

In response to “China used to harvest organs from prisoners. Under pressure, that practice is finally ending” by Simon Denyer of the Washington Post late last year, Ethan Gutman, author of [The Slaughter](#), shows that the 'Post' article was little more than propaganda for the Chinese communist regime:

In China: News is not news. News serves a state campaign.

The guiding principle is that the Chinese Communist Party always wins; therefore, the news – about China anyway – is usually pretty good. The exception comes in when the Chinese Communist Party attacks foreign enemies – then the public can expect a parade of vivid Chinese defeats and humiliations. Internal enemies require a more personal approach. For example, the televised campaign against Falun Gong began with a ritual right out of the Cultural Revolution – widowed spouses breaking down in bitter tears at neatly-timed intervals.

Thus, to rout internal enemies, the Chinese media is permitted to briefly expose unsavory elements within the Mainland (such as the anti-corruption campaigns that exposed malfeasance at the highest levels while simultaneously crushing President Xi Jinping’s competitors). But entrenched Party corruption, failures, or mass murder? By the time any of these elements surface, they are already “in the past” and a State campaign has put things right.

When it came to the organ harvesting of innocents in China, the Chinese media traditionally followed the pretty-good-news-principle, i.e. simply ignore the whole thing. The late Harry Wu, as the grandfather of the forced organ harvesting issue in Washington DC, arranged with Congress for a credible Chinese physician to testify on the sourcing of organs from condemned criminals as early as 2001. While the testimony did not lead to sustained action from the global medical community, in part because surgeons with China contacts – certainly any surgeon in Taiwan, such as Dr. Ko Wen-je – the testimony confirmed what they had already suspected: Death-row prisoners were the source of Chinese organ transplants, even if Beijing did not care to officially acknowledge it.

Bloody harvest

Yet the real inner workings of the Chinese transplant establishment were increasingly exposed. Chinese transplant activity was growing exponentially, foreign organ tourists were flooding into China, and hospitals offering fresh Falun Gong organs were beginning to slip up – as Dr. Ko’s testimony clearly shows – and questions were being asked. When the first accounts of Falun

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Gong being harvested began to emerge in the *Epoch Times* at the end of 2005, and was quickly followed by the seminal investigative report

[Bloody Harvest](#)

by David Kilgour and David Matas in the Summer of 2006, the hour of maximum danger to the Party had arrived.

My investigation was published in 2014. Through a series of interviews with doctors, refugees, and law enforcement personnel, I was able to establish a basic narrative: Organ harvesting of political and religious victims began with the Uyghurs in 1997, began ramping up for Falun Gong in late 2000, and was targeting Tibetans and select House Christians for their organs by 2003. By 2005, Beijing grasped that the Falun Gong harvesting issue was particularly explosive; Tibetans and the Uyghurs had at least a handful of violent activists associated with their freedom movements.

Yet not a single Falun Gong practitioner had ever committed a crime which could justify a death-sentence, even under the distorted Chinese legal system and the scale of Falun Gong disappearances was too great to claim that any harvesting was simply the work of rogue hospitals or organized crime. So in 2005, liver surgeon Huang Jiefu, the “health official” that Simon Denyer refers to so glowingly in the first paragraph of his article, made a calculated admission in an international conference that China was, in fact, using condemned prisoners as organ sources.

Even the voluntary organ donation centers which had been set up in China’s major cities turned out to be a public relations mirage. Our researchers were instructed to call them every day. Most centers would not pick up for weeks at a time. When a donation representative finally answered, they would often admit that the number of volunteers to become organ donors was “five” or perhaps “three” – out of a city of millions.

Six weeks of vetting by three of the toughest researchers from the Chinese mainland who have ever worked on Capitol Hill followed, and the House of Representatives passed Resolution 343 explicitly condemning China for murdering prisoners of conscience for their organs. The European Parliament followed suit two weeks later. Closer to my home in London, our report

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helped to spark numerous hearings and debates in the UK House of Commons, several Early Day Motions, and two reports by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission.

Western press coverage was widespread of our report, yet the best stories were written by Beijing-based reporters: Nathan Vaderklippe's critical analysis in the *Globe and Mail*, and Didi Kirsten Tatlow's careful, measured, yet relentless coverage in the *New York Times*. When three Chinese attempts to hold global conferences, which would ratify the Chinese medical establishment's claims to have reformed the system received a mixed reception at best (the Pope cancelled an audience with participants at an organ harvesting conference hosted by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to avoid controversy), the Chinese finally dropped the ignore-it-all strategy.

It's not even a true hybrid. Yes, there are vestigial reminders of good old *Washington Post* reportage: for example, the admission that Huang Jiefu hasn't been consistent in his views of whether criminals should be harvested or not, but the overall impression is of a sophisticated Mainland newspaper, employing selective use of quotations, a cavalier approach to the facts, and phrases describing our research that, as a *Washington Post* reader for 40-odd years, I find astonishing: "lurid allegations" and "a darkly sinister accusation." I'll address the facts, but I am going to spend a little time on Denyer's first lines because this is where I had the uncanny sensation that I was back in my Beijing office, reading *China Daily*:

"China's organ-transplant system was once a cause of international scorn and outrage, as doctors harvested organs from prisoners condemned to death by criminal courts and transplanted them into patients who often paid dearly for the privilege. After years of denials, China now acknowledges that history and has declared that the practice no longer occurs — largely thanks to the perseverance of a health official who, with the quiet backing of an American transplant surgeon, turned the system around over the span of a decade."

With a single word in the first line — "once" — Denyer transforms a promising news article into a Party trope: The resolution of a successful campaign. The unsavory element that China has overcome? "doctors harvested organs from prisoners condemned to death by criminal courts." This is precisely the Chinese Communist Party snare that I warned against in my testimony to the Foreign Affairs Committee in June 2016:

"Fatally exposed, the Chinese medical establishment promised to move to voluntary sourcing...but wrapped it in a semantic trick: The phrase 'end organ harvesting of prisoners' was acceptable. The phrase 'end organ harvesting of prisoners of conscience' was unacceptable. Thus the Chinese could avoid speaking about a vast captive population that doesn't officially exist, while the acceptable phrase allowed Westerners to hope that 'prisoners of conscience' was just a subset of 'prisoners'. By avoiding the taboo phrase, both sides could maintain their illusions."

Entitled to a history

Thus, Denyer begins by cloaking the reason that he is writing the article in the first place, and then doubles down on the phrase: “China now acknowledges that history,” thus declaring that the entire investigation into prisoners of conscience – all the recipients of physical tests in labor camp, all the medical personnel interviewed, all the numerical discrepancies – was nothing more than an elaborate, perverse hoax. Yet our collective work was not based on anonymous sources: As the Congressional Chinese researchers quickly grasped in their vetting process, it is footnoted and replicable.

We recorded our interviews in the field and, when not fully transcribed, the recordings have been freely offered to government agencies, human rights NGOs, and serious reporters. In the few cases where an interview was not recorded, such as the highly sensitive interview with Dr. Ko Wen-je in Taipei, the write-up was explicitly signed off on by the subject not just once, but several times before publication. So yes, we have produced a massive body of work over the last decade, but it’s actually quite selective – we could easily fill a massive report with discarded interviews, biased numerical representations and leads that didn’t check out. As David Matas wrote to the Washington Post:

“The evidence of mass killings of prisoners of conscience for their organs in China, primarily practitioners of the spiritually based set of exercises Falun Gong, is vast, detailed, verifiable and verified by independent researchers. Unverifiable assertions to the contrary, even if they take the form of numbers, are no answer to this large volume of hard and incontestable evidence.”

The stakes of China getting the history right are high: In my twenty years of China analysis, it is my deepest belief that the Party’s failure to deal with history, particularly its human rights abuses, its refusal to offer restitutions, apologies, its censorship of discussion, ranging from the Cultural Revolution to Tiananmen to the repression of Falun Gong – these are the main impediments to China advancing as a democracy. Yet my feeling goes deeper still. My father was Jewish. As a sailor in Europe after the Second World War, he helped rescue orphaned Jewish children coming out of the death-camps. If I know anything about genocide at all, it is that victim groups are not just entitled to survival and a home of some sort, but to a history.

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