

The New York Times to Attack Shen Yun Performing Arts Again

The paper seems to again turn to misrepresentation in an attack mirroring Beijing's latest playbook.

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The New York Times headquarters in New York City on Dec. 7, 2009. Mario Tama/Getty Images



By [The Epoch Times](#)

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igning closely with the Chinese regime's tactics, The New York Times is preparing to publish another hit piece on New York-based performing arts company Shen Yun and the spiritual discipline Falun Gong, The Epoch Times has learned.



For nearly two decades, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has



targeted Shen Yun, whose mission is to revive traditional Chinese culture. The company was founded in 2006 by practitioners of Falun



Gong, a peaceful meditation practice whose adherents are severely persecuted by the CCP.

Falun Gong practitioners have for 25 years highlighted abuses they face in China, including kidnapping, torture, and being murdered by the regime, which then often profits from selling their organs. Shen Yun in its performances depicts some of these atrocities.

Outside of China, the CCP has used tactics both aggressive and subtle to suppress Falun Gong, from physical attacks, to diplomatic pressure, to infiltrating and utilizing Western media organizations to do its bidding.

Efforts by The New York Times, which has published several articles targeting Shen Yun and Falun Gong since August, with another one in the works, hew closely to Beijing's efforts. The premise of the articles also lines up with a newly implemented CCP strategy.

Earlier this year, three CCP whistleblowers [came forward](#) with information about an escalation in the CCP's efforts to go after Falun Gong overseas.

A cornerstone of the campaign is to manufacture the type of allegations that would most likely trigger an investigation by U.S. authorities, according to whistleblowers who provided detailed information to the Falun Dafa Information Center (FDIC), a nonprofit monitoring the persecution of Falun Gong.

A Chinese-American man who takes credit for jump-starting The New York Times's latest crusade against Falun Gong was last year tracked by law enforcement near Shen Yun's campus. Soon after, the FBI issued a warning to local law enforcement describing him as "potentially armed and dangerous."

The man, who also runs a YouTube channel, was arrested and is now facing charges for possession of illegal firearms.

"I was the one who introduced people [ex-Shen Yun performers] to the New York Times, especially for the initial interviews. They found additional people through that," he wrote on X following the publication of a New York Times hit piece on Shen Yun earlier this year.

In one post on X, the YouTuber described Shen Yun's managers as his "enemies" whom he was trying to have sent to prison.

In several posts, he bragged about filing complaints against Shen Yun with New York State authorities in order to generate legal action against the arts group. He encouraged others to do the same.

On the point of The New York Times coverage aligning with the CCP goals, the newspaper's spokesman said the reporting on Shen Yun was "entirely under our own editorial direction."

Since launching its persecution against Falun Gong in 1999, the CCP has built out a whole-of-society, global approach against the practice. The use of Chinese agents has been a growing concern for the United States.



Security guards stand at an entrance to the Great Hall of the People during the sixth plenary session of the National People's Congress in Beijing on March 18, 2018. Greg Baker/AFP via Getty Images

In 2020, FBI Director Christopher Wray [said](#) that Chinese dissidents and “critics seeking to expose China’s extensive human rights violations” are a target of the CCP’s overseas operations. Earlier this year the FBI in a sting operation arrested two Chinese nationals who sought to bribe an IRS official in a scheme to get Shen Yun’s nonprofit status revoked.

Latest Attack

In their latest attack on Shen Yun, New York Times co-authors Nicole Hong and Michael Rothfeld appear to intend to misrepresent the performing art company’s program that allows students at Fei Tian College and Fei Tian Academy of the Arts to perform with the group as part of their practicum, The Epoch Times has learned.

Ying Chen, a vice president of Shen Yun, said The New York Times has conflated Shen Yun professional staff with student performers from the Fei Tian schools.

“And it does so in an apparent attempt to create a false narrative of supposed child labor issues,” Chen told The Epoch Times.

“The truth is this: talented performing arts students participate in Shen Yun performances as part of their practicum study, which is an established program that is legal, transparent, and a highly sought-after opportunity for aspiring artists.”

Indeed, the main reason students apply to the schools is precisely for the chance to perform with Shen Yun, according to dozens of current and former Shen Yun artists, Fei Tian students, and their parents interviewed over the past months.

“What they don’t tell you is that classical Chinese dance is a young person’s game—some of the best in the world are in their late teens,” Chen said.

“Imagine not allowing minors in the Olympics. Sure, we could do it, but some of the best in the world would not have a chance to live out their dreams. The same is true on the Shen Yun stage.”



Shen Yun dancers perform on stage during a show. Courtesy of Shen Yun

As for compensation, Fei Tian students aren't employees and as such cannot be paid salaries. If they qualify to tour with Shen Yun, they often receive a stipend, in addition to tour expenses being covered, including accommodations at high-quality hotels, transportation, meals, clothing, and even most recreational activities, Shen Yun representatives explained to The Epoch Times.

Yung Yung Tsuai, who has danced with many major dance companies and has taught at the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance as well as other colleges, told The Epoch Times that to become a professional dancer you need to start from a young age, "at least early teens."

And it's a demanding pursuit. To master ballet, for example, you have to train your body every day for six hours a day. "It takes years of hard work to break into a professional level," she said.

On top of the regular technical rigors, many Shen Yun artists tend to work extra hard because they view their work as a personal mission. Those who spoke to The Epoch Times found it baffling that this would be used against them by The New York Times.

For their articles, Hong and Rothfeld relied heavily on a small group of disgruntled former Shen Yun artists.

Both Fei Tian Academy and the college are religious private schools. Current and former students said that countering the persecution of Falun Gong was a motivating factor for their joining the schools in hopes of performing with Shen Yun.

"We get to be part of this big mission to revive traditional culture. And also, for me, as a Falun Gong practitioner, I get to tell people through my art the truth about what's happening in China," Shen Yun percussionist Alice Liu previously told The Epoch Times.

Yet New York Times reporters Hong and Rothfeld went out of their way to portray the artists' spiritual conviction as brainwashing. The Falun Dafa Information Center, in a [report](#) earlier this year, called the portrayal a display of “religious ignorance, intolerance, and explicit bias.”

“Let’s be clear about what’s really going on here: we are a religious group embarked on an endeavor that is rooted in our faith,” Chen said.

“We are a close-knit community who love what we do and are deeply fulfilled by a life of hard work and constant striving for spiritual growth, and yet the New York Times is attacking and demonizing us.

“Why? There is only one clear answer: Beijing considers our program, which showcases China before communism, as an existential threat. That is what’s really going on here.”



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Falun Dafa Information Center

For their articles, Hong and Rothfeld relied heavily on a small group of disgruntled former Shen Yun artists. And the writers failed to disclose key information about their interviewees.

“At least three of the six former Shen Yun performers photographed and quoted multiple times in the Times article have undisclosed ties to the Beijing Dance Academy (BDA)—a Chinese state-run organization, which is an instrument in the CCP’s global campaign against Shen Yun,” the FDIC report states.

Several former Shen Yun artists that Hong sought interviews from said they were left with the impression she was already set on writing a negative story before hearing what they had to say. Some of them declined interviews and instead sent her their responses via email, which were later published by the FDIC. Hong and co-author Rothfeld had omitted most of the responses from their stories.

Ties to China

The father of Nicole Hong, one of the lead authors on the New York Times' attack pieces against Falun Gong, appears to have ties to CCP-affiliated groups. He denies the connections.

According to an online profile, Zhejiang Province nominated George Hong in 2006 as one of the "Ten Outstanding Overseas Scholars" who serve China.

The 2008 profile was [published](#) by the Zhejiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ZFROC), which falls under the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, which, in turn, "acts as a pivotal link and connector between the Party, the government, and the extensive community of returned overseas Chinese, their relatives, and compatriots abroad," according to its charter. The profile gained online attention after his daughter's articles targeting Shen Yun and Falun Gong started publishing and has since been deleted.

The profile also stated that he was an honorary overseas director of the Western Returned Scholars Association (WRSA).

The WRSA is led directly by the CCP Central Committee Secretariat and is under the "guidance of the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee," [according](#) to the China-based China-CEEC Think Tanks Network.

When asked about the connections, George Hong vehemently denied them. He was particularly forceful about the WRSA.

“I have never been a member of this organization, and I have never been affiliated with it in any capacity,” he told The Epoch Times via email. “Any suggestion or insinuation that I am an agent of the Chinese Communist Party or working for a United Front entity is false and defamatory,” George Hong said.

George Hong told The Epoch Times that he didn’t play a role in The New York Times’s reporting about Shen Yun.

He didn’t respond by publication time to follow-up questions regarding the discrepancies between his denials and the information about his background available online.

The screenshot shows the website of the Zhejiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese. The header includes the organization's logo, name in Chinese and English, and a search bar. The navigation menu contains links for Home, News Center, Federation Overview, Activity Brand, Cultural Corridor, Overseas Wind, Policy Information, and WeChat Public Account. The main content area displays the profile of Hong Chaohui, dated 2008-11-13 16:41:45. The profile text includes a highlighted section: "中国欧美同学会海外名誉理事".

A screenshot of George Hong's profile on the Zhejiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese website. The portion of the profile in highlighted text indicates that Hong was an honorary overseas director of the Western Returned Scholars Association. Zhejiang Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, Screenshot via The Epoch Times

Targeting Traditional Culture

Maintaining control over Chinese culture has been instrumental to the regime’s grip on power, as evidenced by the decade-plus it spent destroying 5,000 years of culture and tradition during the Cultural Revolution in the ‘60s and ’70s.

Shen Yun is perceived by the CCP as a threat because it showcases traditional Chinese culture untainted by communism.

As it has grown in popularity—eight touring companies perform for a live audience of around a million worldwide each year—the pressure campaign from the CCP has intensified.

Portraying an inspiring vision of China without the communist party is intolerable to the regime, some experts say.



Shen Yun performers gather onstage during a curtain call at the Paramount Theatre in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on Oct. 24, 2021. Hu Chen/The Epoch Times

“For once the artificially conjoined ideas of ‘China’ and the party are decoupled, the regime’s insistent claim to be the sole legitimate guardian and spokesperson of Chinese civilization and culture is undermined,” Yuefeng Wu, art history researcher and PhD student at John Hopkins University [wrote](#) in an op-ed in The Hill earlier this year.

Some Shen Yun dance pieces directly depict the persecution of Falun Gong, raising awareness about the CCP's abuses to theatergoers around the world.

The New York Times may be willing to criticize CCP's human rights abuses in Tibet or Xinjiang 'but they would never do that with Falun Gong because that would really offend the CCP,' according to Trevor Loudon, an expert on communist regimes.

The Falun Gong issue is a litmus test of one's true attitude toward the CCP, some experts have suggested.

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"The CCP would throw a fit over that," he previously told The Epoch Times.

The regime considers the Shen Yun campus in upstate New York, called Dragon Springs, a "headquarters" of activities by Falun Gong practitioners to counter the persecution, according to a CCP directive document obtained by The Epoch Times earlier this year.

The document called to "systematically strategize to attack" Falun Gong's "headquarters."

Another document directed officials to co-opt specific industries for its transnational repression campaign against Falun Gong, calling for mobilization of "China-friendly people such as experts, scholars,

journalists ... who have greater influence in the U.S. and Western countries to speak for us, and strive to make more foreign media to publish more reports favorable to us.”



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