

Webinar: Remember December 1996 - How Tai Ji Men's Persecution Started in Taiwan

20 December 2020

Organizers : CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions)
HRWF (Human Rights without Frontiers)

See the event on Youtube :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNcHEe1aoW4&feature=youtu.be>

Tai Ji Men : December 1996 – December 2020

24 years of persecution

Oral presentation by Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

Remembering and commemorating a traumatic event which made history is important for any social group, whether it is a nation, an ethnic group or a religious community.

It is important for the generation who experienced such an event but it is also important for the next generation because it forges the transgenerational collective identity of the group while strengthening this identity at the individual level.

Brutal persecution

The 19 December 1996 pogrom is such a traumatic event. It was the starting point of a series of physical persecution targeting Dr Hong and a number of dizis who were arbitrarily arrested, deprived of their freedom of movement and imprisoned for days, weeks or months. They were all innocent and they were all acquitted of the spurious charges they were accused of.

But at that time, there were other victims. Those who were illegally arrested and their loved ones lost their job. Their children were mocked at school. The psychological and social damage was incommensurable. Moreover, the slanders and defamation in the media targeting Tai Ji men and Dr Hong deeply saddened all the dizis. You heard their testimonies and felt their grief in their psyche and in their flesh.

Fiscal persecution, a slow but deadly poison

But persecution does not always show a face of brutality. It can be insidious like a poison as Peter Zoehrer explained you with the case of the Church of Unification. BUT its purpose always remains the same everywhere : it is to destroy and to kill.

One of those poisons used by the persecutors of Tai Ji Men in Taiwan is the never-ending harassment by the tax administration – 24 years - for the purpose of stifling it financially to death. This form of persecution is not spectacular and can remain invisible to outsiders who might be in a position to help. Like any poison, its purpose IS to remain invisible, to scare away anybody who might decide to help its victim and to avoid the threat of an antidote. That antidote being defenders from outside as all the panelists are here today.

For 24 years, the body of Tai Ji Men has only relied on itself and has mobilized all its cells to fight against that poison, the tax administration. Tai Ji Men has been largely successful in its resistance and its fight against the tax administration but with the auction of some of its properties, it has temporarily lost a part of its integrity and its capacity.

The war waged by those who wanted the death of Tai Ji Men was comprised of several weapons usually used by anti-cult movements : to fabricate a case, to find alleged victims of Tai Ji Men and to spread fake news in the media.

Fabricated case

A common technique used by anti-cult organizations is to accuse a group or its leader of violating the law. Sexual abuse, exploitation of members, abuse of weakness, money laundering, criminal activities are attractive issues for the judiciary and the media. It usually takes years, if not one or two decades, and a lot of money for court expenses to be cleared of such fake charges. This can easily exhaust the mental and financial forces of a small and vulnerable group.

In the case of Tai Ji Men, the fabricated accusation was tax fraud. Marco Ferraresi explained how a taxation system can be an instrument of persecution against a specific target and be particularly effective to this end. Tax fraud was the ideal accusation to damage Tai Ji Men which claims to abide by strict ethical rules.

Marco Ferraresi recalled that in this case the Supreme Administrative Court ruled in favour of the movement. It stated that donations by the dizi to their spiritual master were not tuition fees and were therefore tax-exempt. The Court also

mentioned that previous decisions against the movement were wrong and declared the alleged violation inexistent but for Prosecutor Hou this was not enough. He stubbornly looked for a possible loophole in the previous judicial cases that he had lost to fabricate a new one and that is how he finally managed to have some properties of Tai Ji Men auctioned.

Fake victims

There is always a natural feeling of sympathy towards victims in general and anti-cult organizations are used to manipulating this argument in the media, whether it is true or false.

As Alessandro Amicarelli from the European Federation for Freedom of Belief said, the persecution of Tai Ji Men was largely masterminded by a single magistrate, Prosecutor Hou Kuan-jen, who based his accusations against Tai Ji Men in court on the testimonies of alleged victims of Tai Ji Men. But, as he pointed out, it was a state institution, the Control Yuan, which found out during a hearing that the victims' association was fundamentally false after the so-called victims themselves retracted during a hearing.

Fake news

Anti-cult organizations know that shocking news easily make their way to the headlines in the media. Prosecutor Hou used the well-known fake news technique with Tai Ji Men to destroy its image as Massimo Introvigne from CESNUR described in his presentation. Prosecutor Hou accused Hong in the media of "raising goblins," which in Chinese folklore (and movies) means evoking a spirit who would then serve to perform evil deeds. Massimo Introvigne deconstructed this ridiculous accusation, stressing that « raising goblins » is something totally foreign to Tai Ji Men's practices.

Conclusion

Tai Ji Men needs to be praised for having remained strong and united, for not wanting a friendly settlement, as it would have meant to recognize an infringement of the tax law and to declare that something was made contrary to the founding principles of their movement itself which, ultimately, would have given the victory to their persecutors.

Persecution by a tax administration is not easy to sell to institutions and NGOs defending human rights because there is no visible physical violence and no blood

to show but we, at Human Rights Without Frontiers, are familiar with that sort of persecution against religious groups in Russia, France and other countries.

The persecution masterminded by Prosecutor Hou has caused a lot of damage, morally and financially. Tai Ji Men has survived but what mainly matters now is its image, which has been disfigured during 24 years.

One way for Tai Ji Men of restoring its honour in Taiwan is to have its past, current and future achievements assessed by neutral third parties outside Taiwan like scholars, lawyers and human rights organizations. Written publications but also video testimonies like today can contribute to it.

Last but not least, media outlets and actors in Taiwan are also a primary target because they shape the perceptions of public opinion, politicians and state institutions. Mapping the negative and fake news about Tai Ji Men in Taiwan is therefore a priority and a first step. The second step should be a constructive report based on research and analysis of the news distorting the Tai Ji Men realities, re-establishing the real facts versus the myths. And the last step should be the publication of this report in English and in Chinese to be followed by a targeted communication campaign meant to re-affirm the truth.

Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

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