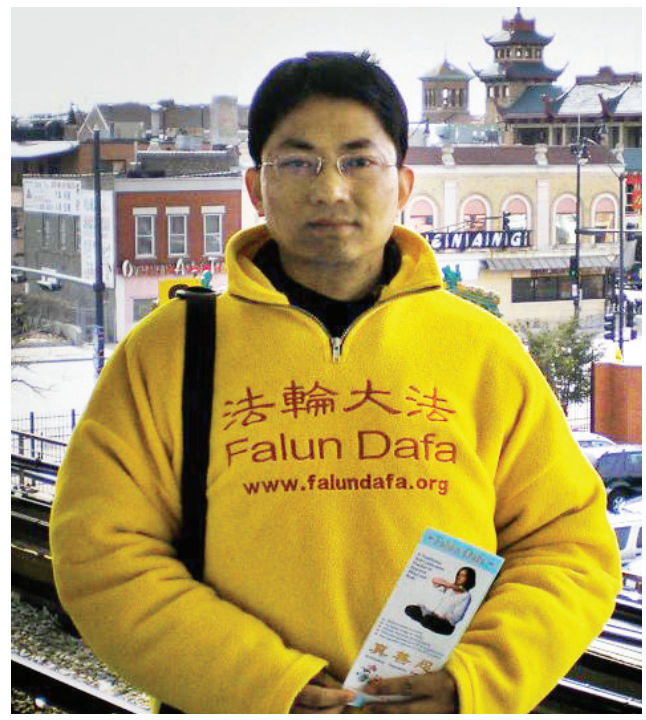
Faces of China's Forced Labor Camps

Ms. Zhang Lianying, a CPA, was sent to labor camps three times for practicing Falun Gong. In 2008, police burst into her Beijing home in a pre-Olympic crackdown, put a sack over her head, and dragged her away. She was taken to the Masanjia labor camp, stripped naked, and tortured. In 2011, she escaped to the United States.

Mr. Chen Gang, a musician, was held at Beijing's notorious Tuanhe Forced Labor Camp for a year and a half, where torture almost left him crippled. After an international campaign, he was freed and now lives in the United States.



A graduate of China's prestigious Tsinghua University, Mr. Huang Kui spent two years in detention and three years in a forced labor camp making Christmas tree lights and flower ornaments for export. Kui's time in the labor camp featured sixteen-hour days, beatings, torture, and sleep-deprivation.

Where Do Your Chopsticks Come From?

Wooden chopsticks are a cornerstone of Chinese takeout in cities across the world. Unfortunately, they're also a regular feature in testimonies of Falun Gong practitioners who fled China after being imprisoned in one of the country's many labor camps.

"The quota was around 7,000, sometimes 10,000. If you didn't finish, you weren't allowed to sleep," says Chen Gang (pictured above), recalling wrapping chopsticks in a Beijing labor camp where he was sent for practicing Falun Gong. "It was a dirty environment. We had to go months without a shower."

Today, Falun Gong practitioners remain an enormous percentage of detainees in China's vast network of gulags. Like Chen, they are typically abducted from their home, taken to a police station, and told they will be sent to a labor camp for up to three years for "re-education"—an Orwellian sounding word if there ever was one.

Once at the camps, they are tortured, shocked with electric batons, deprived of sleep, and more often than not, forced to work over 12 hours a day manufacturing products, some intended for export.

Some glue soles onto shoes. Others sew clothing. Many wrap disposable chopsticks in unsanitary conditions.

So you might want to opt for a fork next time you get takeout.

Think You're Safe from the Hazards of Repression in China? Think Again.

Sitting on the back porch of my Albuquerque home, nestled in the soft light of the American Southwest, I casually put down my newspaper, looked at my son playing with his toy train and suddenly realized: China's corruption could kill him.

I had just finished reading about the latest tainted product from China—Thomas the Tank Engine toy trains—only to realize that was the exact train he was playing with there on the deck. Needless to say, the train is now in the garbage and I washed my son's hands with soap—three times.

Shoddy products from China are nothing new, but how do they come to be that way, and why does it seem they are on the rise even as oversight processes are supposedly improving?

Poor manufacturing is partly responsible, but there's something more pervasive and sinister happening in China: an erosion of basic morals. It's not that products are merely made of poor quality material. They are made with hazardous material and consciously so.

During the 1990s, China, though still autocratic, saw advances in freedom, law, and the economy. When the persecution of Falun Gong was launched in 1999, however, it threw many institutions back several decades.

Tyrannical officials were promoted and kind ones were purged in a cleansing of the Communist Party ranks. Policies were implemented with oppressing Falun Gong as the core objective, disregarding their implications for social and economic wellness.

In short, the persecution of Falun Gong spawned an enormous backslide in morals. CNN's senior analyst Willy Lam called it the greatest crisis facing China.

So long as such a systematic persecution persists, Chinese officials and common people will continue to lose sight of our common humanity and responsibility for each other's wellbeing. That moral crisis will result in more and more dangers being exported from the world's factory.

Know Whose Hand You're Shaking

Chinese officials and the details you won't find in their biographies

After over a decade of persecution, many of the officials who run China's provinces and cities have had a hand in suppressing Falun Gong, including encouraging torture. The following four men are just the tip of the iceberg.

Name	Positions held	Track record on Falun Gong
Bo Xilai	Chinese Communist Party head in Chongqing; Minister of Commerce and member of Communist Party Central Committee; Governor, Liaoning Province.	Under Bo's watch, Liaoning province became a hotbed of torture and killing, and a central node in the illegal harvesting of Falun Gong organs. Bo has been sued for torture in multiple countries, and judged liable in one court already.
Liu Qi	Chinese Communist Party head and former Mayor of Beijing; head of the Beijing Olympics Organizing Committee; member of the CCP Politburo	Beijing police under Liu's command publicly beat practitioners. In 2004, a U.S. federal court found Liu liable for torture and sexual assault. Some 8,000 practitioners were detained in the run-up to the Olympics, which Liu oversaw.
Wu Guanzheng	Former Deputy Governor of Shandong Province; former member of the Chinese Communist Party Politburo	Under Wu's watch, a punitive system for officials was implemented that led to widespread torture, according to a Pulitzer Prize winning article. Eighteen months later, 24 practitioners were dead, with many more thought to have been killed.
Xia Deren	Deputy Governor of Liaoning Province; former Mayor of Dalian	Using his control of local state-run media, Xia fueled the persecution campaign, making Liaoning one of the deadliest provinces for Falun Gong. In 2004, a U.S. federal court found Xia liable for overseeing the torture of practitioners.