitioners in Singapore, or other soft authoritarian contexts where freedoms of speech, assembly, petition and so forth are not legally guaranteed or so deeply engrained in the political culture. Substantial journalistic evidence exists, however, to suggest that national and local chapters across North America and the Asia-Pacific face similar conditions and behave in similar ways.24 I therefore regard the survey as a “plausibility probe.” Despite the sample size, the results are suggestive of outcomes that occur broadly. With these caveats in mind, this study presents the most rigorous, thorough research possible within the confines of a Master’s thesis.

23 The actual size of the “silent” contingent, while uncertain, warrants a cautionary note. Please consult the appendix for details concerning sampling issues.

Organization of the Study

The next chapter aims to clarify further some of the important concepts related to social movements and their strategies. After providing a brief typology of TSMs and the different structures one expects to see in each of two major kinds discussed in the scholarly literature, it shows how social movements arise from contentious claims in local or national contexts. It argues that domestic cycles of contention create ripe conditions for the formation of shared grievances, collective identities, and common purposes which reinforce movement solidarity and lead to sustained interaction with political opponents. It then considers some important dynamics of transnationalization as a strategy for redressing contention.

Chapter three advances the theoretical argument concerning social capital and movement structures. It explains how horizontality helps deepen engagement by encouraging expectations of mutual consideration among individuals in groups. While horizontal structures are not necessarily better than vertical ones, the chapter argues that they promote interpersonal and public trust in ways that vertical structures do not. Moreover, it argues that the internet can help build public trust within movements by forging new relationships among people in varied national contexts while simultaneously preserving thick trust bonds where they already exist. Online media do not necessarily encourage weaker forms of movement activism, but create new avenues for deepening engagement across great geographic distances.

The purpose of chapter four is twofold. First, it develops the argument that Falun Gong’s organizational characteristics are a direct outgrowth of contentious politics in
China. It provides a synopsis of the movement's cultural roots and historical
development, including the government crackdown. Special attention is given to how the
ongoing repression of practitioners in China shapes their transnational strategy and
horizontal organization. Second, it presents empirical data from the Vancouver survey,
providing evidence of the relationship between horizontality and the social capital stocks
which strengthen Falun Gong's internal cohesion, create robust patterns of engagement
and allow it to draw upon the support of its allies. A short concluding chapter
summarizes the main argument of the thesis and suggests some reasons for believing in
the long term political relevance of Falun Gong and its possible role in future political
developments in China, including the emergence of civil society.
CHAPTER II
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND TRANSNATIONALIZATION

The proliferation of transnational relations scholarship in the past decade has come on the heels of theoretical innovations recognizing the relevance of non-state actors. In a seminal essay published in 1972, Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane describe how “students and practitioners of international politics have traditionally concentrated their attention on relationships between states,” but they acknowledged that “a good deal of intersocietal intercourse, with significant political importance, takes place without governmental control.” More recent work has refined the definition of transnational relations. Thomas Risse-Kappen describes it as “clearly identifiable actors or groups of actors...linking at least two societies or subunits of national governments.”

In addition to multinational corporations, a broad spectrum of NGOs and a host of other possible institutions or relationships, the term encompasses TSMs. These are “action systems comprised of mobilized networks of individuals, groups and organizations which, based on a shared collective identity, attempt to achieve or prevent social change, predominantly by means of collective protest.”

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26 “Transnational relations” might refer, for example, to a cross-border relationship where one actor is a state agent and one is an interest group, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Canadian beef producers or a partnership of subnational groups addressing issues of common significance, such as when a polluted river flows through more than one country creating externalities in multiple jurisdictions. See Risse-Kappen, “Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: An Introduction,” in Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions. Risse-Kappen, Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 8.

dynamic of these groups refers to the way in which they organize themselves and coordinate information flows across international boundaries.

Falun Gong is considered a TSM because its practitioners use a horizontal structure to coordinate political demonstrations in many countries to apply pressure on a domestic target. All practitioners are part of the same organization, but operate in different national and local contexts. The movement is not a coalition of autonomous actors and is not preoccupied with maintaining cooperation among autonomous national groups. Rather, it exhibits a high degree of internal cohesion, ideological uniformity and tactical focus, traits that are somewhat unusual given the movement’s informal horizontal structure.

This chapter proceeds in three main parts. After first providing a brief typology of TSMs and their characteristic structures, it depicts how domestic movements are formed within local or national contexts, pointing to some of their common attributes and objectives. RM theorists, of course, have contended that successfully meeting these objectives depends upon the coordination of resources and information flows in top down vertical structures. The chapter also explores some dimensions of the transnationalization process, noting how it opens opportunities for domestic social movements to pursue their claims in new ways.

A Typology of Transnational Social Movements

There are several different kinds of TSMs, but they can generally be grouped into one of two sub-categories. First, many are extensions of domestic politics that undergo a
process of transnationalization. Contentious politics rooted in national or local contexts are removed to transnational space via global communications technologies. Activists in these movements “think locally and act globally.”

For them, transnational activism is a strategy aimed at drawing attention to their plight, winning the support and sympathy of others and leveraging targets more powerful than themselves. Falun Gong has used the internet to generate publicity and sustain a transnational network of activists focused on redress for Chinese practitioners. Movements in this category focus on contentious politics in domestic contexts, but mobilizations, tactics and organizations are adapted for purposes of transnational coordination.

The second type of TSM targets issues of broader transnational significance, linking like-minded individuals or groups from different localities around diverse agendas such as the eradication of landmine usage, immunization distribution or the preservation of endangered species. Such movements are the result of aggregated opinions about transnational issues. Keck and Sikkink argue that “by building new links among actors in civil societies, states and international organizations, [advocacy networks] multiply the channels of access to the international system….Motivated by values rather than by material concerns or professional norms, these networks fall outside our accustomed categories.”

Because they are most often composed of autonomous individuals or groups, advocacy networks tend to be more segmented than domestic social movements. Leaders may act more like brokers, building contacts between movement organizations and helping to sustain cooperation in the absence of some greater central authority. In the parlance of network theory, elites facilitate

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28 These are the “rooted cosmopolitans” discussed by Tarrow.
“reticulation”—they are in a position to negotiate the bargaining processes between autonomous organizations and forge the web of connections that determine the relative strength or weakness of transnational coalitions.

Vertical structures are generally more common among the domestic social movements I deal with in this thesis. Rucht comments that vertical organization implies a more centralized structure characterized by one or several bodies beyond the national level that, in substantial matters, can impose their will on national groups. In this case, the flow of communication is predominantly vertical and top-down. Such a centralized structure presupposes or induces ideational and structural similarities between national groups—a trait that is most likely when all national groups are part of the same organization.30

Horizontality, on the other hand, is more typical of segmented, issue-based advocacy networks comprised of autonomous groups or organizations from different contexts. Rucht adds that “Because each group keeps its full organizational autonomy and none dominates the others, coordination is essentially horizontal even if there is a joint office designed to facilitate the flow of communication.”31 The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), for example, maintains that its success has been a result of its highly coordinated single-message strategy mingled with a non-bureaucratic campaign structure that allowed effective coalitions to develop between autonomous NGOs and national governments.32

30 See Rucht, p. 208. It is worth noting that many movements use both coordination structures in tandem with one another.
31 Rucht, p. 208.
32 Advice for other transnational coalitions can be found on the ICBL website at http://www.icbl.org/tools/faq/campaign/lessons.
The Origins and Objectives of Social Movements

Social movements are the products of domestic contention. They provide options for addressing shared problems when access to legitimate opportunity structures is denied. As Sidney Tarrow explains, collective action becomes contentious when “it is used by people who lack regular access to institutions, who act in the name of new or unaccepted claims and who believe in ways that fundamentally challenge others or authorities.... Contentious collective action is the basis of social movements, not because movements are always violent or extreme, but because it is the main and often only recourse that ordinary people possess against better equipped opponents and powerful states.”

In democratic countries, political parties, interest groups and volunteer associations provide access to a public sphere where contention is defused. As vehicles for mass participation, these types of organizations use formal institutions and procedures as resources to articulate preferences. Participation requires and often reinforces stewardship for institutional and procedural rules. Legal recognition is the basis of legitimacy for most collective actions in established democracies.

Even in liberal democracies, however, contentious politics may fall outside accepted or legitimate categories. Social movements find ways to subvert exclusion from legal recognition when necessary. Expressing contention in extreme ways may be the most effective way for movements to raise awareness of their cause and win support. Sometimes this can be accomplished by discursive means, but because their agendas are

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34 Ibid., pp. 2-3
35 Not all movements behave this way. Applying the formal institutions of the state is a part of social movement repertoires, but many turn to other tactics when these institutions prove ineffective.
often more progressive and push the boundaries of accepted norms or definitions of
citizenship, movements frequently resort to more disruptive alternatives to call attention
to themselves. The American civil rights movement, for example, became divided
internally between advocates of non-violent resistance and those who were willing to
pursue “any means necessary” to achieve social change. Malcolm X favoured more
extreme tactics because he felt that discursive methods had been ineffective and would
continue to be so.

It is more difficult to observe the origins of social movements in authoritarian
states in part because degrees of legal recognition vary widely between soft authoritarian
and highly repressive regimes. However, we can assume that in most cases, freedoms of
speech and assembly are weak, limiting associational life and thus the formation of
interests and identities that underpin collective action challenges. Many regimes either
stifle contention or lack the transparency for scholars and international observers to
clearly see it. Yet that does not mean that movements cannot or do not exist under these
conditions. Elizabeth J. Perry, who has written extensively on resistance movements in
China, argues that modernization and the development of markets has speeded the rise of
new interests and inequalities, engendering resistance in several arenas. 36 Falun Gong’s
transnational activism is a direct response to both the oppression of religious practitioners
and a lack of opportunities for redress in China. Even in authoritarian contexts where
movements face greater risks of retaliation from vengeful states or dictators, inability to
access to political resources is the basis for contentious collective action.

36 Selden and Perry, “Introduction: Reform and Resistance in Contemporary China,” in Chinese Society,
Conflict, Change and Resistance, Perry and Selden, Eds. (London and New York: Routledge-Curzon,
Tarrow argues persuasively that political contention is a necessary condition for recognition of common purpose, the strengthening of group solidarity and sustaining interaction with opponents—three key objectives of social movements.\(^{37}\) First, recognizing common purpose requires that individuals be aware of their stake in a particular problem. Movements need to develop consensus around their claims to contention and promote ideas about shared grievances. This could also mean arousing collective recognition of the consequences of inaction or the degree of severity a problem could potentially impose on a community. Participation in movement activities may be accompanied by certain risks, depending on how contentious the claims are. Effective collective action depends upon individuals engaging in risk-assessment and realizing that participation is worth it.

In the Falun Gong case, contention in the form of brutal persecution has justified activism and shaped movement strategies since 1999. Recognition of shared grievances has pushed the movement toward alternative means of addressing contention, even in a climate of considerable risk, fear and repression. Contention actually produced the clandestine, horizontal structure that endures to this day. Where individuals are more aware of common purpose arising from high-stakes contention, the more determined, cohesive and enduring a movement is likely to be.

Second, movements construct identities for themselves by engaging in issue framing and by creating symbols which become rallying points for shared identity. Indeed, as Tarrow puts it, "even in liberal democracies, people identify with movements by words, forms of dress or address, and private behaviour that signify their collective

\(^{37}\) See Tarrow, 1998, pp. 4-7.
Scholars have debated which foci of identity translate into the most cohesive social movements. In general, ethnicity and religion are thought to be especially effective for mobilizing identities because they can draw upon feelings of solidarity rooted in shared histories. I submit that shared history is not the sole or even most important determinant of strong identity in all cases. Although contention is the outgrowth of some ancient grievance in many other cases, it does not appear to be so for Falun Gong. The movement’s history cannot be traced back further than the early 1990’s. Strength of identification actually comes from widespread recognition of high stakes contention.

Finally, groups that are defined by an isolated incident, such as a riot, are not social movements. To be considered as such, groups must sustain interaction with opponents. This is why risk assessment and perceptions about the degree to which a challenge matters are so important. Collective identities must remain strong and solidarities maintained for continued activism to be justified. Movements therefore need to coordinate information flows in ways that ensure messages are deemed accurate and urgent. Anthony Oberschall, who pioneered the concept of resource mobilization (RM), defined it as the “technological and structural means of information dissemination” which allows scholars to consider the nature of “broad structural shifts” in relation to levels of activism. Essentially, this means that one can expect participation in movement activities to vary with organizational structure. Building on this body of theory, Mayer

38 Tarrow, p. 5.
40 For an overview of the sociological approaches to movement behaviour, including an excellent synopsis of resource mobilization, see Nick Crossley, Making Sense of Social Movements, (Philadelphia, Open University Press, 2002), especially p. 79.
Zald has argued that the procedural objectives of movements are often solved by entrepreneurs taking advantage of access to resources. Where levels of activism are robust, such as at Falun Gong’s Robson Street demonstration, one expects to find resources under the direction of a leader or central body in a vertical structure. It is this supposition which makes Falun Gong’s political activism all the more puzzling.

**Some Dynamics and Challenges of Transnationalization**

For domestic social movements like Falun Gong, transnationalization is a strategy aimed at maximizing the visibility and effectiveness of contentious collective action. Some movements look beyond the state for access to institutions, resources and like-minded sympathizers who can apply pressure on domestic targets. Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam describe this process as “scale shift,” referring to “a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities.” Although it presents movements with a host of structural-logistical hurdles, the transnational public sphere represents opportunities for domestic movements since it increases the range of options available for approaching collective challenges at home.

Globalization is the engine driving the transnationalization of social movements. A contested and ill-defined concept, it is understood here not as an economic process involving the transfer of people, commodities and capital across territorial boundaries,

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41 Ibid.
42 This is the “boomerang pattern” described by Keck and Sikkink.
43 See Tarrow and McAdam’s “Scale Shift in Transnational Contention,” in Tarrow and Donatella della Porta, p. 125.
but a time-space convergence spurred by technological advancement that facilitates communication. This take on globalization is not new.\footnote{Many cultural theorists tend toward the view that, because space-time convergence brings distant localities into closer proximity with one another, globalization does not make all localities the same, but creates “spaces and connecting corridors,” which ease the flow of information. This idea is drawn from British cultural theorist John Tomlinson’s idea of “complex connectivity.” In \textit{Globalization and Culture}, for example, John Tomlinson refers to this notion as “complex connectivity.” (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999), p. 7.} In the 1960’s, Marshall McLuhan called attention to the role technologies played in shrinking the globe.\footnote{McLuhan coined his now cliché but nevertheless relevant dictum “the medium is the message” in his 1964 book \textit{Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man}. (New York, Toronto and New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), pp. 7-21. He used this phrase to refer to the fact that “the personal and social consequences of any medium...result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.” This idea was developed further in his posthumously published book, \textit{The Global Village: Transformations in World, Life and Media in the Twenty-first Century}. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).} Benedict Anderson has famously argued that the printing press was instrumental in “great mass ceremonies” that linked spatially distant participants under common ideological constructs of nationhood.\footnote{See Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, (New York: Verso, 1983), pp. 37-38.} Other scholars have also noted how various technological innovations have similarly transcended time and space to unify people under a common purpose and collective identity.\footnote{Susan Rogers has demonstrated how audio tape recorders helped to solidify kinship ties between ethnic communities in Indonesia, for example. See “Batak Tape Cassette Kinship: Constructing Kinship Through the Indonesian National Mass Media,” in \textit{American Ethnologist}, Vol. 13, no.1 (February 1986), pp. 23-42.}

On this understanding, globalization is a cyclical phenomenon coinciding with scientific breakthroughs. What, then, distinguishes the present global era from those past? Internet technology has sped up the space-time convergence, unleashing the communicative capacities of people in virtually every corner of the world. Globalization leads to a thickening of communicative linkages, creating a space known as “global civil society,” or the “transnational public sphere.” It has usefully been described this way:
The transnational public sphere offers a place where forms of organization and tactics for collective action can be transmitted across the globe. It is the medium through which various forms of collective action and social movement repertoires become “modular” and transferable to distant locations and causes. It also provides the space where material resources can be developed and distributed across national boundaries in ways that limit the nation-state’s capacity to sanctify and demonize practices with cries of patriotic and alien influences.48

This space often looks attractive to movements operating under repressive conditions because it opens up the possibilities of reaching massive numbers of supporters in a variety of local contexts. Provided the technology is available, oppressed people can awaken the consciousness of the global public to their plight.49 Transnationalization also allows movements like Falun Gong to transmit information about a domestic situation to practitioners in other countries who attempt to raise public awareness through activist campaigns. Such campaigns can include demonstrations like the Robson Square torture re-enactments, or more direct attempts to leverage targets by utilizing the legal institutions of the countries they inhabit.50

The benefits of transnationalization are accompanied by a special set of dilemmas, however. Various movements and causes must compete with each other for the attention of the global public. This could potentially result in the failure of some movements to attract much publicity because “there is only a short road from the appeal of many voices

48 Tarrow, as cited in Guidry et al, p. 5
49 Despite the widespread availability of resources in the relatively affluent West, “information poverty” remains a problem in some other parts of the world.49 Gaining access to the required technology is more difficult where infrastructural development is lacking. See Pippa Norris’ Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet Worldwide. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.5. Falun Gong has had some success with online coordination, but internet access is limited in some poorer parts of China.

50 According to the Friends of Falun Gong Ontario website, a Canadian man successfully sued a Chinese Deputy Consul General for libel after the consular official stated that the plaintiff was a member of a “sinister cult.” See http://dawn.thot.net/fofg/feature13.html.
to cacophony. If too many concerns and actors compete with each other, the audience becomes highly selective, or even bored.\footnote{Rucht, p. 217.} The plight of Falun Gong in China is a matter of grave concern to other practitioners across the globe, but what makes it any more important to the average Westerner than human rights abuses occurring anywhere else? Even if greater numbers of people were fully aware of what was happening in China, it seems unlikely that the Falun Gong cause would become a priority for them. In other words, the attention span of the global public is limited and movements tend to crowd each other out.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how movements are the products of contentious politics in domestic contexts and how the transnational public sphere provides an outlet for movements to pursue their claims when options at home are limited. Additionally, it has highlighted some of the potential challenges movements face in transnational space, using Falun Gong as a reference point. Most RM theorists would no doubt argue that meeting the challenges of transnationalization is not much different than conquering domestic coordination problems. The greater control over resources, the more focused the information individuals receive. Even across geographic divides, more focused, reliable information means a stronger sense of common purpose and collective identity that translates, in turn, to politically useful collective actions that can be sustained over time. As a bonus, using hierarchy to control information flows can help ensure that
information targets and reaches parts of the global public most likely to be sympathetic to a movement’s aims.

By supposing that a movement’s success or failure with conquering coordination challenges and meeting basic procedural objectives depends upon specific structural criteria, RM theories deflect attention from exceptional cases. As there are few studies that deal with Falun Gong in depth, scholars have not sufficiently accounted for the range of factors shaping its structure and strategy. Only after one the conditions that produce distinct observations have been sufficiently explored can one make sound judgments about the relative uniqueness of a case vis-à-vis similar ones. With that in mind, the next chapter more fully develops the theoretical framework of social capital, describing the conditions under which it is likely to be found, and more importantly, under which it flourishes.
Domestic social movements often establish centralized hierarchies to maximize control over resources and flows of information. Vertical structures provide a means of short-circuiting collective action problems and serve many social organizations well. Leaders can compel individuals to contribute toward a public good by pulling rank, enforcing a formal chain of command, offering incentives for cooperation or doling out punishments for non-compliance. By controlling access to information flows, elites can send clear orders and directives to lower-ranking members. To provide one example, few social organizations are as centralized, hierarchical or institutionally rigid as the Roman Catholic Church. In this case, a vertical structure allows information to flow from the top down. The Papacy issues instructions to Cardinals, who pass orders on to Bishops, and so on down the line until the desired ends are met.

At the same time, vertical structures are subject to a number of problems. Vertical movements tend to be more formal than horizontal ones and sometimes become more institutionalized over time, a process which can carry a host of consequences for efficient, effective resource distribution. Valerie Sperling notes how relationships with Western NGOs have spurred the professionalization of some women’s movements in Russia. Professionalization has, in turn, created a number of unforeseen problems for these groups, including intra-movement factionalism and cries of preferential or unequal
access to resources. Movements that use vertical structures sometimes fall victim to bureaucratic unresponsiveness and are, almost by definition, undemocratic.

Alternatively, a horizontal structure can tap into the trusting relationships that bind individuals in social movements. Horizontality contributes to the development of social capital—that is, to elements of social relationships (like reciprocity, trust and networks) that lead to higher levels of voluntary engagement in collective pursuits. Rising engagement levels promote group cohesion and help sustain interaction by contributing to the general sentiment that “we’re all in this together.” That is not to say that evidence of trust and reciprocity cannot be found in vertical structures, but that horizontality is primarily responsible for deepening trust between Falun Gong’s transnational practitioners and encouraging participation in activities related to the movement’s political struggle. By trusting one another, practitioner-activists make investments in the movement’s social capital stocks. These investments are “cashed in” to help stage demonstrations against the Chinese communist party.

A central purpose of this chapter is to highlight the theoretical connection between horizontality and social capital. This is important for understanding how social movements like Falun Gong might coordinate activist campaigns in the virtual absence of vertical structural controls. The chapter begins by defining social capital itself and discussing how movements like Falun Gong apply it to collective action challenges. It then explores how different movement structures can effect social capital development. A third section briefly explains the role of communications technology in promoting social capital transnationally.

Defining Social Capital

Social capital is productive. It is a resource that individuals or movements can use to help solve problems or achieve certain goals. As Woodcock and Narayan put it,

The basic idea of social capital is that a person's family, friends and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called upon in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and leveraged for material gain. What is true for individuals, moreover, also holds true for groups. Those communities endowed with a diverse stock of social networks and civic associations are in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability, resolve disputes and take advantage of new opportunities.53

Unlike other forms of capital which are owned or possessed exclusively by individuals, social capital is both a private and a public good. Private social capital consists of relationships between individuals characterized by high levels of trust and generalized reciprocity on a one-to-one basis. According to Robert Putnam, generalized reciprocity refers to "a continuing relationship of exchange that is at any time unrequited or imbalanced, but that involves mutual expectations that a benefit granted now should be repaid in the future."54 An individual who helps an old friend to cope through a divorce or the loss of a loved one does so because they believe that the other person would do the same for them. Brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, parents and their children, even colleagues who have worked together closely for years are all examples of thick trust relationships where one individuals is likely to help the other if necessary. Individuals

54 Putnam actually distinguishes between two types of reciprocity. In addition to the generalized variety, he notes that some reciprocity norms are "balanced," meaning "the simultaneous exchange of items of equivalent value, as when office-mates exchange holiday gifts or legislators log-roll." See Putnam, 1993, p. 172.
with a wealth of social capital will develop as many thick trust relationships as they can, storing up favours that they can call upon when needed.

In contrast to private social capital which is based on interpersonal trust, social capital within groups is based on public trust that occurs when generalized reciprocity norms are diffuse and widely shared and where people who do not know one another personally hold mutual expectations of trustworthiness. Individuals in communities or groups with high levels of public trust tend to regard each other with a certain familiarity. For example, a person who asks a stranger in a coffee shop if they would mind “keeping an eye on my laptop while I grab another drink” shows a degree of trust and by asking tacitly acknowledges that, had it been the stranger who asked, they would have obliged them as well. This is called thin trust.

Public trust speaks to the presence of thin trust within larger networks of actors, which is useful for promoting social cohesion. The tendency for thin trust to proliferate in group settings does not mean that social movements are somehow weaker. On the contrary, thin trust is the glue that holds TSMs like Falun Gong together. Members of even the most tight-knit communities may trust each other based on shared purpose or identity, yet they may never interact face-to-face. They need not be old friends or share blood ties or even know one another. For Falun Gong to mount protests and sustain its struggle with the Chinese government, all practitioners must do is trust that others would do the same for them if it were they who endured persecution.

It is, of course, fairly easy to understand how close associates would come to each other’s rescue. Most people would do whatever was necessary to help a relative or friend in danger. But the kindness of strangers, especially those who are not in any direct
danger themselves, defies the logic of collective action. In the case of Falun Gong, altruistic behaviour is not the result of coercive enforcement or specific rewards to individuals. It is, rather a product of horizontal association that, over time, has resulted in broadly shared reciprocity norms and expectations about the trustworthiness of fellow practitioners.

**Social Movement Structures, Collective Action Challenges and Path Dependence**

Strong leadership allows movements to overcome collective action dilemmas. In the classic Hobbesian illustration, a neutral third-party facilitated communication between actors to negotiate the terms of cooperation and, in addition, meted out punishments for violating collective agreements such that defection by any party became too costly.\(^{55}\) The big problem with this, according to Putnam, is that “impartial enforcement is itself a public good, subject to the same basic dilemma it aims to solve. For third-party enforcement to work, the third-party itself must be trustworthy...”\(^{56}\) In *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam argues that the state, as third party, allowed Italy’s more civic northern region access to certain political resources while the south learned to mistrust the political bargaining process, the third party and its northern neighbours. There are no guarantees that the third party will always remain neutral or that it will not defect and pursue its own agenda. Third parties have little value if their authority is not applied impartially or if the processes they arbitrate are regarded as illegitimate.

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\(^{55}\) This characterization of third party enforcement is based on that of Douglass North, as cited by Putnam in *Making Democracy Work*. Putnam also draws upon Hobbesian notions of third party enforcement. “If both parties concede to Leviathan the power to enforce comity between them, their reward is the mutual confidence necessary to civil life. See p. 165.

\(^{56}\) Putnam, 1993, p. 165.
Although vertical structures help enforce compliance with movement objectives, they are not as conducive to building social capital because the power dynamic within them is inherently asymmetrical. As Putnam writes, "a vertical network, no matter how dense and how important to its participants, cannot sustain social trust and co-operation. Vertical flows of information are often less reliable than horizontal flows, in part because the subordinate husbands information as a hedge against exploitation." Reciprocity norms tend to be similarly one-sided. Clientelistic relationships involve mutual obligations and expectations, but because one party is more powerful than another, reciprocity and trust could be easily supplanted by coercion.

Falun Gong’s horizontal structure, on the other hand, has allowed the group’s social capital to flourish. When interpersonal trust becomes public trust, the result is greater social cohesion and widening circles of engagement. Greater numbers of people regard each other as trustworthy and voluntary cooperation becomes more likely. Well-established reciprocity norms make the cost of defection from collective obligations very high, especially in horizontal organizations where internal power dynamics are more symmetrical. There is, furthermore, a certain path-dependence to social capital accumulation in this type of organization. Horizontality became widely used as Falun Gong spread outside China because it had proven a successful means of coordinating activities domestically. Practitioners learned to rely on one another in times of crisis and by working together, were able to save the movement from almost certain annihilation. The accumulation of transnational social capital may be even easier for groups like Falun Gong that have fluid identity boundaries because the diffusion of reciprocity norms is not constrained to the same degree as in movements that are more protective of their identity.

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Gathering social capital in the form of support from practitioners and outsiders around
the world is a help to the movement, not a hindrance.

While all movements seek to maximize their support, many are reluctant to
pursue strategies that could negatively affect their identity. Along these lines, Putnam
makes a further distinction between two types of social capital:

Some forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward-looking and tend
to reinforce exclusive identities among homogeneous groups. Examples of
bonding capital include ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women’s
reading groups and fashionable country clubs. Other networks are outward-
looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. Examples of
bridging social capital include the civil rights movement, many youth service
groups and ecumenical religious organizations....Bonding social capital is good
for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity....Bridging
networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and information
diffusion.58

Movements that are concerned with preserving the integrity of their collective identity
will likely opt for a bonding strategy.59 Those that are less concerned with identity and
who simply want to generate awareness of their cause will lean toward bridging social
capital. Their claims can reach greater numbers of people because outsiders are free to
simply be sympathetic toward a movement without adopting its identity per se. Falun
Gong uses both bridging and bonding strategies. It retains emphasis on domestic claims
to contention and is heavily influenced by ancient Qigong practices particular to Chinese
culture, yet it has reached out to others with its spiritual message, gathered support to

58 Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. (New York: Simon and
Schuster, 2000) p. 22
59 There is, however, a tension between bonding social capital and transnationalization which sometimes
leads to interactions that blur the boundaries of group identity.
better leverage the Chinese national government, and grafted Western human rights discourses onto its own doctrines.

Transnationalization and the Growth of Public Trust

The central message of Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* is that while individuals continue to participate in various activities, they now do so on a more isolated, individualistic way. Americans enjoy bowling as much as they always did, but now prefer single-player matches to participation in leagues or fellowship with teammates. Many people are still involved in public life. They belong to movements and interest groups whose lengthy membership rolls do not indicate any special problems with engagement or declining public trust. Instead of attending weekly meetings or ringing doorbells for a campaign, however, many people are content to simply mail in a yearly donation check. This kind of engagement constitutes, in Putnam’s view, a threat to America’s social capital stock. The reciprocity and trust fostered by face-to-face interaction has been replaced by distant or “by proxy” involvement in public life, weakening social cohesion. If America is to reclaim its social capital of yesteryear, individuals must break from isolation and return to more interactive forms of engagement.  

The symbolic distance Putnam perceives between individuals in contemporary America finds a parallel in many TSMs. Paradoxically, participation in the transnational public sphere opens up new opportunities for engagement, but deterritorialization produces engagement of a sort that Putnam would probably not view as desirable. Francis Fukuyama similarly doubts that the trust between individuals in geographic

60 See Putnam, 2000, pp. 15-18.
proximity to one another can be emulated by actors in separate regions. Yet face-to-face interaction is obviously unfeasible for TSMs which must rely on technologies to synthesize trust present in real-time, close-quarters interactions. Reliance on technology is a necessary part of transnationalization but it affects the nature of relationships and the patterns of engagement arising from them.

Is the internet a help or a hinderance to social capital development? Does it allow for the wider diffusion of reciprocity norms and forge new pathways for the development of public trust, or does it merely encourage weaker forms of association? I do not believe that trusting relationships built via distance transcending technology are, ipso facto, inferior to those based on face-to-face interaction. Transnationalization does not automatically imply weakened attachments to symbolic communities. In fact, the opposite is often true. Many national and religious Diasporas assert their identities more vehemently in distant spatial contexts. As a bonus, they are often able to form thin trust bonds with others who help them pursue their goals.

By compressing space and time and multiplying the number of interactions between distant individuals, the internet maintains thick trust bonds where they already exist and helps build new thin trust linkages between individuals and groups across borders and sometimes identity boundaries. It is therefore inherently well-suited to building public trust in horizontal movements. The ICBL maintains that the effectiveness of its campaign was due, in part, to alliances that were “built among and between NGO’s, ...

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61 Fukuyama was investigating whether capitalism has negative impacts on social capital stocks. The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order. (New York: The Free Press, 1999), pp. 210, 249-262.

62 The debate among scholars is polarized as to whether internet technology helps or hurts a community’s social capital stocks. See Anita Blanchard, “The Effects of Dispersed Virtual Communities on Face-to Face Social Capital,” in Social Capital and Information Technology, Marleen Huysman and Volker Wulf, Eds. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 53.
governments and international organizations [and] facilitated by improved electronic communication (first faxes then emails) and also by the personal relationships between those involved.” The Falun Gong case shows how the internet can be as instrumental for structuring domestically oriented TSMs as it can be for advocacy networks. Horizontal interactions in cyberspace are a way of spreading public trust that promotes solidarity and widens the scope for participation in movement activity.

Conclusion

One common criticism of social capital theory is that the direction of causality remains uncertain. Does public trust generate greater amounts of social capital, or does having social capital breed public trust? Do high levels of engagement really require broadly diffused reciprocity norms, or does engagement itself actually cause norms to be diffused? Social capital accumulation depends upon cyclical feedback mechanisms to an extent, but it is important to remember that there are two distinct forms of trust that factor in the causal chain. Interpersonal trust is a necessary condition for even small amounts of social capital to develop. Social capital stocks rise when interpersonal trust becomes public trust. Widening circles of engagement reflect shared reciprocity norms and the diffusion of thin trust relationships.

If horizontality has worked so well for Falun Gong, why have more movements not emulated its structure? The reason is that the group’s organization and transnational strategy have been shaped by specific historical factors. Dealing with repression meant devising coordination methods that would allow the movement to operate without high

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63 ICBL homepage, online at http://www.icbl.org/tools/faq/campaign/lessons
profile leadership. Falun Gong's ability to put together successful activist campaigns comes from experience with forms of organization that encourage the growth of public trust, reciprocity and voluntary engagement. Internet technology extends that organization, allowing information to reach distant practitioners and transnational allies. The next chapter presents a fuller empirical account of that history and transnational strategy.
CHAPTER IV

FALUN GONG AND ITS DISCONTENTS: FROM DOMESTIC CONTENTION TO TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM

I experienced [the] June 4 event in Beijing. At that time I [was] studying in one of [the] Beijing universities. After June 4, 1989, I [felt] totally disappointed and hopeless toward the Chinese government and Chinese Community Party.... So when chances came, I and my husband came to Canada to study....my close friends, they disappeared suddenly and were found abducted or imprisoned.

My dad was harassed repeatedly for speaking for Falun Gong. He did not practice....A family friend was beaten to death by police for exposing the persecution of Falun Gong. Another family friend has been imprisoned for his belief, his house taken away from him by a court after he was jailed.

--Two Vancouver-area practitioners, names withheld

These are common tales for Falun Gong practitioners in many countries. Virtually every individual who participated in this study reported close relatives and friends suffering at the hands of the Chinese government for their religious beliefs. Even those that did not told horror stories involving more distant acquaintances. Why?

There are two forms of associations in China: those that operate with the government’s blessing, and those that do not. Forms of association that contribute to social cohesion or provide the party with a valuable service are tolerated, while those that do not are regarded with suspicion. As a social movement, Falun Gong represents an unwelcome

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64 Many simply claimed knowledge of “fellow practitioners” who lost their jobs, were arbitrarily arrested, detained or beaten in police custody.
form of association that threatens the stability of political rule. Its technologically savvy transnational adherents and growing international support make it particularly menacing.

Immediately following Mao’s seizure of power, the party instituted a complete ban on associational life. Religious organizations diverted attention from one’s loyalty to communist dogma, which was the de facto national religion. These sentiments were relaxed considerably during the Deng era and various forms of association are now becoming more common, though religious organizations are still required to register with party offices. Unfortunately, the growth of association has not been accompanied by improvements in China’s abysmal human rights record.

This chapter traces the meteoric rise of Falun Gong in China, from its emergence in the early 1990’s to the development of its “boomerang” strategy following the government crackdown of 1999. Cycles of contention in the intervening years, as well as continuing persecution in the years since, have shaped Falun Gong’s behavioural and organizational characteristics as a movement. The group’s history is fraught with ambiguities and contradictions and there is a paucity of information from neutral, academically viable sources. To provide as balanced a view of history as possible, I supplement a selected historiography with narratives drawn from my own survey research to flesh out the empirical details of the movement’s rise and provide evidence of how contentious politics affected both the movement and the lives of ordinary


66 A small but growing literature on civil society in China notes the increasing prevalence of business and professional groups as well as the introduction of local citizen’s coalitions. See B. Michael Frolic, The Emergence of Civil Society in China. (Toronto: University of Toronto-York University Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, Eastern Asia Policy Papers, 1996). In my view, such liberalizations are a strategic attempt to prolong single party rule which, considering the reproductive, expansionistic properties of social capital discussed in the previous chapter, may eventually outstrip the party’s capacity to contain associational life and provide impetus for greater reform.
individuals. Further data from the survey confirms that there are sufficiently strong degrees of interpersonal and public trust between Vancouver-based practitioners to sustain ongoing participation in political demonstrations even in the absence of identifiable leadership or vertical structural organization. A horizontal structure and corresponding information flows contribute to Falun Gong’s social capital stock, strengthening internal cohesion while building linkages with external allies.

“Pseudo-Science” and State Terror: Falun Gong and the Roots of Contentious Politics

Falun Dafa, the belief system exercised through Falun Gong, has much in common with Buddhist spirituality and Taoist philosophies that have been practiced in China for centuries. In addition to the core principles of benevolence, compassion and forbearance, Dafa is comprised of a series of exercises and stretches aimed at improving one’s body, mind and spirit. Practitioners maintain, however, that meditation and exercise alone is not enough to reap Dafa’s full benefits. One must also cultivate xinxing, or “innate morality.” The movement’s founder, Li Hongzhi, has conferred the status of Buddhahood on himself, and refers to his own spiritual teachings as a “cultivation

67 This method is similar to what Ian Lustick calls “quasi-triangulation.” According to him, historical records are not facts, but reflect scholarly perspectives on the past. By drawing on selected historiographies and incorporating a broader range of perspectives, the risk of using biased evidence is reduced. See “History, Historiography and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias,” in American Political Science Review, vol. 90, no. 3 (1996), p. 614.

system," though he venerates Dafa as the superior path to personal well-being and enlightenment.  

Despite these historical and cultural antecedents, there are no concrete dates from which the movement’s precise origins can be traced. Practitioners and scholars agree that Falun Gong has gained recognition as a movement only in the last ten to fifteen years. The physical practice of Dafa links Falun Gong with many other Qigong (translated as “vital energy”) practices that underwent a tremendous surge in popularity in the early 1990’s as part of a national Qigong fever. Although religious life in China was suppressed after the 1949 revolution, Qigong was actually permitted and even encouraged by the party as a fitness regime. Leading party officials unabashedly took part in Qigong practices during the hype. There is even evidence that Jiang Zemin, who would later denounce branches of Qigong practice as evil sects, called upon prominent teachers to help relieve his arthritis pain.

It was during the Qigong craze that Li Hongzhi began to teach in his hometown of Gongzhuling in the Jilin Province. At a gathering in Beijing in 1991, Li dazzled a crowd of some five-hundred enthusiasts. According to Adams, Adams and Galati, Li was “a natural. He spoke fluently and easily, demonstrating his five simple sets of exercises and referring only occasionally to a few notes written on scraps of paper.” The popularity of Qigong escalated, propelling Li to near celebrity status. Practitioners congregated spontaneously in public areas to participate in mass meditation sessions by the hundreds.

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69 Li Hongzhi makes statements to this effect in prefacing *Falun Gong*, English Ed. (New York: The Universe Publishing Company, 2000).
70 As Frank notes, the movement’s past is quite “non-specific” and its lineage “vague,” (p. 235).
71 Chen, as cited in Frank, p. 235.
Li’s brother, Donghui, admitted that he was “in the right place at the right time” and it is reported that at subsequent gatherings, Li drew crowds of thousands.\textsuperscript{73}

Li ran seminars across China and abroad between 1992 and 1995. In 1993, Falun Gong officially became part of the China Qigong Scientific Research Society (CQSRS), which at the time had the full approval of the communist party.\textsuperscript{74} Followers flocked to Li’s banner in massive numbers seeking the reported health benefits of his easy-to-do exercises. Some recall significant improvements in their health after beginning to practice Li’s teachings. Several survey respondents describe how the practice relieved a whole range of illnesses and increased their vitality. One woman testifies that

I have [had] migraine[s for] over twenty years, inherited from my mother. My mother and I have been seeking a way of curing [them]. I tried everything including Western and Eastern medicine. Nothing can help. I began to try Falun Gong because it is free to learn and my friend recommended it to me, saying it cured his father’s diabetes. So I tried and I was surprised to find out that my migraine was gone two months later.

Another reports feeling “a warm energy around my head and body. When I finished, I felt very comfortable, relaxed and energetic.” Dubbed a “pseudoscience,” Dafa was praised as a miracle form of alternative medicine that could help relieve China’s overburdened healthcare system.

Qigong practices were never explicitly passed off as religion, but many new converts to Falun Dafa embraced Li’s ideas as spiritual principles for moral living. He


\textsuperscript{74} It is supposed that allowing Qigong schools association under the auspices of a larger umbrella organization made it much easier for the communist party to keep tabs on potentially threatening individuals and ideas. It is even rumoured that the CQSRS tracked Qigong teachers for the party’s Public Security Bureau, though this has never been verified.
systematized the content of his seminars, teaching that “consummation”—a sort of transcendence or ascension to one’s true essence, akin to the achievement of Buddhist Nirvana—was made possible by giving up all personal desires. A number of practitioners recall that in addition to improved health, Dafa helped them to come to grips with spiritual questions other faiths left unanswered.\textsuperscript{75} One man explains how he found “Truth, compassion and tolerance to be basic principle[s] of this world….something that [he had been] search for his whole life.”\textsuperscript{76} Another man claims that his ongoing study and practice of Falun Gong “continues to broaden [my] mind and deepen [my] heart. It enables me to be mentally stronger, and be more kind, compassionate and tolerant.”\textsuperscript{77} As public gatherings grew steadily larger through the late 1990’s, Falun Gong appeared to the party as a different and vaguely ominous sort of animal. Qigong practices were permissible, but unregistered religious organizations were not.

The precise details and chronology of events surrounding the government’s crackdown remain quite ambiguous. Apparently, the movement split from the CQSRS and Li began to conduct seminars in the United States, eventually emigrating there in 1998. A prominent physicist named He Zuoxiu wrote an article criticizing the movement and, in response, large but non-violent vigils were staged at Tianjin Normal University on April 19, 1999 and outside the Zhongnanhai government compound in Beijing on April 22 of that year.\textsuperscript{78} The government responded to the demonstrations with brutal force and practitioners numbering in the hundreds were beaten or killed by police and thousands more were detained in stadiums. “6-10 offices” were allegedly established by the party.

\textsuperscript{75} Survey respondent, name withheld.  
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{78} Estimates of the numbers involved in the protests range from ten to sixteen thousand, according to Chang’s account.
on June 10 expressly to implement the roundup of Falun Gong practitioners. Police began confiscating videos, cassettes, literature, busts of Li and other paraphernalia in early June and the government issued a complete and total ban on all material related to Falun Gong, its organization, doctrines and practices on July 22. Chang recalls how some party officials proclaimed the April demonstrations to be the most serious threats to public order since the Tiananmen Square uprising. Li, now living in New York, went into self-imposed exile for nearly two years, fearing kidnapping and brutal retribution from the Chinese government if he were found.

Immediately following the ban, the communist party launched an elaborate smear campaign to defame the movement at home and abroad. President Zemin denounced them as "evil" and a threat to "the vanguard role and purity" of the party. Any government personnel found to be involved faced dire consequences. Television reports aired claiming that Falun Gong practitioners were insane and driven to kill themselves and their families. Rumours circulated that ritual practices, far from promoting robust health, incorporated self-starvation and blood-letting. The state-controlled Xinhua news agency equated Falun Gong with rebels in China's past, and called attention to the fact that Qigong clubs had played a major role in the Boxer uprising. As Frank notes, "by adopting the language of past rectification campaigns, the party implicitly situated

79 The significance of the numbers '6-10' are uncertain. The office is a branch of the Public Security Bureau, which handles matters related to immigration and social order, and is reportedly akin to the former Soviet KGB. Several websites allege that resolutions to abolish the 6-10 office have been signed by members of the U.S. Congress, yet a thorough search for the primary document turned up nothing. See "United States Congressional Resolution, passed July 24, 2002" Online at http://www.faluninfo.net/610/info.asp
81 Chang, p 10. See also John Wong and William T. Liu, The Mystery of Falun Gong: Its Rise and Sociological Implications. (Singapore: East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, Contemporary China Series No. 22, 1999), p. 17.
Falun Gong in the context of not only examples of chaos, such as the Taiping rebellion, but also in the more recent chaos of the Cultural Revolution."

It is difficult to estimate the real damage of the government’s attempts at defamation. Indeed, the movement has failed to shake its cult-like appearance entirely, even in the West where its public demonstrations are generally well-received. Australian media giant Rupert Murdoch, who has interests in the emerging satellite television market in China, has publicly defended the actions of the communist party. Headlines such as “China Shows off Repentant Falun Gong” and “Chinese Falun Gong Members ‘Confess’ to Concocting Torture Photos,” have been run by online news sources, including the BBC, and have been damaging for the group’s image. Perhaps the most negative attention in the West has been generated by the movement’s continued use of the Falun symbol, which features a large, multicoloured swastika at its centre. Although the swastika predates Nazism by many centuries and appears frequently in the symbolism of several Eastern religions, its use has nevertheless caused a public relations nightmare for the movement in the United States and Canada.

Government persecution has not let up in the time since the crackdown. There is, of course, no way of knowing the full extent of the brutality. Precise estimates of the raw numbers are unavailable and existing records are unreliable. Reports published by the movement itself estimate the death toll in the thousands, while the government has never acknowledged or reported a single fatality. Stories of continuing persecution and

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82 Frank, pp. 241-246.
83 Frank, pp. 2434-244.
85 The 2003 edition of the Falun Gong Report claims that “since July 20, 1999, over 100,000 practitioners, including pregnant women, the elderly and young children, have been sent to labour camps without trial, thousands have been illegally jailed, with the longest term being eighteen years, and millions of innocent
injustice are common in Falun Gong circles, however, as the statements by Vancouver-area practitioners attest. Disappearances seem to be commonplace, as do firings, blacklistings, arbitrary arrests, beatings and so forth. Perhaps most disturbing are the allegations of sexual torture. Practitioners tell of female detainees being stripped naked and pushed into cells crowded with male inmates who are encouraged by guards to commit rape. Several others indicate that friends or relatives who had never been directly involved with Falun Gong were constantly monitored and harassed by police who were searching for information on movement activities.\textsuperscript{86}

Falun Gong was not a political movement at its inception, but it became one following the crackdown. Within China, the ban pushed the movement underground, toward more clandestine forms of organization that made identifying and targeting practitioners much more difficult. Rather than gathering to perform exercises in public parks, practitioners opened their homes and coordinated mediation sessions themselves. Information traveled either by word of mouth between close associates or anonymously over the internet. These innovations proved useful for keeping a low profile and, eventually, became fixtures of Falun Gong's structure in other countries. Pursuing justice and redress for those suffering under persecution is now the primary focus of demonstrations in cities across North America and the Asia-Pacific. Domestic contention led the movement to discard all forms of conventional leadership and embrace much

\textsuperscript{86} Survey respondent, name withheld.
looser forms of association, yet enthusiasm for Falun Gong’s political fight remains astonishingly high.

**Falun Gong, Social Capital and Horizontality**

Contentious politics in China now dominates the movement’s agenda while it mobilizes key resources including people and technology to maximize its visibility and sustain interaction with a powerful domestic target. Curiously, the movement is headless, lacking the organizational features normally required to disseminate information and coordinate collective action. As Chang notes, “Li’s title as Master and founder of the sect may give a deceptive impression of the degree of control he has.”87 He makes few public appearances and seldom communicates with practitioners, save for occasional postings on movement websites. Information is exchanged between ordinary individuals of relatively equal standing in the movement, either in face-to-face conversations or over the internet in online discussion forums. There are no formal rules or procedures dictating who has access to channels of communication or who is ultimately responsible for the movement’s direction. Nor is any specific individual charged with the duty of orchestrating local political demonstrations.

Instead, Falun Gong uses local facilitators to coordinate activities in specific communities.88 Contact numbers for facilitators in thirty-four Canadian cities are available from the movement’s website, Falundafa.org. The same page contains links to

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87 Chang, p. 5.
88 To reiterate, this behaviour is more typical of reticulated movements comprised of cells in various national and local contexts. The transnational cohesion of Falun Gong, as a single movement, makes it a standout in this regard.
schedules of upcoming local events in which practitioners and non-practitioners alike are invited to participate. Otherwise, there is no way to connect individual practitioners with political demonstrations or spiritual gatherings of any kind. There are no local membership roles or attendance records, let alone authority figures which compel individuals to take part.

Several online news sources report on the latest happenings in China, though reporters are seldom credited by name. Postings on Clearwisdom.net and Faluninfo.org provide up-to-date listings of practitioners who have been jailed, tortured or otherwise targeted, but these are consistently attributed to Clearwisdom.net itself. Occasionally, updates on these blogs are signed “A practitioner in Mainland China.” Compassion, an internet-based magazine produced by the Clearwisdom group, lists its editorial staff but does not identify the original source of its information. Online newspapers, like Falun Gong Today, have no conventional masthead but is ambiguously “produced by volunteers,” according to its cover page. There is, of course, no guarantee that any of the information on these websites is accurate. Neither can it be verified or traced to one specific individual. The fact that it is acted upon speaks to the trustworthiness with which practitioners regard the information they receive.

Horizontal communication seems to work for Falun Gong. At the time of this writing, an ongoing vigil outside the Chinese consulate in Vancouver had endured well beyond its fourteen-hundredth day, suggesting admirable steadfastness and commitment

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89 See http://faluncandada.net/contacts.htm
90 Articles at http://www.faluninfo.net are posted by the Falun Dafa Information Centre, which is staffed exclusively by anonymous volunteers.
91 See http://www.clearwisdom.net.emh/34 for a list of recently blogged updates and http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2005/8/13/63880.html for an example of one anonymously signed posting.
to the group's cause. The group owes its success in this regard to its wealth of social capital. Engagement levels, measured by the frequency of involvement in political activity, appear healthy among respondents. From a sample of twenty-two practitioners, roughly seventy-six percent reported voluntary participation at least once a month in a demonstration while only five percent reported participating only when specifically requested to do so by other practitioners. Group identity—measured by the length of time one has self-identified as a member—is also strong. Nearly forty-eight percent of respondents considered themselves practitioners for more than eight years, while only nine percent reported practicing between one and four years.

Even more important are the high measures of interpersonal and public trust between practitioners. Seventy-six percent reported that they became involved with the movement in the first place through word of mouth from a friend or relative and, in nearly all cases, details were given about the persecution of similarly close associates. Generalized reciprocity can reasonably be inferred in thick trust relationships. A woman living in Vancouver actively participated in demonstrations because she felt that, had it been she who was arbitrarily detained, her sister would do the same for her. Defection from collective action is far less likely where personal relationships figure so largely in the decision-making of each individual participant.

Public trust requires that generalized reciprocity be broadly shared among individuals that do not know one another personally. Where online media transmit

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92 This observation is the result of ethnographic research by the author.
93 It is supposed that those who have been practitioner for longer periods of time identify more strongly with the movement's struggle than recent converts.
94 Close, potentially thick trust relationships can develop as a result of sustained movement activity. People become friends. Thin and thick trust can overlap, creating a web of public trust where reciprocity norms are widely shared. This usually occurs in local contexts like Vancouver where engagement with the
information anonymously and are the main primer from which individuals take their cues for action, a form of thin, public trust also exists. Fifty-two percent of survey respondents report that the internet is their primary source of information about the movement, its objectives and other practitioners, while forty-three percent cite “word of mouth from a fellow practitioner,” and slightly less than ten percent receive their information from print media. About sixty-two percent testified to distributing information about local movement activities and the situation in China through email or on message boards, blogs and the like on a regular basis, compared with thirty-eight percent who did not. Simply put, individuals act because they assume that the information they consume online is trustworthy, and that those who posted it would also react in kind to the posting of others. Additionally, ethnographic investigations of protests and vigils such as the Robson Square demonstration, the tireless efforts by sympathetic human rights NGO’s such as Friends of Falun Gong and the World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong (WOIPFG), and the petitions circulated by the same groups all provide evidence social capital in the form of public trust that bridges identities.95

Conclusion

Falun Gong’s success with transnational activism is the result of organizational behavior that harnesses and encourages the group’s social capital. Enforcement by a central authority has been replaced with spontaneous, voluntary cooperation arising from movement is high and people encounter each other often because they live in the same neighbourhoods and may know each other in other capacities.

95 The petition can be viewed online at http://www.fofg.org/act/act_petition.php?pid=1
a sense of duty and obligation to other practitioners. Groups that can build on their experiences with horizontal association acquire public trust that leads to greater participation in transnational activist campaigns, and additionally, also show considerable promise for sustaining interaction with their opponents as circles of engagement widen.

By mobilizing its most important resource—social capital—Falun Gong appears set to challenge the Chinese government for the duration of its struggle. The movement’s long-term prospects are discussed further in the final chapter.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Jiang Zemin's new Chinese consulate is being built with brick and concrete and steel. The Falun Gong outpost is six feet by six feet by three feet, and made from plasticized cardboard. If I had to bet on which structure would endure the longest, my money would be with the Falun Gong.

--Dan Murphy, The Province, Sunday, June 16, 2002

TSMs are goal-oriented, interest-maximizing entities capable of employing a repertoire of tactics and strategies to meet their ends. In order to frame contention, construct identities, promote internal cohesion, apply pressure on their targets and sustain their activities, movements need to mobilize key resources like people, money and technology. RM theorists emphasize the importance of centralized movement structures with formal institutional channels for reaching these goals. They place particular importance on the role of leadership in coordinating movement activities and overseeing resource distribution. Under strong central leadership, information flows vertically, resulting in forms of activism which are highly productive politically.

This study has provided a re-examination of the RM paradigm by showing how horizontal structures can lead to deeper engagement in a movement's political activities. Instead of relying on a leader or central body to oversee RM and enforce participation, Falun Gong practitioners demonstrate voluntarily and spontaneously, responding to the internalized sense of obligation that they feel for one another. Public trust binds practitioners across geographic distances and identity boundaries, widening circles of
engagement that provide hope for sustaining movement activities over long periods of time.

Falun Gong’s experience with horizontal organization has given momentum to its social capital accumulation. Social capital levels are more likely to remain static in vertical movements run by autocrats. Whereas elites in vertical organizations manipulate resources to reach their objectives, Falun Gong practitioners appear to recognize reciprocity and trust as important resources. Judging their likelihood of success to be only as great as their solidarity with other practitioners and transnational allies, Falun Gong is likely to continue its struggle with the Chinese government as the web of trust between practitioners and outsiders grows denser.

Repression has given rise to horizontal movements in other national contexts as well. Prior to the fall of communism in the early 1990’s, Soviet dissidents adopted organizational behaviours that allowed them to operate under extremely repressive conditions. Peter Reddaway describes how one movement operated in the absence of central leadership:

A fortnight after Pyotr Grigorenko’s arrest, the Action Group for the Defense of Civil Rights in the Soviet Union was formed. Maybe this was no coincidence. Deprived of their last inspiring leader, Grigorenko’s colleagues probably felt an extra need for at least a minimum of formal coordination to their civil rights activities....Indeed, in such an atmosphere the very creation of the group required enormous courage, given the acute, almost paranoiac fear which the secret police in totalitarian states always feel for groups beyond their close control.96

In this case, letters were written detailing various human rights abuses and passed to the United Nations office in Moscow through a clandestine network of group members and

supporters. As a result of these efforts, word of human rights violations in the Soviet Union eventually reached groups in France, Italy, Switzerland and Belgium.\textsuperscript{97} As with Falun Gong, repressive conditions created a horizontal structure by forcing activists to work together in underground networks. Campaigns by government agencies removed recognizable leadership from both movements and led to the political contention that justified their activities. Individual activists learned to trust one another when they could not trust other citizens or even the state itself.

If authoritarianism actually breeds the horizontal networks that keep movements like Falun Gong alive, what happens to these movements when repression dissipates? Theoretically, the demise of an opponent would mean the removal of political contention, and hence, common purpose and group solidarity. Besides demanding an end to dictatorial rule, Soviet dissidents agreed on very little and the movement splintered once communist rule crumbled. If the Chinese communist party fell, Falun Gong may become politically obsolete as well, no longer able to justify its activism.

Tarrow observes, however, that loosely-organized movements often come equipped with "abeyance structures" into which activists retreat during periodic lulls in contention and mobilization.\textsuperscript{98} Even charismatic leaders fade into obscurity over time, but as long as the informal relationships between individuals stay in tact, movements remain politically salient. Abeyance creates space for individuals and organizations to engage in other pursuits while allowing them to stay in touch with the movement. Old relationships can be called upon and activism rekindled if the need arises in the future. For Falun Gong, such structures might include weekly or monthly gatherings of

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid. pp. 150-153.
\textsuperscript{98} See Tarrow, 1998, p. 129.
practitioners in local homes to meditate or the continuation of ties with the NGO community.

Even if practitioners around the world no longer needed to demonstrate politically, they would probably not abandon their spirituality. If extreme persecution did not compel people to give up their beliefs, they would be even less likely to do so after repression ended. By maintaining a degree of public trust between practitioners, abeyance structures encourage cooperation that could spread to other interests and organizations arising from China's modernization, urbanization and industrialization. The challenges of developing civil society are legion, but resistance movements like Falun Gong are nevertheless an important part of emerging domestic networks that may factor centrally in future political reforms. The potential for promoting horizontal cooperation among varied interests, organizations and social movements in China provides an agenda for future research.


Diani, Mario. “‘Leaders’ or Brokers? Positions and Influence in Social Movement Networks,” in *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective


Homepage of Falun Gong, online at http://www.FalunDafa.org. See also the Falun Dafa Clearwisdom pages, English version of Minghui.org online at http://www.clearwisdom.net.


Homepage of the Baha’i Faith, online at http://www.bahai.org.


Wong, John and Liu, William T. *The Mystery of Falun Gong: Its Rise and Sociological Implications.* (Singapore: East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, Contemporary China Series No. 22, 1999).

APPENDIX A

Because Falun Gong keeps no permanent records or membership roles, reliable, accurate population estimates are extremely difficult to obtain. The survey questionnaire was circulated in both English and Mandarin Chinese to a listserve of one-hundred twenty practitioners between June 30 and July 22, 2005. A sample of twenty-one observations was obtained. This constitutes about eighteen percent of the listed total. I readily acknowledge the limitations that internet-based survey research imposes on the data. There are theoretically innumerable individuals practicing Falun Dafa that either do so infrequently, on their own, do not care about its political agenda or simply never added their names to email lists. Those whose names were on the list but did not respond might have been reluctant to volunteer their experiences or may be only sporadic users of the internet. In addition, the use of internet media for distribution purposes theoretically biased the sample in favour of “internet source” answers.

Raw data obtained from the survey, including controls, is given in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1: Into which of the following age categories do you fall?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Under 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 19-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 35-55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D 55-older</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 2: Please provide an indication of your average household income.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Less than $10000 per year</td>
<td>6 28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B $10000-$35000</td>
<td>10 47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C $35000-$80000</td>
<td>4 19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D More than $80000</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1 4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 3: Are you able to communicate fluently in English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Yes</td>
<td>16 76.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B No</td>
<td>5 23.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 4: How long have you lived in Vancouver?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Less than 1 year</td>
<td>1 4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Between 1-4 years</td>
<td>12 57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Between 5-15 years</td>
<td>7 33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D More than 15 years</td>
<td>1 4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 7: How long have you practiced Falun Dafa?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Less than 3 Months</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B More than 3 months but less than 1 year</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C More than 1 year but less than 4 years</td>
<td>2 9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D At least 4 years</td>
<td>9 42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E At least 8 years</td>
<td>10 47.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Question 8:** How did you originally hear about Falun Gong?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Word of mouth by relative</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Word of mouth by friend</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A &amp; B</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Movement literature</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Internet sources</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 9:** What is your primary source of information about Falun Gong, its practitioners and objectives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Word of mouth from fellow practitioners</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Word of mouth from a friend</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Radio or TV newscasts</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Internet sources</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 10a:** Do you participate in any online discussion groups, message boards, blogs or chatrooms which disseminate information pertaining to Falun Gong, its membership or objectives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B No</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 10b:** If yes, have you ever posted information for consumption by others on any website, blog, chatroom, message board or other online media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 11: How frequently do you interact face-to-face with other practitioners for reasons related to your shared membership in Falun Gong?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A More than once a week</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B More than once a month</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C More than once a year</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Almost never</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 12: Have you ever participated in a public demonstration or rally sponsored by the movement?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 13: If yes, how frequently do you participate in these demonstrations?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A More than once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B More than once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C More than once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Only when requested to do so</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 14: When a public demonstration or rally is to take place, what is your primary source of information concerning its organization? For example, how is information dispersed concerning logistical issues such as arranging a place and time?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Internet source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B word of mouth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 15: Have you ever personally known anyone who was imprisoned, abducted, financially ruined or otherwise persecuted by the Chinese national government?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Questionnaire: Please answer each of the following questions and return this form to
the researcher via email (snoakes@interchange.ubc.ca)

1. Into which of the following age categories do you fall?
   a) Under 18
   b) 19-35
   c) 35-55
   d) 55-older

2. Please provide an indication of your average household income.
   a) Less than $10 000 per year
   b) $10 000-$35 000 per year
   c) $35 000-$80 000 per year
   d) More than $80 000 per year

3. Are you able to communicate fluently in English?
   a) Yes
   b) No

4. How long have you lived in Vancouver?
   a) Less than 1 year
   b) Between 1-4 years
   c) Between 5-15
   d) More than 15 years

5. If you immigrated to Canada, please indicate your birth country below

6. For what reason did you emigrate? Please provide details in the space below.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
7. How long have you practiced Falun Dafa?
   a) Less than 3 months
   b) More than 3 months but less than 1 year
   c) More than 1 year but less than 4 years
   d) At least 4 years
   e) At least 8 years

8. How did you originally hear about Falun Gong?
   a) Through word of mouth by a relative
   b) Through word of mouth from a friend
   c) Literature dispersed by the movement
   d) An internet source
   e) Other

8b. Why did you become involved? Please give details below.

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

9. What is your primary source of information about Falun Gong, its members and objectives? (Select only 1)
   a) Word of mouth from fellow practitioners
   b) Print media such as newspapers, magazines, publications by the movement such as fact files, brochures, newsletters, etc.
   c) Radio or television newscasts
   d) Internet sources
   e) Other

10. Do you participate in any online discussion groups, message boards, blogs or chatrooms which disseminate information pertaining to Falun Gong, its membership or objectives?
10b. If yes, have you ever posted information for consumption by others on any website, blog, chatroom, message board or other online media?

a) Yes  
b) No  

11. How frequently do you interact face-to-face with other practitioners for reasons related to your shared membership in Falun Gong?

a) More than once a week  
b) More than once per month  
c) More than once per year  
d) Almost never  

12. Have you ever participated in a public demonstration or rally sponsored by the movement?

a) Yes  
b) No  

13. If yes, how frequently do you participate in these demonstrations?

a) More than once a week  
b) More than once a month  
c) More than once a year  
d) Only when is requested by another practitioner  

14. When a public demonstration or rally is to take place, what is your primary source of information concerning its organization? For example, how is information dispersed concerning logistical issues such as arranging a place and time?

a) Internet website, email, blog, message board or newsgroup  
b) Word of mouth from another practitioner  
c) Literature indicating procedural guidelines to be followed  
d) Other___________________________  

15. Have you ever personally known anyone who was imprisoned, abducted, financially ruined or otherwise persecuted by the Chinese national government?

a) Yes  
b) No
15b. If yes, what was your relationship to them? Please indicate below.


Thank you for taking the time to respond.