

Comment on N.Y. Times Report on Shen Yun

On August 16, 2024, the NY Times published an article titled, “Behind the Pageantry of Shen Yun.” The article paints an inaccurate portrait of the New York-based Fei Tian, the first arts college in the West to provide comprehensive training in traditional music, art, and classical Chinese dance and serves as a major feeder for Shen Yun Performing Arts. It also distorts beyond recognition the nature of Classical Chinese dance and the core tenets of the religion associated with the school, which like most other Eastern practices emphasizes compassion and tolerance.

The article disappoints and misleads for several reasons.

First, an article based on interviews of around 2.5-3% of performers smacks of random if not outright biased sampling, each of which carry an extraordinarily high risk of inaccuracy and incorrect conclusions. To wit, the authors interviewed twenty-five or so former performers to speak on behalf of a far larger pool: performers who have or currently perform as part of the Shen Yun dance troupes. Indeed, there are currently 8 dance troupes with at least 80 performers that have toured with Shen Yun in 2024. The very different views of many others, see, below, illustrates that the views of the 2.5-3% do not represent the views of most other Shen Yun performers.

Second, the views of the select minority evince a misunderstanding of the nature of Classical Chinese Dance, which requires a rigor and discipline analogous to that of Olympic trainees and

participants. If the Times were to interview a few Olympic trainees who confused their dissatisfaction with the demands of Olympic training to the physical or emotional abuse, the Olympic winners and stars would explain what most Shen Yun dancers have stated: “There’s nowhere else in the world that’s like this,” said lead dancer Marilyn Yang, adding [i]ts a place where we feel at peace.” See, https://www.theepochtimes.com/article/what-its-really-like-to-be-an-artist-at-shen-yun-5654412?ea_src=frontpage&ea_cnt=a&ea_med=top-news-2--0-title-0. Others have emphasized the sheer joy involved in training to perform and expressed gratitude for the opportunity. See, e.g., <https://www.theepochtimes.com/article/new-york-times-relies-on-distortion-deceit-in-effort-to-smear-shen-yun-5707763>. The NY Times’s failure to even attempt to assure a statistically significant sampling is unusual considering the paper’s commitment to accurate reporting. That the samples only include the views of the disgruntled raised far more worrisome concerns.

Third, the article appears to mock and most certainly misunderstands the spiritual practice of Falun Gong. Its flagrant mischaracterizations of tenets of the religion and especially those that involve a metaphysical or supernatural realms as “less conventional” than other more familiar tenets about, including for example, role of enlightenment in the practice, is unprofessional at best. Of course, one cannot prove such deep religious convictions as the existence of Yahweh, the birth of Eve, the Fall from Grace, the Holy Ghost, the Trinity, the many miracles attributed to Jesus,

the belief in miracles, the self-described mystical experiences of Yogi, Hindus, and Christian Saints and so on. The supernatural realm of Falun Gong is similarly a matter of faith, including the existence of the existence of one's Main Spirit or Primary Soul and such other intangible phenomena as “*de*” (virtue) and “*gong*” (“cultivation energy”) a “*Falun*” (law wheel), and reincarnation and karma. Few of these beliefs are unique to Falun Gong. Mockery of these and/or related beliefs including the karmic origin of illness is disrespectful of the religion and of the rights of disciples to freedom of thought and belief in the U.S.