

Act like a 'Chinese' 'Lady', you 'un-civil' 'Woman'!

*Different views on the assumed attraction of the Falun Gong
movement to Chinese women*

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Introduction

‘Cultivation of the mind and body’, ‘spiritual transformation’, ‘enlightenment’; reasons claimed by members of the Falun Gong (FLG, 法轮功, Fǎlún Gōng) to support their movement and join their practices.¹ The FLG was originated as a movement in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1992.² Since its’ formation, is estimated that until 1999 this movement counted 60 to 70 million members in total.³ The 22nd of July 1999, the Chinese government issued a legal ban on the FLG, considering this as essential to maintain stability in society while contributive to China’s economic development.⁴ After 1999, it became therefore more difficult to retrieve anything about the FLG’s demographic constituency.

1 FAQ about Falun Gong. (2008, June19). Retrieved September 24, 2014, from <http://faluninfo.net/article/689/FAQ-about-Falun-Gong/?cid=23#sthash.uzk3NkVM.dpuf>; P. Houben, personal communication, March 24 2014.

2 For practical reasons, ‘China ‘or ‘Chinese ‘refers here to the People’s Republic of China, not to the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong, Macau or Taiwan.

3 Estimated, not proven. For the official ban causes that FLG members often are too afraid to admit having affiliations with the FLG. Tong 2002; Palmer 2007; Chan 2013:2, 15; Chan 2004:674-678.

4 *“This is an important decision of the CPCP Central Committee, and it is of great significance for the building of the Party, the enhancement of the cohesive and combat strength of the Party and the maintenance of China’s reform, development and stability”*, Senior CPC Official on Falun Gong Prohibition.(1999, July 24). Retrieved September 20, 2014, from <http://englishpeopledaily.com.cn/special/fagong/1999072400A104.html>.

However, the prohibition did not seem to decrease the number of members of the FLG, for most estimation measured the total number of FLG members after 1999 still to be 70 to 80 million in total.⁵

Demographic surveys conducted in 1998 in China revealed furthermore that the movement consisted of mostly female, elderly individuals that time: of 34,351 FLG members surveyed, 38% were less than 50 years old, only 27% were male while 73% female.⁶

In 2002 and 2004, other findings showed that approximately 60% of FLG members in China that time were also female.⁷ In 2013, it was similarly estimated that the number of women that at least participated in the FLG's demonstration activities was equal to and sometimes surpassed the number of Chinese men.⁸

Outside China there seems to be more equality between the number of male and female members of the FLG. In 2008 for instance, out of the ethnic Chinese FLG members living outside China (90%), 56% was female and 44% male.⁹

These figures might suggest 'gender equality'. However, 'gender inequality' seems not perceived by FLG members as a bad thing. On the contrary, it is assumable that most FLG regard women's subordination to men as inherent to a reality

5 Falun Gong (Falun Dafa) resource guide. (2008, December 10) Retrieved September 20, 2014, from <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&docid=4b6fe1d35&skip=0&query=FalunGong>; Tong 2002:363;Porter 2003.

6 Porter 2003:117.

7 Leung 2002:766; Chan 2004:671.

8 Mencken&Autrey 2013:107-110.

9 Ownby 2008:132-134,136; Mencken&Autrey 2013:107-110.

‘as it should be’ according to their movement-specific thinking.¹⁰ Moreover, less risk to legal persecution in a society seems to cause more equal numbers of female and male FLG members in it.¹¹

Why would Chinese women be attracted to membership of a movement when its members seems to be proponents of women’s subordination to men? And why would they, less than men, fear the risk to severe punishment for their membership? Some explained that Chinese women appear to fear punishment from spiritual entities more than Chinese men. Hence, Chinese women more often than Chinese men participate in religious activities which the Chinese government forbids, including those of the FLG.¹² Others argued that FLG membership provides Chinese women ways to cope with their feelings of being suppressed and threatened, either by men or by the Chinese government.¹³ Might the FLG as a movement perhaps be a substitute for movements that claim to aspire ‘women’s emancipation’, because these movements arguably have become marginalized in China?¹⁴

10 Li Hongzhi (李洪志, Lǐ Hóngzhì), assumed founder of the FLG, frequently states in the Zhuan Falun (the book containing guidelines for FLG membership adhered by most of the FLG members) sentences as: “A male figure holds a female body, practicing cultivation.” (Hongzhi 1999:89-90) and “Why should some people be born male and others female? (...)” “People all wish to be equal. If something is not a part of someone’s life, how can they be equally made? How can people be the same?” (Hongzhi 1999:128-129).

11 Ownby 2008; Mencken&Autrey 2013:107-110.

12 Ibid.

13 Guo 2013; Chan 2013:2, 14, 28; Mencken&Autry 2013:107; Croll 2013.

14 Howell 2003:197-198; Waylen 1994:342- 344; Latham et al 2006.

First of all, what does the term ‘emancipation’ mean? What should it mean, to women, to men and to Chinese men and women? Might differences exist between them? Is it even possible for suppressed groups, regardless of their gender, to ‘emancipate’?

In this article, I explain how Chinese female identity is (re-)presented by the FLG in theater performances, if we can relate these (re-)presentations to ‘emancipation’ of female FLG members, and if yes, how?

I will introduce in the following sections a new research paradigm which I conceptualized by combining contemporary theories about emancipation, audience autonomy, content analysis, public opinion, normative democratic theory and findings about theater performances in China’s past. As I will explain in chapter two, I have termed this paradigm as ‘Ideological theater.’ This concept of ‘ideological theater’ might be useful for future research to prevent generalizations and simplifications about the relation the FLG and the FLG’s assumed appeal on Chinese women.

Since the Shen Yun performing arts group (SY) consists of solely FLG members¹⁵ and I regard its’ performances as exemplary for my idea of ‘ideological theater’, I limited this research to analysis of the theater performances produced by this group. Though usage of my invented paradigm, I will show that the SY performances mediate¹⁶ a message that women should remain ‘un- emancipated’ ‘as women.’ I argue furthermore that this

15 P. Houben, chair of the Dutch FLG association, personal communication, March 24 2014; Shen Yun. (2006). Retrieved August 19, 2014, from <http://nl.shenyunperformingarts.org>.

suggests that women should be (kept) 'un-emancipated' by FLG members to motivate them to (inter-)act contributively to 'emancipation' of the FLG 'as a movement.' This affirms furthermore statements of several so-called feminist scholars who argued that we should doubt the general assumption that subordinated or suppressed individuals, are able or even motivated to 'emancipate' *themselves* in 'developing' societies, especially when 'development' in these societies proceeds via consensus-based, negotiated (inter-)actions.¹⁷

16 "*Mediation, the processes by which consciousness interprets actuality and motivates action.*"1995:51. As I will explain in chapter one, I interpreted the idea of mediation as described by Appadurai&Breckenridge as a way of presenting and representing ideologies, which is determined by presentations and representations of other ideologies exposed to those who mediate and those who are the target of mediation. For instance: the producers and spectators of theater performances.

17 Mouffe 2001; Fraser 2013; Howell 2003.

1. Definitions of, or from 'reality'?

Below I describe several of the applied terms and definitions in many academic articles I have read. I've used these terms and definitions for my own investigation, yet argue that these should not be interpreted as conveying *the* truth, but rather as referents to a truth. For as I will conclude, assumptions about what 'reality' is and which definitions suit this 'reality' the best, often obstruct the readers' attention to the diversity in actual existing realities.¹⁸ The explanations below will furthermore clarify why I agree in the concluding chapter that "one of the greatest rationalist utopias of mankind is the utopia of a rationally planned economy leading to human emancipation."¹⁹

Ideologies

Individuals use ideologies to determine and assign meaning to their ways of thinking and behavior, towards other individuals and towards themselves.²⁰ Ideologies accordingly guide and structure human (inter-)actions.²¹ They are used to formulate solutions, explanations and/or evaluations of certain problems individuals encounter, themselves or observe others facing.²²

18 See also Chen 2002:136-137 for further reading. Chen points out that in particular orientalist perspectives to 'Chinese reality' are often leading to bias and generalizations in academic fields.

19 Fraser 2013:30.

20 Chan 2013:3-5; Waylen 1994; Alexander, Giesen&Mast 2006:76-80; Appadurai&Breckenridge 1995:4; Junker 2011:6-7.

21 Crawford&Ostrom 1995:582. Although the social political scholars Crawford&Ostrom provided similar definitions for what they termed 'institution'(1995), I assumed their explanation of 'institution' in my description of 'Ideologies', because I found this corresponding with statements in Appadurai&Breckenridge 1995; Junker 2011; Chan 2013; Entman 1993.

22 Chan 2013: esp.4-5; Entman 1993:52-53.

The content of ideologies hence provides information about why individuals have certain thoughts about a subject.²³

When individuals adhere to the same ideologies, they can form groups. These groups are demarcated and can be distinguished by their communal, repetitive (inter-)actions. These (inter-)actions are therefore fairly predictable and limited because of the imperatives of their communal ideologies.²⁴

Ideologies thus provide individuals solutions to certain problems, “along with rationales that justify certain actions over others.”²⁵ When individuals encounter problems they experience as not solvable on their own, they can feel confused, anxious or threatened.²⁶ Such feelings are claimed to motivate individuals to join groups of individuals that proclaim to be able to solve the problems causing those feelings. Group specific ideologies therefore do not have to correspond entirely with other ideologies individuals adhere to, or can adhere to.²⁷

What I mention in this article to be ‘institutionalized ideologies’, are the “interconnected authoritative beliefs, which are manifested in both cognitive and affective modes, which command the evaluative statements of a group or population and that compel and make sense of participants’ behavioral bearings within particular social contexts.”²⁸ This means that I

23 Chong&Druckman 2007:105.

24 Chan 2013:4.

25 Chan 2013:1.

26 Chan 2013:3-5; Nakamura&Csikszentmihalyi 1990:90; Junker 2011:6-7.

27 Ibid.

28 Chan 2013:4; Entman 1993; Junker 2011; Crawford&Ostrom 1995:582; Alexander et al 2006.

assume that when the majority of individuals in a society adhere to the same ideology, then I mention this ideology to be ‘institutionalized.’

I use the term ‘authorities’ in this article to denote individuals who are sufficiently able and motivated to institutionalize the ideologies they adhere to.²⁹ They can put limitations to choices and interpretations of the ideologies available to individuals that inhabit the social realms in which they are authorities.

Their (inter-)actions ‘as authorities’ aim to make others aware of the need to adhere to the ideologies they seek to institutionalize, and therefore proclaim.³⁰

Development

‘Development’ is generally used as a term to summarize processes that create environments “in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests.”³¹ Such processes expand the choices people have to lead lives that they value. It is assumed to be about “more than economic growth, which is only a means of enlarging people’s choices.”³²

29 Habermas 1989: esp.51-52. It should be noted that Habermas describes ‘public’ authorities, arguing that public authorities have the task to institutionalize ideologies beneficial to the individuals they have authority over, and not to themselves. This is however, a definition provided in normative theories about ‘democracy.’ I have chosen not to elaborate on this idea ‘democracy’. Although interesting, this is not the aim of this research.

30 Alexander et al. 2006; Diamond 1994; Habermas 1989; Appadurai&Breckenridge 1995.

31 Infusing the Human Development Paradigm in Education. (2013, march 22). Retrieved October 11, 2014, from <http://hdr.undp.org/en>.

32 Ibid.

The creation of more choice in ideologies is an often ascribed premise to development.³³ This might however not be desired by suppressed individuals, let alone be a precondition for their ‘emancipation.’ Because more choice regarding which ideologies to adhere to can cause individuals to become more exposed to contradicting, competitive ideologies.³⁴ Inhabitants of ‘developing’ societies, can therefore become more “divided by ideology, race, ethnicity, class, religion and region”,³⁵ while “social processes become more contingent, more subject to conflict and argumentation.”³⁶

To prevent these disruptions, new ideologies need to be institutionalized, suitable to the new society development processes create. The identifiable ‘authorities’ in developing societies therefore need to “have sufficient autonomy, legitimacy, capacity, and support to mediate among the various interest groups and balance their claims” to prevent disruption and criticism; to maintain their identities ‘as authorities.’³⁷

Therefore, authorities often need to make consensuses with their opponents, especially during societal disruption.³⁸

Processes regarded as ‘development’ can furthermore create more opportunities for suppressed or less-privileged, subordinated individuals to challenge their suppressors.³⁹ Yet

33 Pang 2007:70.

34 Chong&Druckman 2007:112. Diamond 1989.

35 Alexander et al. 2006:75.

36 Alexander et al. 2006:51.

37 Diamond 1994:14.

38 Fraser 2013:152.

39 Yan 2003:16; Inkeles 1969; Unger 2000; Habermas 1989.

such individuals obtain less of such opportunities when 'development' is guided by long-standing, authoritarian systems.⁴⁰

Identity

In times of development, authorities seemingly focus on institutionalizing ideologies surrounding 'identity' to solve problems related to development.⁴¹ 'Identity' as a term here covers collections of the subjective experiences of reality individuals have, or can have. These experiences are based on ideologies that proclaim how he or she should (inter-)act.⁴² The experience of 'being', invokes an individuals' moral assessment of (inter-)actions, undertaken by themselves and others.⁴³ Each individual furthermore seems to have internalized a "hearing and visual gaze of an 'objectified' external, generalized, nameless, often faceless 'other', which crucially impacts his or her (inter-)actions."⁴⁴

Society

Sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1929-present) is one of the first scholars who described the 'public sphere' in 1960, explaining it as the physical places within societies where individuals can meet and discuss how they experience societal

40 Waylen 1994:342; Latham&Klein2006; Hu 2000; Lu 1993; Mouffe 2001; Fraser 2013; Howell 2003; Mazur 2002.

41 Alexander et al. 2006:35, 49, 50-52; Junker 2011:8.

42 Fraser 2013:12-13; Butler 1988; Fong&Widmer 2010; Bayne 2004.

43 Authorities in so called 'democratic' societies seek to influence the way their ideologies are presented in public spheres. At the same time, they do so in ways they think individuals within the public sphere will approve. This highly questions if 'public opinion' really is 'public', since the opinion of the public is malled by authorities. See also Chong&Druckman 2007:111.

44 Bayne 2004:161.

issues and their roles in them.⁴⁵ Although formulated in the 1960s, his theories about the influences of development to societies already were already applied very normatively since the renaissance period in many Western societies.

Accordingly, many other academic articles use the term 'public sphere' to describe a place within societies where different social groups (classes, ethnic groups, genders) can come together, because they want to discuss and judge the society they find themselves in, including assessment of their authorities.⁴⁶

Private spheres furthermore are, in Habermasian theories, the places within societies where an individuals' 'private life' takes place. As a concept, 'private sphere' is often used by contemporary scholars to refer to a "zone of immunity for individuals, a realm that is, ideally, not open to the scrutiny of the community and not subject to the intrusion of public authority."⁴⁷

As development proceeds, it is assumed that more public spheres are created in a society and more individuals become motivated to step out of their private sphere and participate in

45 Habermas 1989: 1, 51-66, 140 and 222.

46 The term 'public society', or 'Gong shehui' (公共社会 gōng shèhuì) is often used in the Chinese language, in Chinese societal contexts, which means roughly the same as the described explanation of the public sphere. Teunissen, J.E. (2014). Lecture on Political Participation in Modern China. Personal Collection of J.E. Teunissen, 2014. Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands. Others see Diamond 1997, Diamond 1994; Damm 2007.

47 Yan 2003:9.

discussions within public spheres.⁴⁸ This can both lead to as well as result from development.⁴⁹ Hence, Habermas claims that individuals ‘emancipate’ when they ‘emancipate’ in political-economic senses.⁵⁰

Moreover, the idea of ‘public opinion’ is often used in Habermasian theories about the ‘public sphere.’⁵¹ I interpret the idea of ‘public opinion’ as the overall assessment of differing interpretations of societal ‘reality’, made by those participating in the public spheres of a society.

‘Public opinion’ is not however, a requirement for existence of the public sphere.⁵² For individuals might not be motivated to enter public spheres. Development is even likely to result in a move “from a public critically reflecting on its culture to one that merely consumes it.”⁵³ ‘Civil society’ however, is arguably formed by public opinion while it forms public opinion. As a term, ‘civil society’ often refers to “social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, and autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules.”⁵⁴

Civil society thus consists of individuals who act collectively in a public sphere to express their ideologies, ideas about society and development. They exchange information to achieve

⁴⁸ Habermas 1989:46-47.

⁴⁹ Habermas 1989: 51-66, 140 and 222; Alexander et al. 2006:50; Inkeles 1969.

⁵⁰ Habermas 1989:46.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Habermas 1989; Diamond 1994.

⁵³ Habermas 1989:175.

⁵⁴ Diamond 1994:221.

collective goals, make demands towards authorities, and want to change the society they inhabit.⁵⁵ Such a civil society is assumed furthermore to be essential for holding “divergent communities of interest together” in non-Chinese societies at least.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Chinese ideas about what ‘civil society’ should be, correspond roughly with the above assumptions. Yet I concluded that distinguishing five types of specifically ‘Chinese’ civil societies is needed before drawing conclusions about the impact ‘civil society’ might have to society, especially to development and societal disruption in this society.⁵⁷

First, there is notion of “Citizen society” (公民社会 Gōngmín shèhuì). This is a civil society in which citizens can interact to make demands to their authorities. In societies that contain citizen societies, citizens have impact on the (inter-)actions of the authorities over the society.

Second, ‘society between people’(民间社会, Mínjiān shèhuì). This society between people is formed when people come together as a group to do thing they are jointly motivated for, but separate from the so-called ‘state.’ Their (inter-)actions, although clearly visible in public spheres, (dances etc.) can have political implications or meanings, but this is not a precondition for existence of this society.

Third, the ‘urban society’, (社区社会, Shìmín shèhuì) seems to exist. What this is, remains difficult to describe, for the term denotes groups bounded by their residential position, and all local

55 Habermas 1989; Diamond 1994; Damm 2007.

56 Damm 2007:277.

57 Teunissen 2014; Diamond 1997, Diamond 1994; Damm 2007; Howell 2003.

communities contain specific institutionalized ideologies; the 'rules of civility.'

Lastly, 'civil society' (文明社会, wénmíng shèhuì) can be identified as a group that is judged to (inter-)act 'civil', meaning that interactions are in line with institutionalized ideologies surrounding (individual) behavior. What this 'civil' is however depends highly on how 'being civil' is experienced by those inhabiting a society.⁵⁸

For reasons of limitations to this article, the term 'civil society' here refers to groups of individuals that are motivated to create times and places in a societies' public spheres to express their communal ideologies. They do so to cause societal changes, because they are motivated by other societal changes. Put differently, they are motivated for participation in civil society because they have communal experiences of reality.

The (inter-)actions undertaken by civil society are, accordingly, (inter-)actions to coerce others to at least make concessions with others about which ideologies need to be (further) institutionalized and/or changed. Suppression does not prevent their (inter-)actions in civil society. It might even be essential to motivate individuals for active participation in civil society 'as a group.'

Emancipation

(Inter-)actions that mediate messages to others with the clear specific aim to make others aware of the need to change or prevent entirely (further) institutionalization of certain

58 Ibid.

ideologies, are often defined as 'emancipatory' actions.⁵⁹

Hence, the explained idea of 'civil society' can be approached as 'emancipated', or at least consisting of individuals who aspire to 'emancipate' via their (inter-)action in civil society.

Development is assumed to provide individuals more access to consumer goods, job occupations, and education opportunities. These processes are generally assumed to prevent or even end experiences of 'being suppressed' by individuals inhabiting a society. Hence, development is seen as both a condition for and as a result of 'emancipation' of individuals of which their identity is experienced 'as suppressed', by themselves and/or by others.⁶⁰

The degree in which individuals are motivated to 'emancipate' depends however largely on how they experience their own, subjective realities. The capacity to translate this motivation into actual (inter-)actions to 'emancipate', depends both on how they experience their identities themselves as well as on how their identities are experienced by others.⁶¹ Emancipation therefore requires self-consciousness to begin with.⁶²

Self-consciousness is claimed to be needed for individuals to organize everyday reality by assigning meaning to exposed elements from this reality and attaching particular definitions

59 Waylen 1994; Croll 2013; Bhadra 2013; Howell 2003; Fraser 2013; Habermas 1989.

60 Fraser 2013; Habermas 1989:44; Yan 2003: esp.16-17; Inkeles 1969, Lindridge&Wang 2008:497, Watters 2010; Unger 2000; Mencken&Autrey 2013:107; Alexander et al. 2006; Pang 2007:70.

61 Habermas 1989:55.

62 Nakamura&Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Yan 2003; Csikszentmihalyi 2014.

and interpretations to it.⁶³This kind of self-consciousness is furthermore assumedly a form of knowledge generally privileged to educated individuals. More education facilities and possibilities to obtain education are, as explained, generally regarded as either results or prerequisites of development.⁶⁴ Moreover, development is regarded as creating more chances for active participation in civil societies. Aside self-consciousness, this kind of participation requires feelings of autonomy, equality, independency and freedom.⁶⁵ ‘Emancipation’ might therefore mean that individuals somehow become free from “entrenched social roles, divisions and hierarchies, especially when this social machinery draws force from inherited advantage, shaping the life chances of individuals.”⁶⁶Development is regarded as ‘freeing’ individuals in these ways, and accordingly seen as required for ‘emancipation’ to occur. ‘Emancipated individuals’ themselves thus arguably experience their *own* identity as free, autonomous and independent from other ideologies institutionalized in society. These feelings can be actualized in (inter-)actions in civil society, with which they claim to have certain rights.⁶⁷

63 Entman 1993; Gamson&Modigliani 1987:143; Chong&Druckman 2007:105; Nakamura&Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Yan 2003; Csikszentmihalyi 2014.

64 Alexander et al. 2006:1.Yan 2003:16; Inkeles 1969, Lindridge&Wang 2008:497, Watters 2010; Unger 2000.

65 Ibid.

66 Unger 2000:5.

67 Yan 2003:16; Inkeles 1969; Lindridge&Wang 2008:497.

In my interpretation of the term 'authorities' in several articles, are those individuals able to determine the degree in which other individuals can be 'emancipated.' They are 'as authorities' able to coerce individuals to behave in line with the ideologies they regard as contributive to achieving goals, often goals they proclaim as 'development.'⁶⁸

Ideologies can prescribe specifically what it means and should mean to have the identity 'as a woman', 'as emancipated women', 'as feminist' and so on.⁶⁹ Ideologies that contribute to women's emancipation 'as women', therefore need to proclaim improvement of how women themselves and others (can) experience the identity 'as woman.'⁷⁰ In this article, 'patriarchic' ideologies are the ideologies that privilege male individuals. Such ideologies are thus ideologies with which women's subordination to men can be justified.⁷¹

While experiencing feelings of 'freedom', 'autonomy' and other emotions related to 'emancipation', individuals can still be subjected to ideologies determined authorities, and the ideologies authorities aim to institutionalize.⁷² When exposed to

68 Fraser (1999) therefore distinguishes between 'weak' and 'strong' public spheres, the former being limited to critical opinion making and the latter moving beyond this to affect authorities in their ideological decision making. Fraser 1999:89-92. See also Yan 2003:92-93, 102-109; Footnote 29-30.

69 Mazur 2002:30; Mill 1970:398.

70 Ibid. See also Howell 2003; Waylen 1994:334-337.

71 Pang 2007; Fraser 2013.

72 Habermas 1989:54-55; Latham&Klein2006:esp.178-187; Howell 2003; Croll 2013; Waylen 1994.

many ideologies that differ, individuals tend to adhere to ideologies they are most familiar with.⁷³

Culture

A society's 'culture' is demonstrable with, for example, myths, stories, proverbs, historical writings, sciences, songs and rituals with which inhabitants of societies generally are familiar with.

This term here refers to the compilation of institutionalized ideologies within a certain society. Accordingly, culture preserves information about a societies' past while it is (made)visible in the present.⁷⁴ Likewise, discourses and thinking of the majority of individuals in a society reflect a societies' culture.⁷⁵

Guanxi'(guānxì, 关系) and 'renqing'(rén qíng, 人情) are argued to be characteristic ideologies within what is regarded as Chinese culture.⁷⁶ 'Guanxi' refers to an individual's social networks: the social groups to which individuals who adhere to the same ideologies belong to. Guanxi networks have specific moralities: 'Renqing.' 'Renqing' denotes ideologies that prescribe emotional responses to others and 'proper' communication with others in a guanxi network. Renqing are therefore guanxi-specific moral standards with which individuals access someone or something.⁷⁷

73 Chong&Druckman 2007; Alexander et al. 2006; Entman 1993; Chan 2013:12-13.

74 Appadurai&Breckenridge 1995; Bhadra 2013; Alexander et al. 2006.

75 Entman 1993:52-53; Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995.

76 Yan 2003:38-39.

77 Ibid.

Members of social groups within a society can mediate culture in very selective ways to others, as demarcations of their identity ‘as a group.’

Moreover, members of religious groups in particular use cultural products, such as rituals and relics, to proclaim how they regard what ‘ideal identity’ entails; to mediate “important advice about living in divinely inspired commandments.”⁷⁸

Development furthermore changes a culture, just as how and why individuals expose a culture to others outside their culture.⁷⁹ For example, due to development processes, in particular after 1978, *guanxi* and *renqing* started to have different meaning for Chinese individuals than before.⁸⁰

Originally, most *guanxi* networks were cultivated via family ties. *Guanxi* and *renqing* provided most Chinese moralizing guidance for their (inter-)actions. The radical socialism between the 1950s and 1970s introduced new ideologies based on the imperatives of the market economy, including a new set of *renqing* ethics. As a result, and particularly after the economic reforms in 1978, *guanxi* and *renqing* became less informative regarding emotional responses towards others. *Guanxi* based on colleague relationships became more common than those based on kinship. Such ‘extended *guanxi*’ enable more choice compared to the past. Besides this, many Chinese individuals

78 Csikszentmihaly 2014:102-103.

79 Appadurai&Breckenridge 1995:5.

80 Yan 2003:186; Lindridge&Wang 2008.

now appear to use guanxi as mostly instrumental means to advance their personal careers.⁸¹

(Re-)presentations

Theater performances, can be created specifically to institutionalize ideologies with.⁸² Gestures, words, scripts and choreographies and other actions of performers in theater performances are in this article termed as ‘presentations’ of ideologies which the performance aims to institutionalize.⁸³ What I call ‘representations’ here are the ideologies, as ideologies *an sich*, which the presentation is intended to mediate.

When the majority of spectators of a theater performance connect particular knowledge about the societal environment they experience and the knowledge they have about the ideologies represented to them in identical ways, the performance can institutionalize these ideologies.⁸⁴

Moreover, individuals seem to judge a new ideology as beneficial to adhere to when ideologies that counter this new ideology are exposed to them.⁸⁵ Therefore, besides what ‘ideal identities’ are according to the ideologies they aspire to institutionalize, performers of performances with this explicit

81 Yan 2003.

82 Chong&Druckman 2007; Entman 1993:52-53;Alexander et al. 2006:33.

83 Alexander et al. 2006:33-36;Chan 2013: 4.

84 What I termed as ‘ideologies’.

85 Esp. shown in Fraser 2013; Butler 1988; Fong&Widmer 2010.

aim also need to perform the opposite of these ‘ideal identities.’⁸⁶

2. ‘Ideological theater’ : a new research paradigm

When individuals do something because they feel it is inherent to and/or beneficial to the identity they aspire to have, they do something based on intrinsic motivation.⁸⁷ Intrinsic motivation causes that individuals have the feeling they are able to influence and control the realities they experience, either mundane or spiritual.⁸⁸ Hence, intrinsic motivation, causes that individuals give up the pursuit of rewards, such as money, just to be able to (inter-)act as they do.⁸⁹

The flow of ‘civility’

Participation in civil society requires an individuals’ intrinsic motivation which is invoked by self-consciousness.

Self-consciousness causes that individuals can “develop a

86 Butler 1988:522.

87 Csikszentmihaly 2000:132.

88 Nakamura&Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Csikszentmihaly 2000.

89 Nakamura&Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 90.

particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue.”⁹⁰ Individuals continue their participation in civil society when they remain intrinsically motivated for this.⁹¹ Even when the realities they experience due to participating implies suppression, persecution and alike consequences, participants still can remain intrinsically motivated to be (more) active in civil society. For the feeling they get from these (inter-)actions causes that they experience having their identity ‘as participant’ as intrinsically rewarding.⁹²

A recently formulated research concept used to investigate intrinsic motivation is also termed ‘flow.’⁹³ Feelings of flow might explain why some individuals are members of suppressed social movements, for feeling flow implies the self-consciousness needed for participation in civil society.⁹⁴ For flow is needed to be invoked to cause that individuals adhere to ideologies that belong to a social movement or group.⁹⁵

To invoke feelings of flow amongst individuals within a social group, its’ leaders need to mediate the ideologies they desire to institutionalize. Besides, they also need to mediate already institutionalized ideologies amongst the majority of individuals exposed to these ideologies.⁹⁶ During such mediation actions,

90 Chong&Druckman 2007:104-105.

91 Crawford&Ostrom 1995:582; Chong&Druckman 2007;Chan 2013.

92 Ibid.

93 Nakamura&Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Yan 2003; Csikszentmihalyi 2014.

94 Yan 2003:10. Csikszentmihalyi 1995, 38, 53-54. Quoted in Alexander et al. 2006, 56.

95 Yan 2003:10.

96 Chong&Druckman 2007:116.

techniques of 'selection' and 'salience' are most often applied. This means that especially the moralizing parts of the ideologies are highlighted to make the codes of conduct the ideologies prescribe more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to those whom the ideologies are mediated. This enhances the probability that the individuals exposed to these ideologies perceive the ideology as positively affecting their lives, and as such become intrinsically motivated to adhere to the ideology. The presentation of an 'ideal reality' which contains elements of a familiar culture, such as myths or symbols, combined with new cultural elements, therefore are often used by authorities to enhance the salience and credibility of the ideologies they desire to mediate.⁹⁷

The omission of (potential) problems in this 'ideal reality' authorities mediate is equally critical in invoking flow.⁹⁸

Performing '(un-)civil' realities

Theater performances can be used by civil society and authorities to create the (new) societal realities they desire. Contemporary scholars tend to approach theater performances specifically produced to challenge, change, reject, or contribute to (further) institutionalization of certain ideologies with terms and theories as 'political theater'⁹⁹, 'ritual performances'¹⁰⁰, 'feminist plays, or 'emancipatory theater.'¹⁰¹In my opinion

⁹⁷ Ibid. and Entman 1993:54.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Alexander et al. 2006; Esherick&Wasserstrom 1990; Alexander et al. 2006, 68; Appadurai&Breckenridge 1995; Goldman 2013; Junker 2001:4.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander 2011; Junker 2011; Alexander et al. 2006.

¹⁰¹ Bhadra 2013.

however, applying these terms can cause academic biases and generalizations about relations between ‘development’, identity and emancipation, particular women’s emancipation. I therefore summarize performances with the aim to institutionalize certain ideologies and challenge or change others as ‘ideological performances.’ Producers of ideological performances seek to change or challenge contemporary societal realities via (re-)presenting the ideologies that they desire to be overthrown while prescribing (new) ideologies, especially surrounding identity. They ultimately aim to motivate the spectators to adhere to the ideologies the performance prescribes. These performances therefore mediate the message that when individuals have a certain identity, they are ‘ideal’ in the sense that they are contributive to the creation of an ‘ideal society.’ Ideological performances therefore make spectators (more) conscious about institutionalized ideologies in the reality they are likely to live in. This heightens the self-consciousness of the spectators, which is arguably needed to invoke their intrinsic motivation to inter-act in ways the producers desire. Hence, ideologies that are already institutionalized amongst spectators highly determine the agreements about what should be (re-)presented in the performance.¹⁰²

‘Ideological performances’ are thus to be regarded as performed ‘realities’. Such performances ultimately aim to institutionalize ideologies contributive to the creation of an

102 Chong and Druckman 2007:111; Brosius&Butcher 1999:58,66, 60; Waylen 1994; Bhadra 2013; Bassnett-McGuire 1984; Appadurai&Breckenridge 1995, 8 ; Nakamura&Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Chan 2013; Alexander et al. 2006; Entman 1993.

'ideal' reality in the perception of those who produce the performance, an 'ideal reality' with 'ideal' individuals in it.

Strategies to 'stage' ideal reality

In an 'ideological performance', performers expose the spectators to a particular problem definition, the causal interpretation of these problems made by its' producers, their evaluation, and their treatment recommendation for the problem. Producers of ideological performances apply mainly the strategies of 'typification' and 'aestheticism.' The performance needs furthermore to (re-)present aspects from what is assumed to be the 'authentic' culture of the society the spectators are familiar with.¹⁰³ In practice this means that in ideological performances ideologies are "manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, and stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments."¹⁰⁴

Typification means here (re-) presentation of ideologies through using specific actions, words and texts that describe a reality in a subjective, positive way. The ideologies the producers desire to institutionalize are proclaimed as 'natural' and belonging to this 'ideal' reality.¹⁰⁵

Aesthetic symbols, signs and attributes are representations of certain ideologies with an explicit moral judgment attached to

103 Ibid.

104 Entman 1993, 52.

105 Chong&Druckman 2007, 104.

them. The strategy I mention to be 'aestheticism' hence refers to a strategy with which ideologies are represented as 'good', 'bad', and 'beautiful' and so on.¹⁰⁶

'Cognitive simplification' is another method applied in ideological performances. This method implies that performers present stereotyped characteristics that are well-known: Characteristic 'bad guys' and 'heroes.' The performers furthermore use specific attributes and objects for this, "to help them dramatize and make vivid the invisible motives and morals they are trying to represent."¹⁰⁷ Cognitive simplifications are furthermore visible in the repetitions of simple facts, careful explanations, direct addressing of spectators and usage of oversimplifications while speaking.¹⁰⁸

A performance is 'authentic' when the performers (re-)present a reality that refers to well-known knowledge amongst the spectators about a culture. When the performers present to have positive personalities such as being straightforward, truthful and sincere while performing the ideal reality, the performance gains 'authentic value' or 'authenticity', meaning that a performed reality and/or identity is also judged as 'ideal' or at least positive by most spectators.¹⁰⁹

Ideological performances aim to cause spectators to interpret the challenges (re-)presented in the performances as manageable by individuals who have the identity that is

106 Alexander 2006:344; Alexander 2011; Chong&Druckman 2007.

107 Alexander et al. 2006, 35; Entman 1993; Alexander 2011; Chong&Druckman 2007.

108 Ibid.

109 Alexander 2011:72.

(re-)presented as ideal in the performance.¹¹⁰ The performer in an ideological performance who (inter-)acts in a way that reflects that he or she knows how to deal with the (re-)presented realities, is therefore the 'ideal identity' the producers want to proclaim.¹¹¹

For institutionalization of ideologies via an ideological performance, there must be also some societal problem (re-)presented in the performance, either derived from actual reality or from a reality that is not desired by the producers, as well as solutions to these problems. The realities and roles performed in ideological performances therefore clearly contain antagonisms: good versus bad, the sacred versus the mundane earth, the rich versus poor et cetera.¹¹²

The degree in which theater performances can function as ideological performances remains determined by institutionalized ideologies that determine the number of and limitations to the creation of public spheres within a society. For example, a lack of practical (technological) means, laws, sexual moralities, national or racial symbols, censorship can hinder the production and/or performance of ideological performances.¹¹³ Objects such as clothing and stage attributes are highly important to (re-)present ideologies, as are suitable theater venues. These elements are crucial to heighten the authenticity

110 Nakamura&Csikszentmihalyi 1990:90.

111 Alexander 2011:72.

112 Entman 1993:52-53.

113 Salmenkari 2004:257.

of the performance in particular, yet not every society is has sufficient public spaces to provide them. ¹¹⁴

Expectations about interpretation and interpretation of the performers and producers of ideologies are the most influential in the creation and effects of ideological performances. ¹¹⁵

For each individual spectator already adheres to ideologies about 'reality' before watching a performance. ¹¹⁶ When individuals are exposed to different ideologies surrounding the same issue, they will adhere to the ideologies most consistent with the ideologies already institutionalized within their public and private spheres. ¹¹⁷ Therefore, when performances (re-)present ideologies that have been institutionalized in a culture for a long time, they are more likely to be institutionalized than new, recently institutionalized ideologies. ¹¹⁸

The spectators of ideological performances produced by movements in civil societies are furthermore generally informed about the ideological content of the performances. This is because the spectators of these performances are often already a member of such movement. The omission of potential societal problems and alternative solutions to the (re-)presented

114 Alexander et al. 2006:36.

115 Alexander et al. 2006:35-41.

116 Chong&Druckman 2007: 112.

117 Chong&Druckman 2007:112.

118 Gamson &Modigliani 1987:169-70; Chong&Druckman 2007:112.

problems might be equally of critical influence to the effects of ideological performances.¹¹⁹

In short, the performed 'reality' in ideological performances is often a reality the producers aim to idealize via the performance. This reality does not have to correspond with the actual reality.¹²⁰ To the contrary, most ideological theater performances intentionally highlight only certain aspects of a societies' culture and deemphasize other aspects. This is especially when ideological performances are created for reasons of 'emancipation' from past realities, for would it be "possible for struggling groups not to interpret history in the light of moral- political imperative, namely, the imperative of the future interest in emancipation?"¹²¹

3. Women and theater performances in China

119 Entman 1993.

120 Chong&Druckman 2007:104

121 Fraser 2013:23

Several theater performances produced in China are characterized by clear proclamation of ideologies surrounding gender. In Chinese contexts, this appears very useful for institutionalization of ideologies that are not specifically related to gender, and vice versa.¹²² However, development does not inevitably prevent (further) institutionalization of 'patriarchic' ideologies.¹²³

(Re-) presentations of gender ideologies appear useful to institutionalize new ideologies and challenge other ideologies with, at least in China.¹²⁴ Periods of rapid, thorough development in particular in China provided Chinese women new ways and means to experience their identities 'as women.' Yet this did not result in participation of women 'as women' in the public spheres of the Chinese society, nor in the existing or existed 'civil society' in China.¹²⁵ Only few Chinese women in the past appear to be sufficiently intrinsically motivated to (inter-)act 'as women' in arguably 'emancipated' ways.¹²⁶ Chinese female writers who lived in the late Qing dynasty (± 1900-1911) and during the May Fourth period (±1915-1921) for instance, linked their experiences of being 'a woman' with general societal changes that were proclaimed as 'ideal' and 'development' in their writings,¹²⁷

122 Fong&Widmer 2010:66.

123 Habermas 1989:46-47.

124 Croll 2013; Pang 2007; Latham&Klein2006; Goldman 2013; Yu 2013; Bayne 2004.

125 Bayne 2004:161;.Latham&Klein2006;Yan2003; Croll 2013.

126 Fong&Widmer 2010 ; Yu 2013; Hu 2000.

127 Pang 2007:16.

The female writers Wu Zao (1799-1862, 吳藻 Wú zǎo) and Qiu Jin(秋瑾, Qiū Jǐn, 1875 – 1907) already wrote with the aim to criticize the lack of recognition of women's intellectual capabilities and the inadequacy of women's literary education in the times they lived.¹²⁸ In continuing this criticism, albeit in a more nuanced way, other female writers, such as Bai Wei (白薇, Bái wēi, 1894-1987), pseudonym for Zhang Huang (張黃, Zhāng Huáng), emphasized their grief and lament in their writings over being 'just' a Chinese woman.¹²⁹ They proclaimed that Chinese women should have the chance to have a professional occupation, emphasizing it as beneficial to the overall development of the Chinese society.¹³⁰ Due to internalized experience of being inferior to men, it is suggested that many Chinese women consciously or unconsciously, still contribute to institutionalization of patriarchic ideologies in Chinese society.¹³¹ Therefore, the above female writers did not achieve the changes they desired in the institutionalized ideologies that prescribed general experiences of 'being a Chinese woman'. For 'as Chinese women', these women too had a history created by ideologies that were formulated by men, which specifically prescribed their identities 'as a women', including their needs, emotions and outer appearance. Although the mentioned writers might have formulated them, Chinese women in general

128 Brosius&Butcher 1999:60.

129 Guo 2013:7.

130 Pang 2007:84, 93; Goldman 2013:31.

131 Zhou 2007:10.

therefore are not likely to adhere to ideologies that prescribe women's freedom in choice, autonomy or independence.¹³²

Chinese ideological performances

Theater performances, in China and elsewhere, can effectively mediate desires and hopes for (future) development of their producers.¹³³ Ideas surrounding (future) development in China apparently were and are often mediated via performances of 'ideal' model identities, which are very gender-specific.¹³⁴ Since relationships between men and women have a profound impact on societal phenomena, especially in China, this was effective for 'development' as authorities desired.¹³⁵

Already in the Ming and Qing period (1770-1900) theater performances were produced under guidance of Chinese authorities to 'educate' Chinese individuals about which ideologies they ought to adhere to for being 'good' citizens.¹³⁶ Since the Tang dynasty (618-907), Confucian ideologies provided detailed prescriptions for 'good' (inter-)actions to the majority of Chinese individuals. Accordingly, this kind of theater performances mainly mediated Confucian ideologies.¹³⁷ It is assumed that Confucius said that "women like slaves are hard to manage", that "the subordination of women to men is one of the supreme principles of government" and that "the relations

132 Lu 1993:137.

133 Alexander et al 2006: 41-59.

134 Latham&Klein2006; Pang 2007:84; Yan 2003; Chong&Druckman 2007; Croll 2013.

135 Esp. Yan 2003.

136 Goldman 2013.

137 Ying 2000, Lan 2003.

between husband and wife, like those between King and minister and between father and son are all, as those between master and servant, universal under Heaven..”¹³⁸

Accordingly, the Confucian doctrine of the ‘three following precepts and the four morality rules’ (三从四德, Sāncóngsìdé) dictated a specific ‘female identity.’¹³⁹ Women with this ‘ideal identity’, presented ‘proper’ appearance, (容 *róng*), virtuousness (德 *dé*), language (言 *yán*) and industry (工 *gōng*).¹⁴⁰ Such ideal women furthermore were at all times loyal submissive towards her father as his daughter, to her husband as his wife, and to her grown son (the heir of the father), as his mother. In addition, Confucius’ ‘ideal women’ had the core tasks of preserving the honor and continuity of the family by presenting filial piety (孝 *xiào*) and remaining chaste (贞 *zhēncāo*) until they married.¹⁴¹ The overthrow of the Qing dynasty (1911–12), with which Confucianism had been closely identified, led to the decline of adherence to Confucian ideologies, which continued after the fall of the Qing empire and was augmented during the Communist revolution (1949). Hence, most performances started to emphasize political and economic achievements of the Chinese authorities up until then, to avoid further discontent amongst Chinese individuals, explicitly amongst intellectuals.¹⁴²

138 Croll 1977:594; Croll 2013:324.

139 Ying 2000:116.

140 Ying 2000:111.

141 Fong&Widmer 2010:66; Lan 2003:233.

142 Goldman 2013; Pang 2007:16, 70.

During the May Fourth period (±1915-1921), and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), more rapid, thorough changes of former institutionalized ideologies took place in China. In these periods, the creation of a 'new society' became a highly aspired goal by many Chinese, which was a society that required 'new identities' to become reality.

Ideal women, Ideal China?

The May Fourth movement (五四运动 Wǔsì yùndòng), starting approximately in 1919, was a period in which many demonstrations by students in Beijing started. Chinese students, intellectuals, formed groups to discuss about why and how China had lagged behind the West, and concluded that in particular Confucianism and the clan system were the main causes. They wanted to teach to as many Chinese individuals as possible about how they could contribute to the creation of the society they regarded as 'ideal.'¹⁴³ They (re-)presented well-known men and women from Chinese history in theater performances to mediate the ideologies they regarded as needed to 'save' China from (further) deprivation. Many argued furthermore that specifically women needed to experience their identities in different ways to contribute in developing the ideal society they wanted to create. The performances they produced, presented a 'new Chinese woman', who actively participated in civil society as ideal 'responsible members' of the Chinese society they wanted to actualize.¹⁴⁴

143 Guo 2013; Ying 2000; Fong&Widmer 2010; Lan 2003:233; Dooling&Torgeson 1998:13; <http://chineseposters.net/themes/women.php>.

144 Ibid.

This 'ideal woman' was generally educated, and actively (inter-)act on stage to solve the (perceived) societal problems of that time, problems identified to be present in reality by May Fourth activists. This new woman was furthermore able to counter the ideology prescribing filial piety by marrying their true love. The stories told in the performances accordingly revolved around women who married the man they loved, worked hard on the side of men, and wore short hair and often a cap. As 'a woman', she was contributive to creation of the ideal society May Fourth activists aspired to actualize.¹⁴⁵

This 'ideal Chinese woman' was accordingly presented in theater performances to motivate Chinese women to contribute in creation of a 'new' society. However, the creation of her ideal identity was not intended specifically to challenge or at least change patriarchic ideologies.¹⁴⁶ After the founding of the People's Republic (PRC) in China in 1949 therefore, patriarchic ideologies were still institutionalized.

Communists however did proclaimed it as part of 'being Communist' to educate women how they could and why they should contribute to the development of China.¹⁴⁷ In Line with Marxism and Leninism, Chinese Communists assumed "the degree of the emancipation of women is the natural measure of

145 Ibid.

146 Yan 2003:186. May Fourth activists did made some efforts to end practices of foot binding, which arguably are efforts to 'emancipate' women 'as women.'
Dooling&Torgeson 1998; <http://Chinese posters.net>. Fong&Widmer 2010.

147 Croll 2013:118,289;Waylen 1994:340-343.

general emancipation.”¹⁴⁸ Due to the growing demands of the economy after 1949, the proclaimed ‘ideal Chinese woman’ at that time also looked like a man, yet her ‘idealness’ was first of all measured by her participation in the labor market.

During the period of Maoism (1958-1976), and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), it became prohibited to emphasize ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ in (inter-)actions in public spheres, for ‘equality’ was proclaimed as essential to achieve ‘development.’ As result, only ‘masculinized’ women were permissibly (re-)presented in ‘cultural products.’ Emphasis on identity ‘as woman’; femininity, was regarded as bourgeois, ‘bad’ behavior. This might have invoked feelings of freedom and equality amongst Chinese women more than the representations of female identity in the past.¹⁴⁹

Gender ‘neutral’ (re-)presentations, might have provided women the feeling that they, despite ‘being a woman’, were able to participate in actions in the public spheres of society.¹⁵⁰

Women’s participation rate in the job market indeed remained high after the Cultural Revolution, and the number of women in higher educational establishments was also higher than before.¹⁵¹

Between 1950 and 1970 furthermore, Chinese individuals were more encouraged and sometimes led by authorities to be

148 Croll 2013:118.

149 [Http://chineseposters.net](http://chineseposters.net); Yan 2003:66.

150 Guo 2013:33.

151 Latham&Klein2006:178; Guo 2013; Croll 2013.

specifically more 'autonomous' and 'independent.'¹⁵² Short after the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) for instance Mao Zedong assigned his wife Jiang Qing, to change several well-known theater plays and Opera's from the past. In 1964, these Operas were proclaimed to be 'model works'(样板戏, Yàngbǎn xì), created explicitly to educate the spectators ideologies surrounding individual behavior. In the 1960s these model works became very popular amongst Chinese individuals. From 1963 onwards, in such model works, such as Shajiabang (沙家浜, shā jiā bāng, Shajia village), Hongdengji (红灯记, hóng dēng jì, The Story of the Red Lamp) and Zhiqu weihushan (智取威虎山, zhì qǔ wēi hǔ shān, Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy) it is remarkable that features from contemporary reality were added. Moreover, differences between 'good' and 'bad' individuals were more emphasized.

Later, two well-known dances created in the 1940s (so called 秧歌, yāngge) were also reformed by Jiang Qing: Hongse niangzi jun (红嫂英雄传, hóng sè niáng zǐ jūn, The Red Detachment of Women) and Baimao nü (白毛女, bái máo nǚ, The White-haired Girl), which prescribed specific ideologies for women. Just as in performances produced with the similar goals in the past, usage of stereotyped heroes, villains and combinations of (re-)presentations of the present and past Chinese culture were frequently applied.¹⁵³

Later, during the anti- Confucius and Lin Biao campaign in 1974, Chinese women were specifically taught that and how

152 Yan 2003; Croll 2013:3, 118-120, 288-290; Latham&Klein2006.

153 Latham&Klein 2006; <http://Chineseposters.net>; Goldman 2013.

Confucian ideologies hindered their ‘liberation.’¹⁵⁴The campaign made them more aware of how Chinese women had been oppressed because of ‘being a women’ in the past.¹⁵⁵ Proclaimed ‘ideal relationships’ between men and women started to change significantly in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁵⁶ This “ideal love relationship” was based upon the ideologies of “having matching tempers”(对脾气, Duì píqì) and “Having something to talk about” (有话, yǒu huàshuō).¹⁵⁷ Intimacy and affection in conjugal relationships seems to have increased, and a wife’s contribution to economic progresses are more acknowledged, while adherence to former Confucian ideologies declined since then. These changes suggest that proclaimed identities of ideal men and women became more similar, more ‘equal’. It is claimed that the number of ‘public spheres’ in China increased as well in this period. It is argued that these changes resulted from rapid (economic) development in China, especially after 1978.¹⁵⁸

Chinese women might furthermore be very receptive to new ideologies based on gender equality and aspire autonomy and independence more than men after 1978 due to their past limitations in comparison with men.¹⁵⁹ The development of women’s studies programs and academic scholarship on

154 Latham&Klein2006:592; Yan 2003.

155 Ibid.

156 Yan 2003:75-76.

157 Yan 2003:73.

158 Howell 2003:198.

159 Yan 2003:222-224.

women in China during the 20th century is suggested to have heightened Chinese women's motivations to contribute to proclaimed development goals.¹⁶⁰

'Equality' between the sexes, women's education, their participation on the job market, in public spheres and sometimes even in civil society seems therefore to be pursued in China as development continued, while the continuation of development required this equality as well.

The above findings can be used as affirmation of the before-mentioned assumptions about the relations between development, emancipation, and society, including civil society and the public sphere. In periods of particular thorough and rapid 'development' in China, many theater performances exposed a 'female identity' to the spectators they were not accustomed to.¹⁶¹ During the May Fourth period in specific, ideological performances aimed to motivate both men and women to become free and contributive to creation of a 'new society' in 'equal' ways and degrees.

However, the performances used (re-)presentations of women's subordination to legitimize and proclaim their ideologies surrounding 'development' into the directions of a 'new', 'ideal' society. Women's identity 'as subordinate', appeared useful to male intellectuals to represent their ideologies with. So the 'reality' performed created in the performances and in the actual reality in the Chinese society, was still characterized by patriarchic ideologies. This was used, if not needed to

160 Zheng 1997:127-132.

161 Hu 2000; Guo 2013; Jiang 2009; Fong&Widmer 2010; Yu 2013; Fong&Widmer 2010:66; <http://chineseposters.net/themes/women.php>.

legitimize, proclaim and motivate Chinese individuals to create a new 'ideal 'reality'.¹⁶²

Emancipated femininity, un-emancipated women

The marketization of China's economy after 1978 has led to the emergence of a so - called consumer culture. In this culture Chinese are exposed to more, new and differing proclamations of 'ideal identities.'¹⁶³ China today is therefore often regarded as characterized by a non- political kind of "cultural" and "do-it-yourself" citizenship."¹⁶⁴

This caused problems of poor employment conditions, sexual harassment and urban prejudices towards women.¹⁶⁵ Female laid-off workers face age- or gender discrimination in the labor market. For commercial sex workers, the possibilities for improvement of their life circumstances are even more limited.¹⁶⁶

Chinese individuals hence seem to experience their identities 'as Chinese' in more confusing ways than previously.¹⁶⁷ It can be argued furthermore that Chinese individuals, especially women, are not autonomous, free or independent from ideologies institutionalized in the past, nor institutionalized and/or proclaimed at present.¹⁶⁸ Gender discrimination and gender

¹⁶² Chen 2002:130-137.

¹⁶³ Latham&Klein2006:22; Croll 2013.

¹⁶⁴ Damm 2007:286.

¹⁶⁵ Howell 2003:197-198.

¹⁶⁶ Howell 2003:198.

¹⁶⁷ Esp. Latham&Klein 2006; Yan 2003.

¹⁶⁸ Latham&Klein2006:33.

conflicts still frequently occur.¹⁶⁹ Even so-called ‘women’s movements’ in China today generally focus on providing services, such as counseling and legal advice for women, rather than mobilizing women to challenge or change patriarchic institutionalized ideologies.¹⁷⁰

Therefore, it can be stated that “the transformations in the configuration of gender, body and nation that have occurred over the last two decades are not innocent with respect to power; they moved away from the androgynous ideal, which many women experienced as liberating, and in fact masked the emergence of new forms of patriarchy.”¹⁷¹

169 Latham&Klein2006:175.

170 Howell 2003:199; Pang 2007. Waylen 1994:esp. 342-343; Especially Waylen explains that such movements are not aimed at nor contributive to ‘women’s emancipation’, although she argues this based on her research findings in societies outside China.

171 Latham&Klein2006:186.

4. The FLG and ‘emancipated women’

In my opinion, the existence of the FLG resembles the mentioned, assumedly existing Chinese ‘civil societies’, as well descriptions of ‘civil society’ in non-Chinese contexts. However, I claim that the FLG’s activities ‘as movement’ and its’ membership constituency reveal that the assumed relationships between these ‘civil societies’, development, emancipation and women’s identities, are too normative to exist. The SY performances I describe below, show how the producers use women’s ‘femininity’ in ways determined by their perceptions about development, which resembles the ideological performances I described earlier.

The Falun Gong ‘as a movement’

The FLG started as religious- oriented movement characterized by jointly practicing Qigong.¹⁷² Qigong master Li Hongzhi(李洪志, Lǐ Hóngzhì, 1951-present), who became the FLG’s spiritual leader after 1980, turned the FLG more into a political oriented movement in 1992.¹⁷³ After a large protest action by FLG activists on April 25 1999 the Chinese government issued an

172 Qigong is claimed to consist of many breathing exercises that are supposed to cure disease, prolong life, and confer supernatural powers and other health benefits. Junker 2011; Ownby 2008; Palmer 2007; <http://faluninfo.net>.

173 Palmer 2007: 224; Junker 2011:7; Zhao 2003.

official prohibition to the FLG.¹⁷⁴ FLG activists have always practiced FLG exercises and proselytizing in public spheres to protest against this prohibition up till today.¹⁷⁵ After the 1999's, FLG members accordingly risk persecution, especially when they (inter-)act as such in 'civil society.'¹⁷⁶

Before the prohibition, it was estimated that the FLG numbered 60 to 70 million members in total.¹⁷⁷ The number of FLG members seemingly increased, in particular between 1996 and 1999.¹⁷⁸ Later it was measured that there were approximately 10 million more practitioners in 2007 than before 1999.¹⁷⁹

Other demographic surveys conducted in China, in 1998 for instance, also found that FLG members were mostly female and elderly. It was measured that out of 34,351 FLG members, 27% were male and 73% female. 38% were below 50 years of age.¹⁸⁰ In a report on the Chinese governments' investigation to FLG in China, it was revealed that the average age of FLG members in 2002 was above 40. The majority were low and middle income Chinese. More than 60% of them turned out again to be female.¹⁸¹

174 Junker 2011:5.

175 Actions as marches, petitions, demonstrations, legal suits, etc. Junker 2011:5.

176 Guo 2013; Mencken&Autry 2013; Junker 2011; Palmer 2007.

177 Tong 2002:171,636-660; Chan 2004:179; Palmer 2007.

178 Palmer 2007:191-92, 252-56, 254.

179 Ibid.

180 Porter 2003:117.

181 Leung 2002:766; Chan 2004:671. Mencken&Autrey 2013:107-110.

The number of male and female members outside China seems more equal than inside China. In 2008, research has shown that 90% of FLG members outside China are ethnic Chinese, of which 56% were female and 44% male. 80% of the members outside China were married. Only 9% held PhDs, 34% had a Master degrees, and 24% a Bachelor degree.¹⁸²

In 2013 it was estimated that the number of Chinese women participating in the FLG's protest actions, within and outside China, was still equal to and in some cases greater than the number of male activists.¹⁸³ The majority of FLG members appeared again to be elderly women with low-incomes.¹⁸⁴

Hence, it is concluded that Chinese women apparently participate more than Chinese men in 'religious activities' in the public spheres of the Chinese society. This includes participation in civil society, via (inter-)actions that are 'riskful' due to the prohibition.¹⁸⁵ Chinese women outside China as well arguably undertake such 'risky' religious actions.¹⁸⁶

Aside clear devotion to the FLG, the majority of female FLG members are claimed to be married. This is explainable, because in 2003 already it was concluded that the more religious Chinese women are, the more they are inclined to

182 Ownby 2008:132-134, 136; Mencken&Autrey 2013.

183 Guo 2013; Chan 2004; Leung 2002; Ownby 2008

184 Leung 2002:767; Chan 2013.

185 Guo 2013:3-4; Mencken&Autry 2013:107

186 Mencken&Autry 2013:107. Men however, irrespective of nationality, are more likely to engage with other 'risky' behavior, such as drug use, adultery, and index crimes.

marry.¹⁸⁷ The majority of female FLG members outside China in 2003 at least was married (90 %) and had middle or high school education. More than 60% of them had more education than their husbands. Moreover, during interviews, the majority of these women claimed to be married based upon free choice.¹⁸⁸ As I explained in chapter one, 'free choice' in marriage partners and education are, especially in Chinese contexts, often regarded as measurements for 'women's emancipation' while also causally linked to development.

FLG activists in general furthermore undertake actions in civil society in which they emphasize to 'protect the Dharma' and 'Clarify the truth'; Hufa (护法 Hùfǎ) and Hongfa (弘法, Hóng fǎ).¹⁸⁹ Similar to the Chinese performances produced in China's (recent) past, these activists also proclaim ideologies about how an 'ideal society' looks like how its' ideal inhabitants'(should) (inter-)act, while teaching individuals how they can 'save' themselves from external threats.¹⁹⁰ Members of social movements furthermore, in particular spiritual-oriented movements, relate their identity 'as member of the movement' with their identity 'as someone.'¹⁹¹

The findings above might hence suggest that female FLG members experience themselves 'as emancipated', which can motivate them to participate in civil society 'as FLG member.'

187 90% of the religious Chinese women interviewed claimed to be married based upon, as they argued, 'free choice.' Yan 2003:92-93, 102-109.

188 Ibid.

189 Ownby 2008; Palmer 2007; Junker 2011:20.

190 Hongzhi 2000: esp. 99, 314-315 and Hongzhi 1999:20, 39, 46.

191 Alexander et al. 2006:39 - 40;Waylen 1994:349-351; Junker 2011.

However, the majority of women in the FLG movement are measured to be not 'emancipated' with regard to their incomes. Their average age as well makes them not so much contributive or benefitting from 'development', at least in economic senses. More importantly, the Zhuan Falun, a book written by Li Hongzhi, contains the core ideologies that FLG members adhere to.¹⁹² This book contains various narratives which I regard as proclaiming 'patriarchic ideologies.' For instance, especially 'inequality' between men and women is frequently not described as 'bad', but as inherent to 'being human.'¹⁹³

Ideals, Identity, and ideology in the SY performances

The SY performing arts group consists entirely of FLG members and is one of the FLG movements' groups of performers that mediate the FLG's ideologies. The Shen Yun performers, as FLG activists, combine the FLG's ideologies as written in the Zhuan Falun with the FLG specific Hongfa and Hufa methods.¹⁹⁴ This explains why the SY performances also mediate patriarchy as 'natural part' of 'being someone', as ordained by 'the divine', or 'heaven.'

Aside from visiting the SY performances myself in 2014, the 20th of March, I interviewed Peter Houben, chair of the Dutch Falun Gong association in the Netherlands.

192 Hongzhi 2000; Hongzhi 1999 ; Ownby 2008; <http://faluninfo.nl>; <http://minghui.org>.

193 Hongzhi2000:140-141; Hongzhi 1999:128-129.

194 Common for religious movements with political affiliations; if "*a religious groups (inter-)acts for political reasons, its' members tend to combine standard forms of protest common to their social environment with their own distinctive religious ideologies.*" Alexander et al. 2006:39 - 40; Chan 2013; Li 2014; Palmer 2007; Junker 2011.

Houben repeatedly emphasized that *“We do not seek to ‘collect souls’ or anything. Our aim is to stop the persecution of Falun Gong in China, but this is not our core aim. Our central mission is to spread the traditional Chinese culture to as many persons as possible.”* He explained this to be the reason that the theater venues in the Hague and Amsterdam were chosen to stage the performances, because their equipment and location were judged to suit this ‘authentic’ Chinese culture.¹⁹⁵

I was told furthermore that all SY performers are FLG practitioners and *therefore* aim to ‘spread the Dafa’, to ‘save’ individuals from problems and threats they assume to be present in reality:

“The motivation of the performers might be to counter social problems. With presenting Falun Gong morality, they try to teach people how they can behave differently to avoid these problems.”¹⁹⁶

Houben mentioned furthermore that the SY performers focus on performing as authentically as possible; *“In the plays and among the group the Dafa is clearly visible or to be felt by others. I often receive compliments about the serenity, calmness and peace among the performers backstage. On stage, you can see that the smile of the performers is natural, a genuine smile, not an acted one. Such smiles come from their hearts, there is nobody who instructed them to smile.”*

After my interview with Houben, I watched the SY performances myself on March 24, 2014.

¹⁹⁵ *“They first of all want to present the real traditional Chinese culture.”* Houben 2014.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

I found that the SY performers clearly perform stereotyped characteristics of 'heroes' or 'victims', which are very likely familiar to the spectators. Throughout the entire show furthermore, a lot of usage is made of stage attributes such as swords, fans, flags and flowers. Mainly pictures of a recognizable Buddha-figure appeared in various scenes. This is explainable, for in the Zhuan Falun it is repeatedly stated that the identity of the Buddha entails the most desirable, 'ideal' characteristics. It states for example: "The most fundamental characteristic of this universe, Zhen-Shan-Ren, is the highest manifestation of the Buddha Fa. It is the most fundamental Buddha Fa.(...) A practitioner can only understand the specific manifestation of the Buddha Fa at the level that his or her cultivation has reached, which is his or her cultivation Fruit Status and level."¹⁹⁷

The background screen of each scene continuously changed its' colors. It frequently showed 'the universe' or 'heaven' with stereotyped features (light blue, white clouds, planets). This represents the 'reality' that the Zhuan Falun describes; a 'reality' composed by antagonist elements (heaven and earth, good and bad, the divine and the ordinary, the good vs the enemy etc.)¹⁹⁸

Houben explained that *"Shen Yun uses traditional Chinese myths, mainly a lot of stories from journey to the west; these stories involve key moralities as loyalty, truth and compassion. The performances are presenting the past, to gain more*

197 Hongzhi 1999:6.

198 Hongzhi 2000:36, 183-185.Hongzhi 1999:85-86.

recognition from the audiences.” He furthermore said that “There is a certain mingling between Falun Gong morality and the morality in traditional Chinese culture. The producers of the dances have done thorough research to these dances, their choreography and cultural features. In the stories there is mainly emphasis on traditional authentic Chinese culture. This we can see back in Ethnic dances. These dances have no relations with Falun Gong. The dances which present stories are derived from traditional Chinese culture.”

Although it is very interesting to retrieve differences between the FGL’s interpretation of what characterizes ‘authentic Chinese culture’ and other interpretations of ‘authentic Chinese culture’, this is unfortunately beyond the scope of my research. I can conclude here however that at least the ‘culture’ the SY performances present, represents the ‘authentic culture’ idealized in the Zhuan Falun.

The first dance, was a dance performed by women dressed in orange. They all kneeled in the end for the characters of the five elements (Wood: 木, Fire: 火, Earth: 土, Metal: 金 and Water: 水). Suddenly these characters disappeared and in a flash an image of Buddha appeared. This image was presented to a background that represented space or the universe. When the image of Buddha disappeared, only this background was visible. This scene is exemplary for a representation of the Zhuan Falun, for Hongzhi often argues in this book that “in ancient times it was said that the Five Elements constitute all things and matter in the universe.”¹⁹⁹

199 Hongzhi 2000:15, 73-74.

Besides, the five elements might characterize a culture that is recognizable for many Chinese spectators as ‘authentic Chinese.’²⁰⁰ For instance, the five elements system is still used in traditional Chinese medicine studies and practices, which is even proclaimed by the government as a characteristic element of ‘Chinese culture.’ Chinese authorities in the past used it as well to prescribe how interactions and relationships between individuals should be.²⁰¹

The SY performances might use (re-)presentation of this system specifically because Chinese individuals, and especially FLG members, are familiar with this system. According to my paradigm of ‘ideological performances’, this representation might make them more susceptible to accept other mediated ideologies in the performances.

Men, women and their ideal relationship

Houben told that *“In the Zhuan Falun, there aren’t specific moralities or rules concerning husband and wife relationships.”* However, *“The performers have specific rules surrounding men and women: their ideals are that the performers themselves cannot have relationships together. The ‘ideal man’ they present show physical strength, masculinity. Women are graceful, amiable.”*

In the SY performances, this is visible with scenes solely performed by men and solely performed by women. The ‘male’

200 Cua 2013:193, 809.

201 Ibid.

scenes were only performed by one or two 'heroes', which according to the presenters, were based on 'myths and legends.' The female scenes are generally communal group dances, which according to the presenters are based on 'ethnic folk customs' or 'Chinese folk rituals.' The 'male' scenes mediated highly educational messages, while the 'female' scenes did not. Only in acts that specifically (re-)present contemporary struggle or battle situations between the FLG and the CCP, the number of female and male performers is equal. This provides the first evidence that the producers mediate patriarchic ideologies with the SY performances.

Besides this, I noticed that in the SY performances everything that is proclaimed to be presenting 'the truth', 'reality' or 'the divine', is masculine. The (male) presenter for example, announces the entrance of 'the divine', addressing it as a 'he.' When the 'divine' appears, his masculinity is overemphasized: he has a white beard and moustache.

Emphasis on the masculinity of 'the divine' is exemplary for the cognitive simplifications made throughout the show. In theater performances about which it is already concluded that these (aimed to) challenge patriarchic circumstances, (female) performers clearly emphasize that women, and not men, are the creators of the 'histories'(re-)presented on stage.²⁰² This element however, was not visible throughout the entire SY show.

Another scene recounted the story of the boy Nüe Jia. This boy was said to have 'magical powers.' Even though he was a child,

202 Canning 2005:55.

he could defeat dragons. The presenters emphasized that he is born out of a 'giant meatball' and that his destiny is to become the 'ruler of the cosmic wheel.' This scene started with the entrance of a highly pregnant woman on stage. When she gives birth to the meatball, her husband gets mad at her, takes the ball and hits it. Then the boy, Nüe Jia jumps out of it. After this, fights between the boy Nüe Jia and 'the enemy' take place. 'The enemies' are the owners of a dragon. The boy has purple clothes and carries golden ring or hoop, with which he in the end kills the dragon.

This scene presents once again clear differences between men and women: the woman as mother, confined to the private sphere, her husband and son as heroes. The ring or hoop can once again be explained by the sayings of Li Hongzhi in one of his lectures in the Zhuan Falun. For he states for example in this book that he 'purifies' the bodies of his genuine members and that he implants a "Falun wheel" into their lower abdomen to help them "expel the bad karma faster."²⁰³

After the act of the birth of Nüe Jia, male performers appear who beat on drums. On the background screen that first presented the universe, now the image of a palace is presented. Then, female dancers appear who wear lotus flowers on the top of their heads. This is, in my opinion, exemplary for the strategy of aestheticism I described earlier. For in the Zhuan Falun, the lotus flower is explained as a symbol for consecration.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ *"The substance of De is attained when we have suffered pains endured setbacks and have done good deeds while Ye is collected when one commits sins and wrong deeds or bullies someone."* Stated by Li Hongzhi in 1998 in a speech quoted in Chan 2013:10.

²⁰⁴ Hongzhi 1999:18.

Then, the presenters of the show start to talk to the spectators. The female presenter was dressed in a glamorous dress, and introduced mostly the scenes that were (re-)presenting struggles between the CCP and the FLG. It can be speculated that the female presenter this way might invoke more intrinsic motivation amongst female spectators to adhere to the mediated ideologies in the show than when it would be the male presenter announcing such scenes.²⁰⁵ Just as after or before almost every act, it is said by the presenters that the FLG in mainland China is prohibited. They emphasize that the SY performing arts group today has existed for over eight years.²⁰⁶ They then point out that the mission of the performing arts group is to *“revive 5000 years of traditional Chinese civilization and Culture through performing arts.”*

The next scene is announced as devoted to ‘the divine.’ The dance which follows is performed by men carrying fans; their end-pose is a circle suggesting a flower or a shield. The background screen changes colors throughout the dance, and in the end it is entirely orange-yellow. This dance is a clear example of typification, for it represents again writings in the Zhuan Falun.²⁰⁷

The shape of a shield suggests furthermore ‘salvation’ of external threats and crisis when individuals (inter-)act in line with the FLG ideologies. The color red of the outfits of the

205 See also Bhadra 2013 who explains the role of the female presenter in so-called ‘feminist’ or ‘emancipatory’ performances.

206 At present 9 years.

207 *“My fashen sit in a circle, and above the exercise site is a shield on which there is a big Falun. A large fashen guards the site above the shield.”* Hongzhi 2000:142; Hongzhi 1999:64.

dancers furthermore might suggest strength or power; features of 'ideal heroes.'

The formation of circles and circle shaped dance patters, end poses and stage attributes such as hoops suggest timelessness, continuation and 'naturalness' to actual realities. This also can heighten the likelihood that the spectators will accept the mediated ideologies to them as 'reality' and 'natural.' Circle shaped attributes might also refer to a rotating symbol used by the FLG as symbol of their movement.



Figure one: The FLG symbol 'Falun.'²⁰⁸

As Hongzhi claimed "In a sense, this Falun emblem is a miniature of the universe" (...) "a human life is not created in ordinary human society; the creation of one's actual life is in the space of the universe."²⁰⁹

208 <http://faluninfo.net>.

209 Hongzhi 2000:18; Hongzhi 1999:2.

By connecting common, recognizable realities with his spiritual ideologies, the chances the spectators adhere to the mediated ideologies increase further.

The next act is performed by female dancers, the 'Ladies of the Tang dynasty.' The Tang Dynasty²¹⁰ is frequently discussed in the mythologies in the Zhuan Falun and portrayed as a period that was very beneficial to the FLG,

It states for example that the Northern School of Zen Buddhism was founded in the Tang Dynasty by Shenxiu, a monk. Li Hongzhi refers to Shenxiu as a person with great inborn qualities and the Tang Dynasty as a period in which the 'ways to enlighten' or discovering the 'truth' were discovered.²¹¹

In another dance performed by solely male dancers, Confucian ideologies are emphasized. The presenter argues that that this dance aims to represent one of Confucius' sayings: "Study without reflection is a waste of time; reflection without study is dangerous." It is a dance in which the dancers hold papyrus scrolls. In this scene, education is linked with masculinity, and with Confucianism. Confucianism, I explained, contains patriarchic ideologies. The (re-)presents these in a positive manner.

The next scene presents the persecution of the FLG in China. It is performed by a man and a woman. The man and woman are said to be FLG practitioners (according to the presenters). They fight together against those performers representing the CCP. However, the female performers are tortured by the (male)

210 "One of the most prosperous periods in Chinese history (618 A.D.-907 A.D.)" Hongzhi 1999:181.

211 Hongzhi 1999:186, 209, 215, 221.

performers that (re-)present the Chinese Communist Party. The FLG man is killed directly. Three banners wave with the characters for “truth, compassion and benevolence” on it, in Chinese and in English. The flags resemble the Falun Dafa. The woman who seems to be in great pain because of the torturing takes a flag and waves with it. Then, the background screen visualizes ‘heaven’, which the tortured woman enters which releases her from her sufferings.

In this scene, the female performer is explicitly used because of her ‘femininity’ to mediate these ideologies. Li Hongzhi argued that “To remove desires and attachments, members should enact the moral precepts of the FLG: Truthfulness, Benevolence and Forbearance in all circumstances, practice breathing and meditation exercises and read the Zhuan Falun every day.” He proclaims ‘suffering’ furthermore as a key virtue, as a necessary condition for achieving ‘salvation.’²¹² It can be assumed that because she has the identity of a Chinese woman, she can mediate this ideology in a more institutionalizing way than a Chinese man.

After this act, a Mongolian dance is performed. The Mongolian dance is the ‘cloud dance’, in which women are the dancers, dancing and jumping with holding flowers. They dance around (as told by the male presenter) “the most wicked person” on earth; the man that caused the collapse of the Song dynasty. The Song dynasty, just as the Tang dynasty, is frequently described in the Zhuan Falun as a period in which a

212 Hongzhi 2000:3-4, 154-155; Hongzhi 1999:14.

lot of Buddhist teachers and practitioners lived and acquired their 'ideal' identity through their religious actions.²¹³

The following act presents a domestic setting in which a woman teases her husband. It is a humoristic act, emphasis is placed on the music which "combines the west and China' according to the male presenter. This act is recognizable as 'married life', which in the 'ideal reality' as proclaimed, relates to the spiritual life the FLG idealizes and as it is presented in earlier scenes.

Following the act representing a recognizable 'married life', is a dance performed by female dancers, who show the 'the delicate beauty of the Han.' The women wear pink clothes, and dance in a natural landscape (mountains, trees and flowers are visualized on the background screen.) During this dance, the presenter repeatedly say " Wo ai shen yun'(I love Shen Yun) and require the audience to repeat these words.

The next dance presented is the "Lantern joy Dance." The dancers are all female, wearing pantaloons and carrying lanterns. They dance on high heeled shoes. To 'display elegance and beauty "as said by the female presenter. "As if they do not have any heels." The goddess of the moon enters the stage during this dance, and her good deeds for the world are told. In the dance that follows, a 'Manchurian dance"(the male presenter announces this). Women in this dance are once again "beautiful and elegant", with their small feet and high heels.

The last performance depicts once again the persecution of the FLG. It is a dance in which male and female FLG practitioners struggle with CCP persecutors. Simultaneously, the

213 Hongzhi 2000:130 -132, 15, 195; Hongzhi 1999:121.

'beauty of Shen Yun' is emphasized in the presenters' speeches. In closure of this last dance, it is said by the presenter (male) that the "CCP has no compassion for Buddha." During these last dances, it is emphasized by the presenters that heaven, earth and all other human beings are interconnected.

An overtly masculine divine entity, the image of a Buddha, the FLG ideology Zhen-Shan -Ren (真善忍, Zhēn, Shàn, Rěn; Truth, Compassion, Tolerance) and the system of the five elements are clearly exemplary 'stereotyped images' and 'sources of information', used to institutionalize the FLG's ideologies throughout the show.²¹⁴

Besides, 'salvation' from external threats and existential crisis by (inter-)acting in line with FLG ideologies is repeatedly emphasized in the performances.

Houben explains this by arguing that "*Mainly the sexual freedom crosses boundaries. Everything has become normal, people take drugs, have sex with everybody etc. and society is declining along with it. Falun Gong practitioners however seek to improve this, by presenting moral values as solutions.*"

His personal motivations for following the FLG are that "*The morale in traditional Chinese culture is declining, people never before have had so much liberties, particularly sexual liberties, but also money, career opportunities, and self-interest.*

(...)Everyone aspires self-interest. Falun Gong teaches that people should first place others before themselves."

In addition, the FLG's ideologies surrounding Birth, the universe and predestined relationships are emphasized in de SY

214 Hongzhi 1999; Hongzhi 2000; Entman 1993:52.

performance. This is logic since Hongzhi repeatedly refers to Birth in the Zhuan Falun, claiming it to be inherent to cultivation and ‘assimilation with the universe’, while he also emphasizes that *“Ordinary human affairs, according to the Buddha School, all have predestined relationships. Birth, old age, illness, and death exist as such for ordinary people.”*²¹⁵

Considering that Guanxi and Renqing are essential features of what is regarded as ‘Chinese culture’, the scenes in which (ideal) birth, the universe and predestined relationships are (re-)presented might be very familiar to the Chinese spectators. These familiarities might make the Chinese spectators more susceptible to adhere to other mediated FLG ideologies in the show. Due to the high degree of recognizability, spectators do not need to be FLG members to be motivated to adhere to the ideologies proclaimed as ideal in the SY performances.

In the SY performances, the identity of Chinese women ‘as Chinese woman’ clearly has a similar mediation function as the new Women I described in chapter two. As Houben explains: *“The Shen Yun has several ‘Falun Gong’ performances in which a lot of women perform. Women in Shen Yun specifically show compassion. This is because in China, more women than men are persecuted for practicing Falun Gong. Women are more vulnerable than men, that is one reason for that they are presented as such on stage. This gives a more clear distinction between good and evil. A man does not look just as vulnerable.”*

215 Hongzhi 2000:3,5,349-350; Hongzhi 1999.

The female performers frequently work together with men to deal with challenges to their existence, either 'as women' or 'as FLG member.' This resembles several ideological performances in past China, in which men and women cooperated together 'as equals.'²¹⁶ The SY performances are therefore clearly approachable as 'ideological performances.' I therefore argue that just as ideological performances in China's past, the main goal of the SY performers seems to be to 'educate', 'save' and 'liberate' themselves and others from the threats they perceive to exist.²¹⁷

Besides, the producers of the SY performances also use a lot of aestheticism in (re-)presenting ideal female identity, just as done in many ideological performances in 20th century China. For women in the SY performances generally perform identities that are 'elegant', 'beautiful' and 'vulnerable.' This might (intentionally) mediate the message that it is highly 'unethical' or immoral when the general ideologies of the FLG are repressed.²¹⁸

Feelings of anxiety, confusion and fear, appear to increase the likelihood that individuals want to be member of a social group formation that proclaims solutions to the cause of these feelings.²¹⁹ Due to the contradictions between the ideal identity proclaimed for women in contemporary 'developed' or

216 Latham&Klein 2006:175.

217 "I think that people are more inclined towards traditional values instead of today's. I think the Shen Yun performers seek to improve society by disseminating the traditional morality." Houben 2014.

218 Yu 2013; Junker 2011.

219 Junker 2011; Palmer 2007; Chan 2013; Waylen 1994:336-349.

'developing' societies and the identity the SY performances proclaim as 'ideal' for women, the SY performances might even cause that female spectators have such feelings more after watching. In addition, the SY performances proclaim certain ideologies in the Zhuan Falun. This might cause that the failure of Hongzhi to 'emancipate' the FLG as a movement from the ideologies of the Chinese government is not regarded by FLG members as his failure or incompetency.²²⁰

5. Discussion

According to Li Hongzhi, there are definite divisions between 'good' and 'bad', yet no real 'middle people.' 'Bad' individuals are those 'whose bodies are already messed up' by society, 'Good' individuals are those who aspire 'true cultivation'; meaning that they (inter-)act according to his ideologies, and 'as FLG members' can save others from becoming 'messed up' by influences from outside the FLG movement; society in

220 Chan 2013:15-19.

general.²²¹ Due to their assumed suppression and subordination to men, at least in China for centuries, Chinese women might be more than men familiar with the fear becoming 'messed up'. Besides, development in and outside China, might furthermore enforce these feelings of threat and fear for being 'messed up'. Since 'being a FLG' member means risk to persecution, and as such generates feelings of fear. This might therefore affirm feelings Chinese women already have due to their experience of 'being a Chinese woman.'

Many other explanations are possible for the number of female FLG members as well.

As *guanxi* and *renqing* become less informative about regulation of emotions, and more oriented to economic advancement and individualistic behavior for instance, many Chinese individuals apparently desire new types of *guanxi* and *renqing* to satisfy a need for spiritual, emotionally loaded guidance.²²² These new types of *guanxi* and *renqing* are called 'religious friends' (*Jiào yǒu*, 教友) and their close connections 'spiritual kinship' (*shén qīn*, 神亲). As originally spiritual movement, the FLG might be such an attractive, new *guanxi*.²²³ Another possible explanation might be that Chinese religious groups in general acquire members via female membership,

221 Hongzhi 1999:1; Hongzhi 2000:46; 153; 172.

222 Yan 2003:186-191.

223 In several (South-) American and European societies for instance, when Communist ideologies became less institutionalized, a search for new ideologies to replace those associated with the discredited Communist system started. Many individuals found them in religion. Waylen 1994:349.

meaning that male members enter religious groups with the help of their wives or their wives' sisters.²²⁴

Moreover, because the FLG can be approached as religious movement with affiliations to institutionalized political ideologies in China, the FLG provides Chinese women an experience of an identity with political affiliations. Such an identity assumedly is not (yet) available to them in present day China, or abroad.²²⁵ Besides, in societies outside China, only when women are exposed to such an identity, meaning that their involvement in political changes is not proclaimed in the public sphere as a bad thing, they seem to be sufficiently motivated to participate in activities in the public spheres. As for their involvement in civil society however, proclaiming this identity might not have the same effect.²²⁶ Yet these conclusions might help explaining why the FLG attracts Chinese women in specific, for it emphasizes that men and women should both work together to counter the prohibition of the Chinese government to their movement.

In addition, it is argued that in most spiritual movements, engaging with the movement's activities is not contingent, but experienced as compulsory by its' members. Participation appears not to be based upon individual choices, but "determined by the established and accepted hierarchies of

224 Yan 2003:186.

225 Li 2014; Leung 2002; Croll 2013; Latham&Klein 2006; Howell 2003.

226 Waylen 1994:336-338.

gender and age.”²²⁷ Being ‘a FLG member’ might therefore mean participation in the FLG’s activities ‘as movement.’

6. Conclusion

“People all wish to be equal. If something is not a part of someone’s life, how can they be equally made?”²²⁸

Do individuals, regardless of their gender, really desire to be equal? Can individuals who experience feelings of being suppressed and subordinated desire this? Can they ‘emancipate’ in conventional interpretations of this term at all? What might motivate individuals to (inter-)act in civil societies, ‘as emancipated’? Is the creation of ‘civil society’ and its’(inter-)actions ‘as civil society’ contributive to emancipation and development, when development requires consensuses between civil society and societies’ authorities, and hence imply mutual dependency?

To answer these questions, more psychological, empirical research is needed than I was able to do for this article.

However, I was able to conclude that least retrieving degrees of ‘women’s emancipation’ should not begin with the questions of why women ‘emancipate’, or desire to ‘emancipate’. It should begin with examining how ‘submission’ is experienced according to women, to women themselves.²²⁹

²²⁷ Alexander et al. 2006, 39-40.

²²⁸ Hongzhi 1999:129.

²²⁹ For more theories on these questions, see Lu 1993:135-157; a chapter in which this ‘docility’ of specifically Chinese women is described.

I furthermore argue that only when ideologies allow differences between men and women to exist in society, while these also proclaim that (inter-)actions by men and women in public spheres and/or civil society should proceed in identical, equal ways, then these ideologies can be contributive to emancipation of women 'as women.'

The so-called 'feminist' Elisabeth Croll might therefore correctly have concluded that 'women's emancipation', at least in China, requires first of all a "redefinition of the role and status of women in public and domestic spheres by ending the legal, social, political and economic discrimination against women, increasing their consciousness of their position in society and total change in their beliefs, self-image, obligations and expectations."²³⁰

Moreover, I suggest that cautiousness is needed when speculating about the degree to which female FLG members are 'emancipated.' Especially when theorizing about their possible degree of 'emancipation' in relation with 'development'.

What I mentioned to be 'ideological performances' are produced explicitly to institutionalize ideologies and prevent (further) institutionalization of other ideologies. The main function of ideological performances is to educate the spectators as to how they can have an 'ideal identity.' To be effective, ideological performances need to have at least three characteristic features. First, (re-)presenting (perceived) realities (societal problems, political issues etc.) linked with either past or present (perceived) realities. Second, (re-)presenting alternatives to

230 Croll 2013:3.

these realities, these are the ideologies the producers of the performers aim to institutionalize. In practice, this means that the performers expose solutions to certain problems of which the producers perceive that most spectators cope with. Third, the performances need to present future consequences of the proclaimed solutions in a positive, achievable way. Fourth, each of such (re-)presentations furthermore specifically needs to mediate how spectators cannot be 'saved' from threats to their existence, in the present and (near) future, when the proclaimed solutions aren't assumed by them as such. Fifth, presentations of separate ideal identities 'as a man' or 'as a woman', appear crucial to the degree to which an ideological performance succeeds in institutionalizing the ideologies the performance aims to institutionalize.

Producers of ideological performances thus emphasize the ideologies that, from their perspectives, are needed to create a 'new', 'ideal' society.' Such performances intentionally present 'new', 'ideal' identities, which function as role models, which aim to mediate these ideologies. These ideologies prescribe specifically what identities the spectators should have to become able to 'save' themselves from (perceived) societal problems and contribute to the creation of a 'new', 'ideal' society, which 'saves' others.

Producers of the SY performances, as well as of several other Chinese ideological performances in the (recent) past proclaim furthermore a specific 'female identity.' This identity of the 'ideal woman' mediates the message that 'ideal women'

(inter-)act in civil society to change the current society into the 'ideal society' as also proclaimed throughout the performance. However, at least in the ideological performances I described, the *femininity* of the ideal women is emphasized. This seems to be needed, for ideological performances need elements from a reality the spectators recognize to make the new ideologies it seeks to institutionalize salient, credible and accepted. The femininity of proclaimed 'ideal women' in China furthermore, although perhaps active in civil society and/or public spheres, still implies experiences of being subordinated to men. For Chinese female identity 'as woman' is created and experienced by Chinese individuals in patriarchic ways for centuries. Therefore, I conclude that presentations of 'emancipated' women in theater performances can intentionally be used by its producers to mediate patriarchic ideologies with. At least in China, this is assumed by producers to be contributive to goals they associate with 'development.'

The SY performances for instance, which I found exemplary for my theories about ideological performances, do not present women who participate in civil society 'as women.' Women are not specifically made conscious via these performances about their (possible) capabilities to act autonomous, independent and voluntary in (civil)society nor its' public spheres.

Membership of movements, such as the FLG, can however be regarded as providing Chinese individuals, and especially women, an experience of an identity unavailable to them in reality. For as a movement, the FLG prescribes clear, coherent

codes of conduct to its' members. Especially confused, anxious individuals can experience that as comforting, as refuge.

The SY performances do suggest however, that the FLG movement provides Chinese women an identity which implies being able to participate in civil society 'as FLG member'. The FLG as a movement, and even more female FLG members can therefore be approached as emerging 'civil societies.' These might benefit from what is regarded as 'development.' At the same time, the opposite can be true. For because of development in general, Chinese individuals and Chinese women in specific are more likely than men to be confused about what having their identity 'as Chinese' women or men means and should mean. Exposure to confusing, differing ideologies generally invokes feelings of confusion and anxiety amongst those exposed to them.

Nevertheless, the FLG might even cannot emancipate entirely 'as movement' when it maintains its' current identity 'as suppressed movement' to legitimize its'(inter-)actions with. It can even be questioned if the Chinese authorities can be emancipated from the FLG, for suppression of the FLG can be used by the Chinese government in similar ways.

When women actively participate in activities in the public spheres of societies to reject or change certain institutionalized ideologies, this is generally regarded as 'emancipation', contributive and/or resulting from 'development.' Words like 'autonomy', 'freedom' and alike terms should however not be incautiously linked with the idea 'emancipation', or causally related to ideas of what 'development' might mean as

unfortunately in many academic domains. For I've shown in this article that institutionalization of patriarchic ideologies and development seem to reinforce each other, and development might even cause continuation of patriarchic societal circumstances. Assumptions about 'how a societal reality should be' or other moralizing approaches alike should therefore not be assumed when theorizing about relations between development, emancipation and other concepts I described. Hence, I suggest to differ between emancipation 'as movement' and emancipation 'as women' when examining (inter-)actions in public spheres, especially when undertaken by (a) civil society. More importantly, formulating adequate definitions of terms as 'emancipation', as well as trying to retrieve relations between emancipation, women and development, especially in China, require an 'emancipated' perspective to *reality*.

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