

Minpaku Conference abstract.

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Falun Gong 法輪功 in Song and Dance

Since Falun Gong was suppressed in the People's Republic of China in July 1999, its activities have centred on communities of practitioners located around the world. Despite attempts to proselytise amongst host populations, the large proportion of Falun Gong practitioners in the west and Japan remain expatriate Chinese. Since 1999, along with their personal cultivation activities, followers of Li Hongzhi 李洪志, the founder and leader of Falun Gong, have engaged in political activity, agitating for the rights of their Chinese co-religionists in detention and arguing that pressure should be put on the Chinese government to ease restrictions on practitioners.

In the last decade, Falun Gong has progressively developed new means of publicizing its message, notably its suite of websites and its affiliated media organs: New Tang Dynasty TV (Xintangren dianshitai 新唐人電視台), The Epoch Times (Dajiyuan 大紀元) newspaper, Sound of Hope (Xiwang zhi sheng 希望之聲) radio network, magazines such as New Land (Xintiandi 新天地), etc. In this paper, in addition to describing these organs, I will examine a new manifestation of Falun Gong publicity, namely its song-and-dance performances, that go under the title “Divine Performing Arts” (Shenyun yishituan 神韻藝術團).

Divine Performing Arts consists of three New York-based troupes that tour Europe, the Americas, and Asia and the Pacific annually. Marketed as “classical Chinese dance”, they claim to be preserving traditional Chinese culture, implying that “this heritage, this treasure of humankind” is under threat in the People's Republic. This alignment of Falun Gong with the glories of the Chinese past – despite the fact that it was only launched in 1992 – is a significant development in their propaganda war with the Chinese government.