

The Tuidang Movement and Falun Gong

Walking down the streets of Chinatown or witnessing a Falun Gong parade in recent years, one may have encountered signs referring to “X million people have quit the Chinese Communist Party.” What does this mean? What does it have to do with Falun Gong? Why has it not been more widely reported?

What is Tuidang?

Signs like the one mentioned above refer to Tuidang, an emerging non-violent movement in China that encourages Chinese citizens to renounce their ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Short for *Tuichu Gongchandang*, Tuidang translates literally as “withdraw from the Communist Party.” Participation in the movement means that a person has made a public declaration that he or she wishes to disavow any previous ties with the CCP or its affiliated organizations, such as the Communist Youth League or Young Pioneers. These statements are typically signed using aliases to protect the identity of participants, and are often accompanied by explanations from the individual about why he or she no longer wishes to identify with the CCP. A majority of Chinese citizens belong to or previously belonged to at least one of these organizations. The term “quit the party” therefore refers to a symbolic denunciation of the CCP or any of these affiliated entities.

How did Tuidang begin?

The Tuidang movement began in late 2004 after the publication of an editorial series in the overseas Chinese language newspaper *Dajiyuan* (*Epoch Times*). The editorials, called the “Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party,” detail the history of the Communist Party in China, with a particular focus on its human rights record and episodes like the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward, the Tiananmen Square Massacre, and the crackdown on Falun Gong. Beyond mere descriptions of historical events, the series also passes judgment on the nature of the CCP itself as an entity that is inherently inhumane, immoral, and whose philosophy is irreconcilably at odds with traditional Chinese values expressed in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. The series presents not a political, but a moral vision of China’s future and path to transformation, and exhorts readers to calmly and courageously examine how their own conduct and complicity has contributed to the current state of affairs.

Soon after the editorials’ publication, the *Dajiyuan* website began receiving letters from readers renouncing their affiliations to the CCP. *Dajiyuan* then began compiling the statements, which are available at <http://tuidang.epochtimes.com/>. Within a few months, millions of copies of *Dajiyuan*’s editorial series had been emailed, faxed or mailed to Mainland China. Inspired by their message, thousands soon began visiting the *Dajiyuan* website (with the help of anti-censorship technologies) to post their statements denouncing their ties to the Communist Party, Youth League, or Young Pioneers. Within a year, thousands grew to millions.

“I have witnessed the Communist Party’s inhumane persecution of the kind people who practice Falun Gong. But I was misled by the Communist Party for many years, and believed that the persecution was only committed by a few individuals and not representative of the Communist Party as a whole. I was fortunate to read DaJiYuan’s ‘Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party.’ I have been awakened, and now have a more profound understanding...I declare that I no longer associate with the Communist Party...I would like to move toward a brighter tomorrow, and have a pure conscience.”
– statement by Yin Xianghui

Tens of millions participate

Today, tens of millions of names have been posted to the *Dajiyuan* website renouncing Communist Party organizations. The declarations’ authors range from rural farmers to prominent intellectuals, schoolteachers to retired military personnel, human rights lawyers to plainclothes police. While some use their real names, most sign their statements with aliases because of the risk of retribution. The use of aliases makes independent corroboration of some of the statements difficult. Nevertheless, a look through the statements submitted to *Dajiyuan* clearly reveals a movement of extraordinary size, diversity, and personal and spiritual significance for its participants.

In their statements, many speak of suffering endured under communism, or of being disillusioned by corruption. Some ask forgiveness for past sins committed during the Cultural Revolution, or more recent abuses like land grabs or the persecution of Falun Gong adherents. In many statements, the authors describe a feeling of relief, of being refreshed, or of joy at being free to live their lives according to the dictates of their own conscience.

Is Tuidang's aim to overthrow the Communist Party?

While the Nine Commentaries denounce the Communist Party, they do not prescribe an alternative political system. Thus, while the Tuidang movement implicitly supports regime change in China, it does not advocate an overthrow of the CCP or a coup, nor does it prescribe specific institutional reforms. Rather, the focus is on a rejection of the culture of violence and duplicity propagated by the CCP and on a revival of virtue to bring about a more just and humane future China. The Tuidang movement is, in many ways, less about political revolution or institutional change and more about spiritual and ethical revival.

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What is the connection to Falun Gong?

The *Dajiyuan* newspaper that was originally responsible for catalyzing the Tuidang movement is staffed largely by individuals who practice Falun Gong. Many of the movement's leading proponents also practice Falun Gong, though Falun Gong practitioners comprise only a small percentage of the total number of individuals who have issued Tuidang statements. The Falun Gong activists involved seek to promote the movement not to catalyze regime change per se, but to offer Chinese citizens a chance to understand the CCP's history of violence, and take a principled stand by choosing to no longer associate with it. In this process, Falun Gong practitioners often say they feel they are offering people a chance at moral redemption, healing, and inner peace.

For the first several years of the persecution, Falun Gong practitioners pointed to individual leaders, rather than the CCP as a whole, when citing the perpetrators of the persecution. Yet, it eventually became clear that because of how the CCP shapes the thoughts of Chinese people through education and media control, many Chinese had difficulty believing the reality of what was happening to Falun Gong. Therefore, to open people's eyes to the abuses faced by practitioners, activists felt they first needed to free people from the CCP's mind-control. This was the intended, and indeed actual, impact of the Nine Commentaries' analysis.

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Falun Gong practitioners' intent in promoting Tuidang is therefore to help people see clearly the scope and nature of the persecution and to enable them to distance themselves from it. In this process, the movement appears to have aided in curbing human rights abuses. As more Chinese citizens have learned of the CCP's violent and deceptive tendencies by reading the Nine Commentaries, many have vowed to no longer act on its behalf to violate fellow citizens' rights. Anecdotal evidence suggests that numerous labor camp guards and other security agents have lost their will to arbitrarily detain, torture, and threaten Falun Gong adherents. Many now seek to quietly protect Falun Gong practitioners against abuses ordered by higher levels. As a discipline whose aim is spiritual fulfillment, Falun Gong as a group never has sought and never will seek political power.

If this is such an important phenomenon, why haven't I heard of it before?

The Tuidang movement is not created for the consumption of Western journalists or scholars. Unlike some better-known Chinese dissident manifestos or calls for change, Tuidang does not have high-profile Western proponents, it does not speak in the language of liberal democracy, and it does not call for visible public protests. Instead, Tuidang is a quiet phenomenon, rooted in Chinese intellectual traditions, whose aim is to help individuals find personal peace and liberation. Whatever the future governing institutions of China may look like, the Tuidang movement will have laid an essential foundation for greater openness and freedom by reinforcing the commitment of tens of millions of Chinese to honesty, fairness, and compassion in daily life.