

Falun Gong and the Canada Media Fund

Why is the Canadian Government Bankrolling an Anti-China Propaganda Campaign?

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ABSTRACT: What do Shen Yun, New Tang Dynasty TV, *Human Harvest* (originally entitled *Davids and Goliath*), *The Art of Courage* (a film about Falun Gong artists in ‘Exile’), *Avenues of Escape* (a film about people ‘escaping’ China), *In the Name of Confucius* (a film attacking the PRC’s Confucius Institutes), and *The Bleeding Edge* (a fictional film about forced organ harvesting) have in common, beyond their anti-China focus?—All, it turns out, are bankrolled by the Canadian government’s Canada Media Fund. In the present paper, we will provide a preliminary outline of these activities, and, in the words of our subtitle, ask: Why is the Canadian Government bankrolling an anti-China propaganda campaign?

KEYWORDS: Falun Gong, Shen Yun, New Tang Dynasty TV, Canada Media Fund, Lofty Sky Entertainment, People’s Republic of China, organ harvesting

The following paper arises out of a series of serendipitous discoveries that, taken together, paint a startling but incomplete picture of the Canadian government’s anti-China campaign. As a consequence, we decided to organize our discussion in terms of a relatively informal discovery narrative. Sometimes it makes the most sense to present an analysis in terms of a story about how certain findings lead to yet other findings, and how one’s understanding evolves and changes. In this case, it seemed natural to work our way into the present topic via an account of our ongoing research and reflections.

It was the summer of 2017. We were following up on some links to Shen Yun, the Falun Gong organization's song-and-dance faux entertainment traveling propaganda show, when we stumbled across a newspaper article with an arresting title: "Disproportionate funding goes to media outlet linked to Falun Gong" (Kiff 2017).

The author, Stewart Kiff, explains that in 2010 the Canada Media Fund (CMF) was set up by the Department of Canadian Heritage "with a mandate to foster, promote and finance the production of Canadian content and relevant applications for all audiovisual media platforms" directed to Canada's ethnic minorities. Kiff was, however, quite surprised to discover that CMF gave the lion's share of its funding to Falun Gong-related groups like New Tang Dynasty TV (Trotta 2011) and Falun Gong-inspired projects, including several explicitly anti-China films.

A closer look at the projects backed by the Canada Media Fund reveals some surprising funding patterns going back to 2010. Several production companies affiliated with New Tang Dynasty TV (NTDTV) have received close to \$18 million in funding over six years compared to the combined total of about \$13 million for other ethnic media outlets. Studios with ties to NTDTV have received 43 per cent of the funding allocated through the Diverse Languages Program and have produced the near totality of funded projects in the Mandarin and Cantonese languages. (Kiff 2017)

Kiff's article is brief, and does not follow up on this startling information beyond seeking and receiving a response from the Canada Media Fund that sidestepped the issue—in the form of a generic explanation-that-doesn't-explain—which was that "CMF is an independent non-partisan body and that CMF does not intervene in the subject-matter of funded projects, recognizing each production's creative value and freedom of speech." Kiff then concludes with a series of rhetorical questions:

So why does this relatively unknown broadcaster outside of the Chinese community, and its affiliated production companies, get what seems to be a disproportionate amount of funding compared to other ethnic broadcasters? Why are almost all funded Chinese-language projects produced for this broadcaster? And what is known about the content of the material produced for a broadcaster with clear ties to a religious sect? Why, for example, are at least three funded projects linked to Shen Yun, the huge performing arts arm of Falun Gong that tours extensively throughout the world? Many critics have noted that this production's overtly political content and proselytizing supersede its artistic merit. . . . Canada takes pride in its pluralistic and nonsectarian society. In spite of the CMF's explanations, it seems odd and most un-Canadian that so much public funding is being allocated to a fringe religious group. It is time for a bit more sunshine on what is occurring here.

Of course, neither Shen Yun nor NTDTV are anxious to call attention to this funding source. Instead, they typically assert that their support comes primarily from individual donors and the donated labor of Falun Gong members (see, e.g., Trotta 2011). Both of these organizations as well as other FLG organizations also take money from the US government, receiving some funding via the Friends of Falun Gong (Barker 2008) organization—but that is a topic for another paper.

The next step we took was to conduct several internet searches, using ‘Falun Gong,’ ‘Canada Media Fund,’ ‘Mark Media’ (the production company’s original name) and ‘Lofty Sky Entertainment’ (the company’s new name) as search items. We initially found two relevant productions by Mark Media/Lofty Sky that were funded by monies from the CMF: *Art of Courage* and *In the Name of Confucius*.

The former film profiles FLG artists in ‘exile.’ The promotional blurbs convey the general tenor of this production: ‘when art and spiritual pursuit face a human rights tragedy’; ‘delve deeper into the stories of the artists and the exhibit challenging authoritarian repression’; ‘read about the power of art and the people painting truth to power.’

The latter film is a full-bore attack on China’s Confucius Institutes program, institutes that provide Chinese language education and cultural programming across the globe. Again, the promotional copy is instructive: *In the Name of Confucius* is ‘a one-hour documentary about the Chinese government’s multi-billion-dollar Confucius Institute (CI) program and the growing global controversy at academic institutions around the world as scholars, parents and others question the program’s political influence and purpose’ (Lofty Sky 2016).

At this point, we contacted David Ownby, a Canadian sinologist who wrote an influential monograph on Falun Gong, and asked if he could throw any light on the CMF-FLG connection. Fortunately, he was able to supply a couple of additional pieces of the puzzle:

Lofty Sky is a Canadian “entertainment company” (films, animations, etc.), run by Jason Loftus, whom I knew as a FLG practitioner when I was actively researching them. If you type Lofty Sky into the CMF data base you get 2 pages of hits, coming to 4.692 million dollars of “commitments” . . . I know nothing about CMF except what I just read on their web site. Jason and people like him do not hide their FLG association, although they don’t always play them up. If you look at the catalogue of Lofty Sky products, there are some things on China and some things that are not. There may be an above-board explanation for all of this—Lofty Sky’s products may be exceptionally good, I don’t know. I admit that as a Canadian taxpayer, I would like to know more about this. (Ownby 2017)

Loftus is an uncommon surname, so it is relatively easy to find relevant information when one juxtaposes ‘loftus’ with ‘falun gong’ in a search engine. One discovers, for example, that Loftus and a co-protester were arrested in China in

2002, and promptly expelled from the country for unfurling a banner reading, “The self-immolations [referring to the FLG protesters who set themselves on fire in January 2001] were a fraud. Falun Gong is good” (BBC 2002). He was an engineering student at the University of Toronto at the time (Tadich 2002). In more recent years, he has been deputy publisher of the Canadian edition of the *Epoch Times* (Loftus 2012), Falun Gong’s international newspaper, and, as already noted, he runs Lofty Sky Entertainment.

More significantly, we also discovered that Loftus was the Executive Producer of *Human Harvest: China’s Illegal Organ Trade*, a film which claims that the PRC executes prisoners of conscience to sell their organs on the international transplant market (Fraser, forthcoming). Winner of more than a dozen film awards, the production is described on the Peabody Awards website:

Like a mystery novel with a devastating denouement, Leon Lee’s documentary starts with numbers that don’t add up and divines an unthinkable explanation. China had no organ-donation system until 2010, yet it’s now the one place in the world where a person can get a heart and lung transplant in less than a week. People flock there by the thousands, checkbooks in hand, to get new kidneys, lungs and livers. China insists executed prisoners are the source, but David Matas, David Kilgour and other human rights activists tell Lee that the country would have to be executing more than 10 times the number it officially reports to generate such a huge supply of compatible organs. Lee found sources inside China who say that the answer is that the harvesting of organs is the execution and that the victims are mostly prisoners of conscience, practitioners of Falun Gong, a persecuted spiritual movement whose goals include better health. Lee bolsters his case not only with interviews with doctors and nurses who describe taking organs from prisoners still alive but with simple telephone inquiries to Chinese hospitals where arranging a transplant seems only slightly more complicated than ordering takeout. For its exposé of highly profitable, monstrous system of forced organ donation, *Human Harvest: China’s Illegal Organ Trade* receives a Peabody Award. (Peabody Awards 2014)

The ‘Davids’ in the original title of the production, ‘Davids and Goliath,’ refers to David Kilgour and David Matas, authors of a 2006 report, “An Independent Investigation into Allegations of Organ Harvesting of Falun Gong Practitioners in China.” On the positive side, the authors are both credible voices: Kilgour is a former Canadian MP, while Matas is a human rights lawyer. Negatively, however, the report was sponsored by the Coalition to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong, a Falun Gong organization (and thus hardly ‘independent’). Additionally, the ‘investigators’ never conducted any original research of their own in China, but rather relied upon questionable sources, mostly provided by Falun Gong, and inferences from available transplant data. Three years later, Kilgour and Matas had an expanded, updated version of their report published under the title *Bloody*

Harvest: The Killing of Falun Gong For Their Organs (2009). The film's title, *Human Harvest*, is transparently a take-off from *Bloody Harvest*.

Perhaps most strikingly, we were surprised to discover that although the production company was not Mark Media or Lofty Sky, 'Human Harvest' was also bankrolled by the Canada Media Fund—so it began to look like some kind of a pattern was emerging. David Kilgour had been an influential politician and member of the Canadian Parliament for twenty-seven years until 2006, as well as a human rights activist, even before he became an advocate for Falun Gong. Thus, it is not far-fetched to see a link between Kilgour's advocacy, his political clout, and the CMF's funding preferences. In other words, Kilgour may have used his political connections with the Canadian government to help direct CMF monies to pro-Falun Gong productions. That, at least, was our initial hypothesis.

We nevertheless continued to explore CMF productions. *Human Harvest* was produced by Flying Cloud Entertainment, run by Leon Lee, who is not a Falun Gong practitioner (Reeves 2015). We were particularly impressed by the many awards the film had won. And so, it seems, was the Canada Media Fund. When the originally-entitled 'Davids and Goliath' won the Viewster Online Film Festival award, Valerie Creighton, President and CEO of the Canada Media Fund, responded:

We are proud that this CMF-funded project has earned praise and recognition internationally and has also won the top prize in an international online film festival. This success provides solid evidence that audiences want to access Canadian content at any time, on any platform, anywhere around the world. (PRWEB 2014)

Creighton delivered similar upbeat remarks after the renamed film won a Peabody award the following Year:

Congratulations to Flying Cloud Productions and Mark Media for receiving the prestigious Peabody Award for their riveting documentary *Human Harvest*. . . . A Canadian production recognized by the international community demonstrates that Canadian content stands shoulder to shoulder with other countries. We are proud to support Canadian content in various languages representative of Canada's diverse culture and that speak to audiences both at home and internationally. (Quoted in CMF 2015)

We also noticed that in both announcements, Kilgour and Matas were referred to as 'Nobel Peace Prize nominees'—as if, like the Oscar Awards, being a nominee meant one was a member of an elite group of finalists, each one only a short step away from receiving the coveted grand prize. However, hundreds of people and organizations are nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize each year. For example, in 2016, three hundred and seventy-six people and groups were nominated, including a nomination for Donald J. Trump (*The Guardian* 2016). Thus, in and

of itself, saying that one is a Nobel Peace Prize nominee carries with it no special connotations—though it obviously *sounds* impressive.

Reflecting on how the Canada Media Fund crowds about the awards its projects have received prompted us to reconsider our initial hypothesis.

Perhaps rather than acting under political pressure, the CMF was so impressed by the success of *Human Harvest*, that they decided funding more films in the ‘China exposé’ genre was the way to go in order to win additional awards, thus further justifying the Canadian government’s continued financial support of the CMF. Alternately, perhaps both factors were at work here, along with yet other influences that cannot be directly perceived via straightforward Internet searches.

In any case, whatever the motives, the result is a series of strongly anti-China films, that appear to grow in quantity and ferocity like an avalanche cascading down a mountainside. In addition to the films mentioned earlier, Leon Lee and Jason Loftus combined forces to produce an overt work of fiction built around the organ-harvesting accusation, ‘The Bleeding Edge,’ described on the relevant webpage as:

From the Peabody Award-winning director of *Human Harvest* (2014), comes a riveting thriller based on real-life events. In the early 2000’s the increasing spread of information technology was fast becoming a perceived threat to the Chinese communist regime. Western technology companies were paid large sums to develop a high-profile project dubbed “The Golden Shield Project” aimed to censor and restrict internet access as well as monitor the activities of Chinese citizens. When a young western tech executive based in China suffers from heart failure on the job, he receives a heart transplant from an unknown donor. Once he discovers the horrific truth behind his operation he must risk his life to help save the next victims and find redemption. (Flying Cloud Productions 2016)

This film has been used to promote Falun Gong’s organ-harvesting claim—e.g., in such high-level venues as the British Parliament (Minghui.org 2016). Once again, the Canada Media Fund bankrolled this propagandistic, anti-China production.

Leon Lee’s Flying Cloud company has also produced another work of overt fiction, *Avenues of Escape*. Based on the promotional blurb, the film appears to be yet another piece of propagandistic melodrama:

Betrayed by an entire nation. Persecuted for their beliefs. An impossible escape was their only option. From the Peabody Award-winning director of *Human Harvest* comes *Avenues of Escape*, a gripping documentary about escaping persecution in China. During the decades long crackdown on Falun Gong practitioners in China which claimed thousands of victims, the lives of three women intertwine as they embark on a dangerous journey to find freedom. Armed with only a road map and a desire for justice, they must rely on their wits, courage and the compassion of strangers, to escape imprisonment and

navigate a treacherous passageway out of communist China. Staying behind means certain death, but the road ahead holds no guarantees. (Flying Cloud Productions 2017)

Unsurprisingly, this new piece in the ‘China exposé’ genre is once again funded by the Canada Media Fund. Additionally, there are indications that we will see more of the same from Leon Lee in the future—e.g., “Flying Cloud Productions is known to explore topics vital to understanding modern-day China, and bring to life fascinating and dramatic stories that couldn’t be told within Chinese borders” (PRWEB 2014).

In fact, when we place ‘Flying Cloud’ into the Canada Media Fund internal search engine, we obtain an interesting table which lists multiple projects—many (though not all) of which carry forward the anti-China theme (see search results).

Search Result



**Canada
Media Fund**

| Title | Applicant | Commitment |
|---|-------------------------------|------------|
| Samsara | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$14,994 |
| Defection | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$14,910 |
| Innocent Prisoner (The) | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$14,973 |
| Tipping Vase (The) | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$14,333 |
| Unwelcome Asylum - DM | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$462,794 |
| Warden Who Escaped (The) | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$167,553 |
| Gold Plated | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$10,736 |
| Warden Who Escaped (The) | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$100 |
| Jing Tian's Escape | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$39,870 |
| Life In A Labour Camp | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$98,081 |
| Redemption Song - DM | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$453,880 |
| Redemption Song | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$9,000 |
| Redemption Song - DM | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$1,000 |
| Human Harvest | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$58,450 |
| REF I (Pilot) | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$15,000 |
| Warden Who Escaped (The) - DM | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$99,900 |
| Warden Who Escaped (The) - DM | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$100 |
| Unwelcome Asylum: A Worldwide Phenomenon | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$97,000 |
| Ruby's Adventure in Bella Coola | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$12,348 |
| David's Investigation - An Interactive Timeline | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$94,871 |
| Marching Ahead: The Story of Tian Guo | Flying Cloud Productions Inc. | \$14,910 |

These various projects add up to \$1,791,803. (The total would have been much higher had we added in the figures for Mark Media and Lofty Sky Entertainment productions.) Some of these projects appear to be in the idea stage, and not every single production appears to be about China, but it is possible to find a few references to forthcoming films on the internet, such as *The Warden Who Escaped*:

Usually it's the prisoners who want to get out. This time, it's the man in charge. Han Guangsheng was the chief of the Judicial Bureau in the Chinese city of Shenyang, responsible for overseeing four labor camps and two prisons that despite his efforts were home to some unspeakable crimes. No longer able to live with this knowledge he traded his high rank and government perks for a basement room in Toronto, and his conscience. Ten years later with a wife, two kids and a local grocery store to run, he must prove in court that he is not a criminal monster and is worthy of refugee status in Canada. Otherwise he will lose everything and be returned to China where he will become a prisoner in the same camps he used to run. (Flying Cloud Productions 2018)

One can well imagine that *Unwelcome Asylum* and *Life in a Labour Camp* will also carry the same sharply anti-China message—once again brought to you by the friendly folks at the Canada Media Fund.

But what, we might ask at this juncture, can be said about the general quality of these films? In terms of filmography, the quality of these productions seems to be quite good, though they tend toward overstatement and melodrama. *Human Harvest* even feels like a B-grade horror flick in places. And documentaries like *In the Name of Confucius* are heavy-handed, with no nods in the direction of balance—as if acknowledging any value in the Confucius Institutes program might be misinterpreted as some sort of an endorsement.

These reflections bring us back around to our original question, namely, Why is the Canadian Government Bankrolling an Anti-China Propaganda Campaign? As we noted, there may be political considerations, or the Canada Media Fund itself might be pushing anti-China productions as a way of promoting its own image as an important governmental agency. Or there may be yet other factors at work that are not evident on the surface. In any event, we can clearly see people intent on tapping Canadian government funds to bankroll their vendetta against China—Falun Gong members in tandem with other people friendly to the Falun Gong cause. Perhaps government officials are already fully aware of these individuals' activities, but probably not. These officials need to wake up and realize that there is a full-blown assault against China being carried out right under their noses, and in the name of the government of Canada.

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