

# Exploration of Destructive Cults' Dynamics

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## Abstract

Destructive cults strengthen their motivating factors by self-proclaimed and covert means and target at specific groups as potential cult believers. Based on theories of dynamics and “product life cycle”, this paper probes destructive cults' power source and their target believers. The power recession of destructive cults is also discussed by introducing the theory of “hierarchy of needs”. This paper, by advocating scientific beliefs, opposing destructive cults, and through the analysis of the experimental cases, aims to provide some suggestions for the realization and transcendence of individuals, communities and even the whole human beings.

**Keywords:** Dynamics, Destructive Cults, Hierarchy of Needs, Product Life Cycle

## 1. Introduction

Destructive cult groups around the world have bad influences to social stability, personal life, etc. They attempt to attract followers by using power factors aim at specific target groups, and have realistic and potential harm to the society and individual. In the development of human society, human dynamics pays attention to the daily behaviour patterns of human beings and can explore the motives of behaviour. The paper analyse the power attractiveness and the targeting believers of destructive cult groups from the view of psychological motivation, help to prevent the harm of destructive cult groups from the source.

### 1.1 The fundamental theory of human dynamics

Human dynamics has become a newly emerging subject in the study of human life and development history (Nannan Li, Tao Zhou, & Ning Zhang, 2008). Processing objective data without human intervention, it reveals the specific statistical law in individual behavior and explores corresponding dynamic mechanism through quantitative analysis. As it emphasizes an objective and neutral attitude, there is barely interference in the generation or acquisition of data or result analysis. Human dynamics generally follows a cycle of “observing samples – acquiring and analyzing data – revealing statistical law – modeling dynamic mechanism” (Sandra Seagal & David Horne, 1996).

### 1.2 The “power supply” of destructive cults

A safer healthier and happier life is a natural appeal of an individual. And a variety of groups and organizations ranging from a country to a small social group try to create more momentum for their members in their own unique ways.

Generally, people pursue a peaceful and stable social (political) environment, an abundant and orderly economic environment, and an elegant, healthy mental environment. Individuals expect greater self-fulfillment through efforts, and a large number of groups appear to meet various needs from distinct social groups, preaching that they could provide an inexhaustible motive force for the realization of personal values. Thus a religious group in a sense provides a certain “power supply” to meet and realize the spiritual needs of its members.

A destructive cult is a fraudulent establishment in the name of religion, qigong or others. Deifying its leader and

disguised under cloak of science and religion(Zhengfeng Liu,2012), it forms on the surface a strong and effective stimulus for the realization of individual expectations.

Two cases are involved in the “power supply” of the destructive cult. One is that the so-called “cult founder” with its own ulterior purposes takes great pains to seduce, deceive and recruit believers. The other is that some people do have a certain request and hope to realize it in a short and quick way by searching the power supply. And by targeting, confusing and deceiving these people, destructive cults often advocate fallacies like "saving mankind and saving the ordinary", and seduce them to become dedicated to the leader to achieve their self-fulfillment. These followers gradually lose their rational judgment, drift away from correct emotional values, become lost in an illusive vortex focusing on personal temperament, and finally will be mentally controlled at an appropriate time. A destructive cult is essentially aimed to control its members, enslave the followers, and amass wealth, and even destroy life, endanger society, and even attempts to subvert state power, this is the main power source of the so-called "hierarch" and "Dharma alas ". The reason why the believers get trapped in the power supply of destructive cults is mainly that they, to pursue their specific goals, prefer choosing a destructive cult as their life-savior even at the cost of violating natural development laws of human society, normal social order and natural personal growth laws. Take "Falun Gong" for example, through various network channels with "Minghui net" as the representative, it vigorously promoted the "need to conform to the changes of astronomical phenomena better" so that many people got lost and found hard to return back to normal life.

## **2. Materials and methods**

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the dynamics of destructive cults. How to meet the objective, the researchers must think over the methodology, try to choose rational methods, try to collect more valuable data, thus contribute to the research objectives through data analysis. Here, the researchers will outline their research methods, including qualitative methods, secondary and primary methods. In addition, the researchers explain that how does they implement the data collection.

### *2.1 Research Methods*

In order for the aims of this paper to be achieved, the literature related to Theory of Evolution, Dynamics, Human Dynamics, Human System Dynamics, especially Power Sources of Destructive Cults are reviewed. Moreover, the researchers analyse the targeting people with specific needs of destructive cults. The literature review and data analysis include relevant books, as well up-to-date information from the World Wide Web. The items will enhance the subject knowledge and help researchers to clarify research question further. The main purpose is to develop a good understanding and insight into relevant previous research and the trends that have emerged.

#### *2.1.1 Qualitative methods*

Generally, the two main approaches to research are deductive and inductive, and there are two broad techniques to approach research: quantitative methods and qualitative methods of research (Saunders, M. et al., 2000)

Quantitative research aims to be objective and collects and uses numerical data. With this type of research the results are given numerical values and the researcher uses a mathematical and statistical treatment to help evaluate the results. Quantitative methods are commonly large scale observations and surveys.

On the other hand, qualitative research is defined by Kinnear (Kotler, P & Armstrong, G., 1997) as: “Questioning knowledgeable respondents individually or in small groups regarding the ‘why’ of behaviour”. With this approach data is usually collected in the form of descriptions. The difference than quantitative research is that this method only uses non-mathematical procedures when interpreting and explaining their research. The positives for this method are that they can look at change process over time and they can attempt to understand people’s meanings and adjust to new issues which present themselves. They can also contribute to the introduction of new theories. On the negative side this method can be very time consuming and require a great deal of recourses. Also the analysis and interpretation of data can prove very difficult.

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of both quantitative and qualitative research, since time limitation, during the work, the researchers use qualitative research method, this could support the researchers’ viewpoints more effectively.

#### *2.1.2 Secondary and Primary research*

##### *Secondary research*

The data itself can also be split into two distinct categories, namely secondary and primary data. Secondary data is normally carried out by desk research. From this it can be noted that secondary data would include information

gathered from books, journals, newspapers, government publications, etc. Secondary data include both quantitative and qualitative data and can be used in both descriptive and explanatory research. The main advantages of secondary data are that it is often immediately available, is less costly and covers a wide range of topics. The disadvantages are that it may be out of date, it may be unsuitable or may be incomplete or inaccurate.

#### Primary research

Primary data is entirely new data that has been collected specifically for the individual project at hand. Field research methods will include interviews, surveys, focus groups, observation, and so forth. These methods will usually produce qualitative information. The main advantage of using primary data are that it can be gathered to meet specific needs, it is up-to-date and can give and added insight to the investigator. However, disadvantages are that it can often be time-consuming and costly, it can be biased and people may be unwilling to give information or cooperate. The researchers choose interviews and observation as their primary research methods.

#### Interview

Since the research concerns former members of destructive cult, in order to give all interviewees the opportunity to talk freely about vents, behavior and beliefs in relations to the researchers' topic area, the researchers did not use structured interviews and semi-structured interviews, but informal, unstructured interviews, which are referred to as in-depth interviews. In addition, the researchers try to use telephone interviews to collect primary data since this approach is seen as more convenient. All these would help the researchers to explore in depth a general area.

#### Observation

Primary data needs to be collected related to targeting people perceptions. The researchers used observation to collect primary data. Selecting relevant samples, stratified random sampling and convenience sampling were used. The samples are classified as public places, public parks, bus stops, communities, super markets, and so on.

### 2.2 Data Collection

#### Secondary Data

First of all, the useful and valid secondary data was collected by the researchers. books and journals are available from libraries, book stores, and some other where, most of theories can be found from there. And also the researchers log on the internet, another important pass, to get some update data.

#### Primary Data

In addition, since limited appropriate secondary data are available, the researchers have to rely on data collected by themselves.

To collect data through interviews, the researchers arranged several interviews with some people, who are the former members of destructive cult. Also the researchers interview some people, who have never joined any destructive cults. All these interviews above were taken place by in-depth interviews, those are one to one, face-to-face interviews, in order to have more depth discuss with interviewees- former members of destructive cult.

During the researchers' observations, each was taken place at different place, perhaps on street, in a supermarket, in a workshop, in one community, in a park, etc. The researchers collected some materials for the research. This hard work was very time consuming, even though, the researchers completed more than 1000 observations.

The researchers collected all data in Beijing, China. The interviews, observations both were taken place in Beijing as well.

## 3. Results and discussions

### 3.1 Former members of destructive cult

The writer interviewed three former members of the Falun Gong. All are female. Their general situations are as follows.

The First female aged 46 is a professor in a university. In 1990s when she was less than 30 she earned doctorate degree. She was in an extremely helpless state as she suffered double blows in terms of employment and love relationship. One day on weekends she accidentally met Falun Gong practitioners in a park, who urged her to join him, stressing that Falun Gong could help her out of trouble and everything would be smooth. She had some doubts at the start, but decided to join the so-called "practice" activities. However, the life hasn't changed for the

better. She still couldn't find a job after one-year practice.

After an adjustment period, she determined to sever ties with Falun Gong practitioners and concentrated on academic research while actively looking for jobs. All her hard work paid off in the end. She was accepted by a University to do teaching and research. Widely welcomed among her colleagues and students because of her devotion and accomplishments in profession, she has gradually become an influential professor in academia. Meanwhile, she set up her own happy family, and a few years after she gave birth to a baby.

In conversation with her, she said frankly that she was confused then, and could have been fooled and even ruined. Fortunately, she quickly returned to the normal life and work with the help of her mentor, relatives, friends and her own psychological adjustment, otherwise, she couldn't have harvested a satisfying job and content life. She said she would always remember that lesson.

The second interviewee is a female lecturer aged 50 with master degree in a university. Her life is quite stable without ups and downs. When she was over 30, she planned to pursue a doctorate degree, but did not succeed. It was during that time when she found there were some people practicing Falun Gong in the community where she lives. Perhaps out of curiosity or just in need of some spiritual support, she followed those people to begin "practice".

Unfortunately, this kind of "practice" gave no real solace; instead, she was threatened by Falun Gong practitioners. They said if she wanted to achieve a real accomplishment, she must pay a training fee, buy books, CDs and training supplies and so on. What is worse some told her that both a happy family and a satisfactory job are stumbling blocks hindering her practice. Those moves attracted her vigilance. She became alert as she realized that all the organization wanted was just her money and her loyalty. She said she was lucky enough as she returned to her warm family and work. Today she became "the most popular teacher" on campus due to her outstanding performance in class, and has earned awards many times in modern educational technology multimedia courseware design.

The Third interviewee, female and aged 65, is a community resident. Her husband and children love her and take good care of her, and her children have also formed their own happy little family. Her son has a six-year-old son and her daughter has a three-year-old daughter. Her family life is fairly content as she and her husband retired at the regular time and her children have stable job and income.

If judged objectively, she is not a qualified housewife since she seldom does or shares any housework. As a matter of fact, her husband thinks she is a bit lazy and he is willing to take on more responsibility for family just because of tolerance and understanding of her after living together for a lifetime. Then something happened by chance which drove her away from the family and relatives further and further. Falun Gong practitioners confused her by saying that practice can help her achieve "perfection" without taking on any family and social responsibilities and obligations. This resonated with her as she is neither willing to do housework nor care about her children. She became so engrossed in "practice" that she didn't care about her family. She even felt tired to accompany her husband to a park or go out for a walk, let alone share housework or prepare a meal for the family.

When the family noticed her neglect and indulgence, they made a calm conversation with her. She told them bluntly that all she needs is only "perfection" and nothing else. Her husband sincerely hoped she could return to family for the sake of their happy life; her children wished her to at least return home to take care of their elderly father. They don't need her to help take care of their young grandchildren. However, the family "meeting" did not change her mind. She still insisted on "practicing" without any consideration for her family. Her husband, children, friends, relatives, social organizations persuaded and gave care to her as usual, but all they have done are in vain. She has been intertwined with Falun Gong practice for over ten years. However, her husband, children and social organizations never abandoned her, always making great efforts to persuade her. The so-called "magic" practice didn't help her at all and those who have seduced her had never fulfilled their "commitment". As she was aging, she became physically weaker and felt a sense of void. She gradually found that the "magic" couldn't bless her or bring any "consummation". On the contrary, she was moved by her husband, children and organizations at all levels of society. She finally went back to her husband's warm arms and enjoyed a harmonious and happy family life.

Although the cases of the above three interviewees are different, they share one thing: all of them are attracted by "practice" at a certain period of time because of a specific need, but when the "power" of the "practice" declines, they return back to their normal life.

### 3.2 *Illegal publicity of destructive cult*

During the research process, the author also found and collected some Falun Gong practitioners' illegal publicity materials and violations committed in China.

#### 3.2.1 Falun Gong's illegal publicity materials

Advertisements posted by Falun Gong practitioners can be often seen on bulletins board of a community, on bus stops, in the public area of a park, and so on. But these are against the Chinese law.

One of Falun Gong illegal publicity materials is shown below and this picture was taken in a park Pavilion.

On the leaflet, the first sentence "Falun Dafa is the truth" cannot hold water as we all know truth is eternal. Falun Gong with its identity as a self-proclaimed "truth" has transcended and surpassed the human history in essence. Any country and nation should respect the law of development of human history with an impartial attitude. The advocacy of any organization which shows no respect for science or law of history development is illegal and unacceptable in society. In addition, the function of a pavilion in the park is to provide a place for visitors to enjoy the scenery or do some leisure activities. It is usually a representative of Chinese traditional architecture or culture. However, the propaganda of Falun Gong putting on the pillars of the pavilion has impaired the harmonious and peaceful environment in the park.

#### 3.2.2 Falun Gong violations damaged RMB

In various countries, many laws and regulations are implemented concerning the action of destroying currency in an organized way is regarded illegal and should be investigated for their liabilities, and China is no exception, It is affirmative in the People's Republic of China regulations on the RMB that destroying RMB is illegal.

However, Falun Gong simply ignored the national law and regulation, destroying the country's official release of RMB and printing illegal slogans on RMB and then circulating those destroyed RMB in market.

In the course of the investigation, the author collected some RMB notes which were destroyed by Falun Gong members from some small shops. As an ordinary citizen, we should know how to cherish the notes; we wouldn't destroy them to violate the law. On the notes slogans were printed such as the "God eradicates the Communist Party of China", "Falun Dafa is good", etc. It seems that Falun Gong identifies itself as "God", and no science exists. There is no doubt that this behavior has deviated from the bottom line of the national law.

From the illegal Falun Gong propaganda in China and its action of deliberately destroying RMB notes, we can see that the fact of its violating science and national laws and regulations is indisputable no matter what purposes they aim for or in which life stage it is.

"Advocating science and protesting cults" should become the shared voice of the international community. It is necessary to foster a more positive and healthy social and living environment for the whole society and to create more self-actualization opportunities conforming to the development law of human society as well as individual growth via various methods such as early warning, assistance, correction and etc. As a result, the expectation of the whole world today "peace and development" can be achieved in various countries and people, and individual, society, and even mankind can achieve actualization and transcendence.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1 *The Target Subjects of Destructive Cults When Recruiting Believers*

The destructive cults often seek more subtle channels to control and attract new believers by claiming they can "purify the soul". As a matter of fact, it is the various personal needs and mental appeals that result in the state of being mentally controlled. The American scholar Dr. Philip G. Zimbardo believes that people are likely to be tempted, no one volunteers to join cults, but when a promise from some interest group meets our urgent demand, we would join it. The religious mania may compensate for the "absence of value" function either lacking in the society or unable to be timely adjusted.

When people's psychological needs and vulnerability reach a tipping point, the destructive cult seizes the chance to target those groups and gradually controls the temperament of each person by employing certain psychological expectations and environmental conditions and offering seeming friendship and family-style warmth and care, making its members deviate from the norm in reason, emotion and temperament, lose personal wills, and even voluntarily submit, sacrifice their lives or become sexual slaves to the cult leaders.

American John Huddle in his book *Locked in My Imprisoned Years in a Destructive Cult* relates his experience of being deceived into tricks like "God's wishes" and joining WFF (Word of Faith Fellowship) (John Huddle. 2015). He was controlled and lost freedom in spirit and action and worse love of his wife and children. With the

help of others, Huddle was determined to leave WOFF at the end of 2002 and returned back to his family and normal life.

The American scholar Rick Alan Ross reveals in his book *Cults Inside Out: How People Get In and Can Get Out* that ideas of "truth, goodness and tolerance" preached by "Falun Gong" is actually the shackles on its believers (Rick Alan Ross, 2015). In fact, those slogans are just the power source of "Falun Gong" to attract its adherents.

#### 4.2 Potential target subjects when destructive cults recruiting members

People's behavior is motivated by the pursuit of the corresponding objectives arising from needs. In 1943 American psychologist Abraham Maslow divides in his paper "human demand level theory of the incentive theory" human needs into five levels like a pyramid called "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs" (Abraham Harold Maslow, 1974) which is namely physiological needs, security needs, social needs, respect for the needs and self actualization needs. What is not regarded as necessary in the theory is the self-transcendence need which actually occurs after the self actualization needs but is in most cases integrated into the self-actualization needs.

Destructive cults take advantage of the theoretical basis that people are supposed to have needs and achieve self actualization. They claim an extraordinary function of self-transcendence which seems to be able to help believers become the so-called "master" or "immortal" in a way called "alchemy".

Destructive cults use the so-called unusual power and covert means of deception to attract believers, mainly targeting those people with specific needs as follows.

- ① Those who think they are so talented that the country and society should have given them more opportunities tend to be antisocial or too critical, and they are most likely to be targeted as potential believers recruited by destructive cults.
- ② Those who show biased value judgment resulted from exaggeration of unfairness in some social problems like unemployment, property division, demolition and insist that the society or the family can not promise his expectations are likely to fall prey to destructive cults.
- ③ Those who have suffered unexpected accidents or misfortunes in life or work may become depressed and extremely vulnerable at least in the psychological adjustment, attributing his/her suffering or misfortunes to non-personal factors. As soon as being noticed by destructive cults, they are bound to become targets.
- ④ Those who have suffered great mental stimulation or attack like losing family, encountering accidents or disasters may become desperate due to the loss of life or property, and it is easy for them in a specific period of time to become the focus of destructive cults.
- ⑤ Those afflicted by fatal illness or chronic diseases, either themselves or family members turn eagerly to alternative treatments due to their lack of confidence in conventional cure. Destructive cults' assurance of "warding off evil spirits through practice" and "saving the whole mankind" is so enticing to them that they rely on and submit to the cult leaders as they regard their illness as an "affliction caused by evil spirits" and only the leaders can cure them.
- ⑥ Those whose personal relationship such as marriage is in crisis are inclined to lose confidence in normal life and enslaved by destructive cults.
- ⑦ Those attempting to achieve success without efforts are usually so lazy and gluttonous that they assume "alchemy" rather than hard work can bring them accomplishments and pleasure. And these people may fall prey to destructive cults.
- ⑧ Those who try to fill the void by pursuing special stimulations or pleasure after having took pains to achieve small business success are likely to give up on themselves, become addicted to drugs or perversions and then follow destructive cults.
- ⑨ Those who believe in superstitions instead of science are likely to be attracted "doctrine" of destructive cults.

In addition to those people mentioned above, destructive cults also target and confuse young generations lacking in social experience by transmitting so-called "super-world" value to entice them against society, mankind, and etc.

It can be seen from the above analysis that when people are emotionally vulnerable or in unstable mood, they may be easily confused, deceived and enslaved by destructive cults with the assumption that only by following "the Master" can they become close to "Buddha" or attain "perfection" and obtain happiness. It is just their

psychological orientation that leads to a quagmire from which they barely extricate themselves or even a role of "pawn" or "fodder" of destructive cult radicalization.

#### 4.3 The destructive cults "power" recession

The development and change of things generally follow the objective law, the so-called "dynamic" concocted by destructive cults aiming at luring believers also cannot escape the universal law of the objective world. If this "power" is regarded as a product and it is still active in the framework of the "product life cycle", then the decline is inevitable.

"Product Life Cycle" theory is proposed by Professor Raymond Vernon of the Harvard University in *Product Cycle of the International Investment and International Trade* in 1966 (Raymond Vernon, 1966). PLC refers to the market life of a product. When launched into market, a new product just as a human life experiences a cycle of formation, development, maturity and decline. The occurrence time and process of this cycle are different in countries with different technical level, and there is a large gap and the time difference. It is this time difference which is represented by cross-country gap in technology that reflects the difference of competitive market position of the same product in different countries, which determines the changes in international trade and international investment. The general rule is that although some products despite its vitality on launch gradually become unable to adapt to market demand due to the progress of society and changes in consumers' requests, and the life cycle of the product will gradually end, and eventually withdraw from the market completely.

The "power" factor of destructive cults is no exception. No matter how "magic" they claim to be or what "halo" they claim to possess, they are bound to die out in time. However, given its great harm to society and ruthless hurt to its believers, every government focus on how to take more effective measures to reveal its evil feature to the public and receive recognition from the public to minimize the number or harm to victims.

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