



# The Church of Almighty God

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# The Church of Almighty God

## BASIC BACKGROUND

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- Also called the “Eastern Lightning”
- Quasi-Christian group
- Founded by Zhao Weishan and his partner Yang Xiangbin in 1991, in Henan Province China
- Most active from late 90s to 2014, still active today mostly in places beyond country’s border
- Core tenet: Jesus Christ has returned to Earth in a female body. Submission to her words in their sacred literature.



敬祝毛主席万寿无疆

# Social Political Background

- Leader Zhao Weishan born in 1951 northeast China
- People's Republic of China established by Mao on Oct 1, 1949
- 1950-1980 was a time of economic and political upheaval
- Early years Mao led anti-rightist campaign to purge remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society to preserve communism. Half a million arrested and sent to labor camps.
- 1958-The Great Leap Forward, a strict agricultural reform. Blind pursuit for steel production that led to one of the worst famine in the world. Around 30 million starved to death.

敬祝毛主席万寿无疆

# Social Political Background

- 1966–Mao launched the Cultural revolution.
- Same goal of preserving and strengthening communism.
- Saw religion as a danger to the atheist party and banned all religious activity in 1966.
- “Religion was condemned as a corrupting factor in Chinese society, and many Christians were sent to labor camps and subjected to “re-education” (Kindopp, 2004)
- 1966–Red Guards. Mass organizations established by college and high school students. Violently harassed intellectuals, teachers, and older people.

# Early years of Zhao

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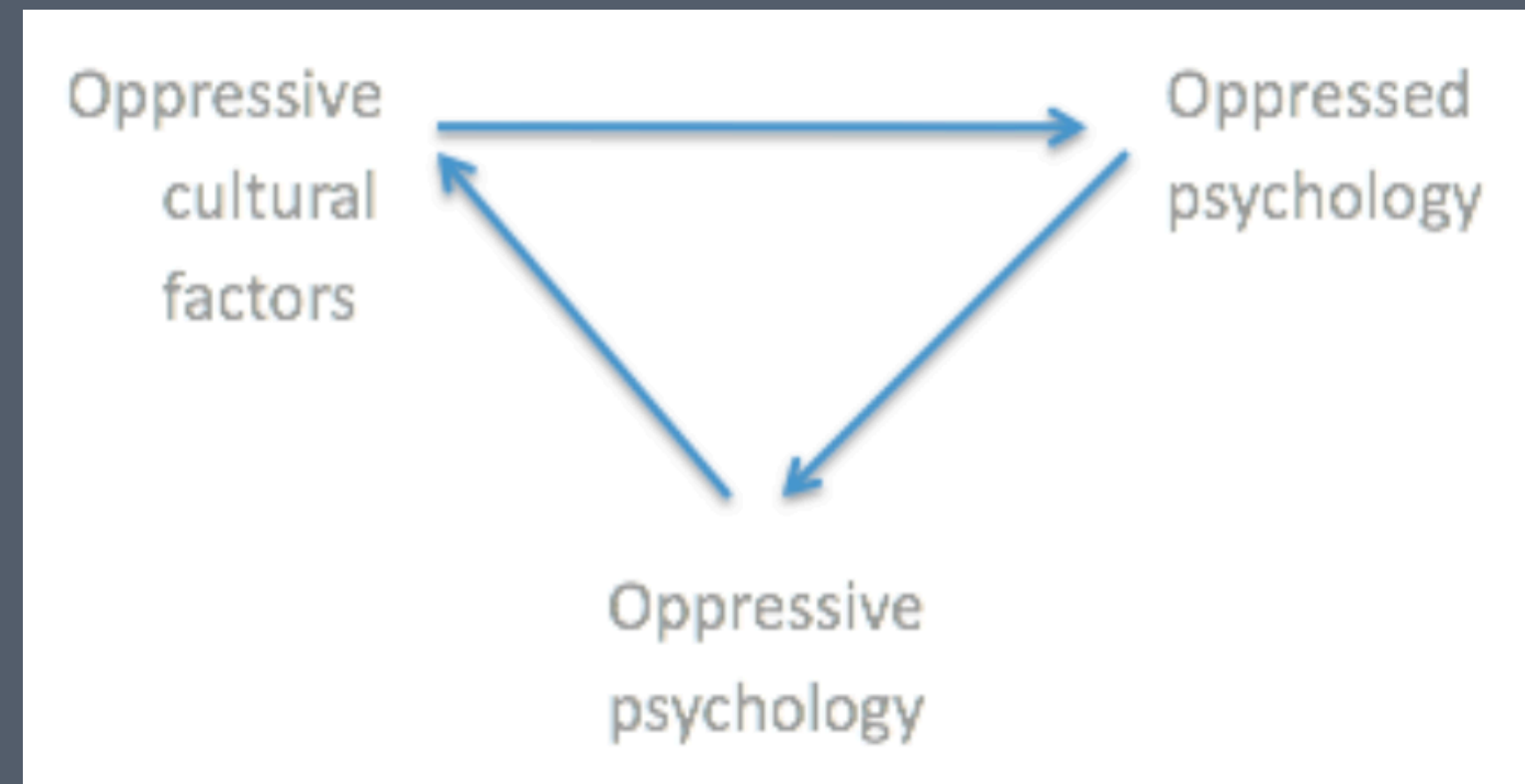
- Zhao grew up with huge stress & anxiety in his teen years since he was religious and the environment was unsafe to practice. In addition to the issue of hunger.
- After Mao died in 1977, restrictions were loosened but Christianity was still unsafe to practice.



# The Cultural Psychology of Oppression and Liberation

Carl Ratner (2009)

- “If society is oppressive, psychology will reproduce oppression in peoples’ minds and behavior...Psychology can thus be an instrument of oppression, an oppressive force, an instrument of ruling class hegemony to maintain the subordination of the populace.”
- Growing up in an oppressive environment led to Zhao having an oppressed psychology.
- Used oppressive force as a way to control his group.



# Life of Zhao Weishan

1986

Moved to Henan province in central China. Introduced to and joined The Shouters, a Christian sect led by Li Changshou. There he was baptized, fully dedicated, climbed the rank quickly, and helped established church in Heilongjiang province.

1989

The Shouters was labelled as cult because the party only recognized Buddhism, Taoism, islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Same year, Tiananmen Square massacre took place. Protesters that called for greater democracy were killed (round 10,000) by troops by the government. Dangerous political climate.

1991

His church was closed by the Harbin Public Security. Left the city and fled to Henan. Established his own church independent of the shouters. Called himself the lord of ability.

# Founding of the group

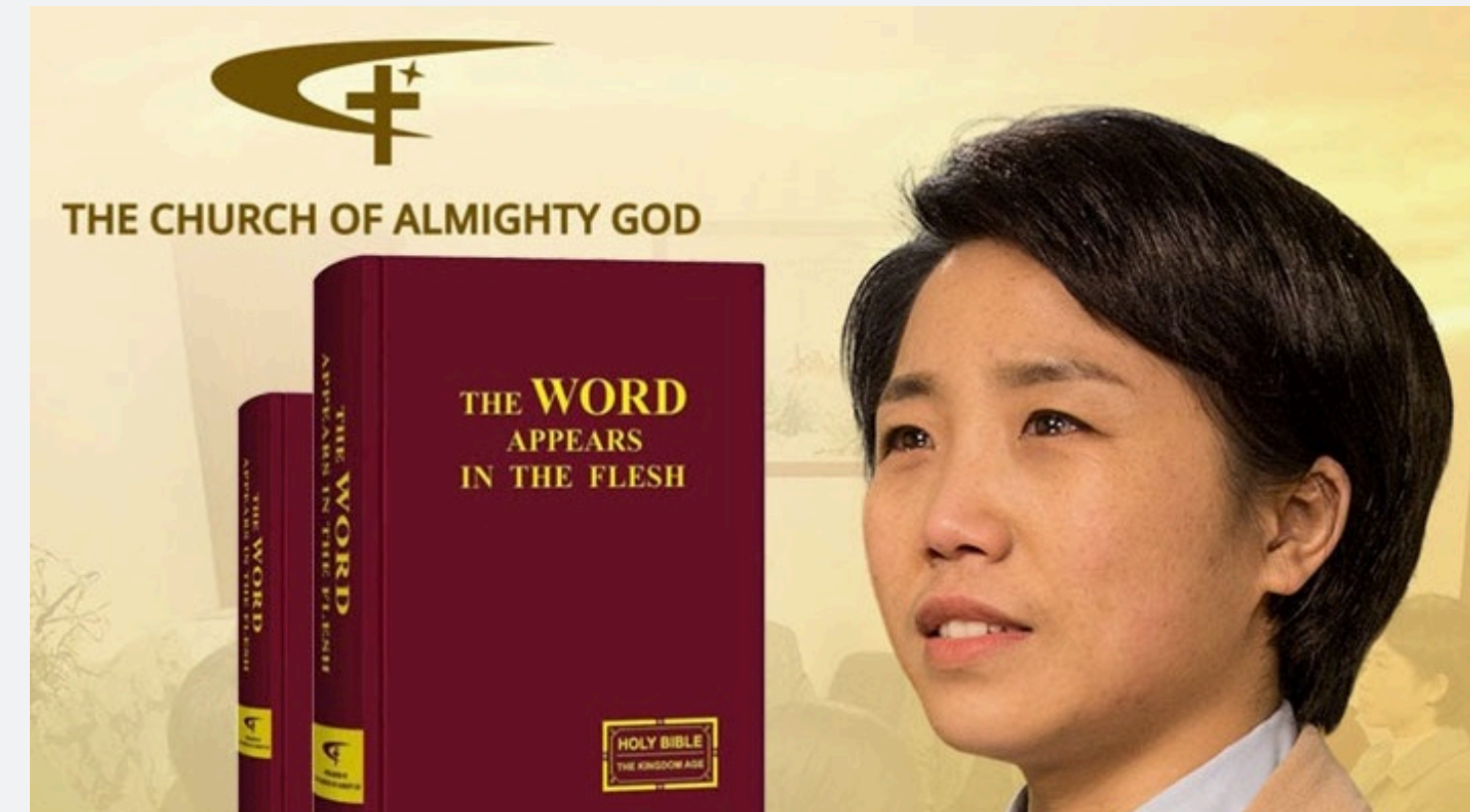
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- 1991-Spread the belief that the second coming of Christ would happen in China.
  - Gospel of Matthew 24:27: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."
  - Lightning from the East-second coming of Christ.
  - Same year Zhao met Yang Xiangbin, the woman that would inspire the entire cult and become this female Christ



# About Yang Xiangbin

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- Born in 1973 in northern China.
- Suffered a mental breakdown after failing her university entrance exam ( dictate whether one is able to enter college).
- Seek medical treatment but nothing helped. Brought to local christian church led by Li and became a devoted member of the shouters.
- Telling people she was having holy dreams and visions.
- Zhao and Yang met at Li's church, two in their low point in life met and immediately felt connected (Ti and Do).



# Founding of the group

- Yang was writing a religious texts- word of God.
- Her text declared that people should stop worshipping Zhao as the Lord of power and start worshiping God himself.
- Yang: “God himself was divided into many different elements. “God could be represented as all prepared, all worthy, all-victorious, all glory, all reverence all authority or all complete.”
- Yang declared that she was all complete because she had been possessed by the Holy Spirit.
- Followers began to believe she was a holy figure.
- Zhao declared Yang the female Christ, an almighty god who came to earth to save them.
- 1993-Official start of eastern lightning. Zhao as the priest and Yang as the holy figure as well as the Eastern lightning foretold in the Bible.

# Development of cult

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- Zhao preached that the arrival of the almighty god was a signal of the end times. Faith in God was the only pathway to salvation and all others would be doomed to hell.
- A huge emphasis was placed on the importance of converting others to the church.
- Followers were actively using fear to convert people: Convert or get fatal diseases and die.
- In 1995 the group was labeled as cult by the China's Ministry of public security. They later continued underground.
- In the late 90s, there were rumors about how members kidnapped and used violence to convert people.
- Zhao claimed rumors were propaganda started by the government that controlled the media.



# Development of cult

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- In late 90s, Yang retreated from the public eye.
- Zhao: only the most elite members could meet the female Christ.
- Used mystery and secrecy to keep followers craving more information. Followers can gain information if they dedicate more.
- Pressure to donate to church as the only way to climb the rank.
- World is ending, only financial contribution demonstrated their faith (Scientology-OT levels).
- Zhao preached that the communist party was the big red dragon in the book of revelation.
- Communists party was a form of devil that has come to destroy them.
- Attracted followers by preying on the sense of fear and discontent toward the government.
- Government was preventing them from having a relationship with God so they would end up in hell.
- Followers found comfort in the message.

# Development of cult 1998-2000

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- 1998 Nanyang Attack
- Two alleged members of Eastern Lightning committed a series of assaults and robberies across Nanyang, Henan.
- Assaulted 9 people over a 12-day period, reportedly for refusing to join or provide funds to the church.
- Group stayed underground but hatred toward the government was propelling them to protest openly.
- Zhao claimed (suddenly) that year 2000 is the end day.
- Same year government began arresting Eastern lightning members.
- Zhao and Yang fled to New York City without any followers and sought political asylum.
- Established a church in NYC and send orders back to church leaders in China.
- End day?

# Going to the Extreme

- In 2002, the group allegedly kidnapped 24 Evangelical leaders of the China Gospel Fellowship by posing as representatives from a theological Institute in Singapore and held them for 2 months.
- Pastor reported that he was “drugged and restrained while two women whispered Eastern Lightning doctrine into both of his ears throughout the night.”
- Cult member got away and the group distanced themselves from the violent acts.

- The group kept quiet from 2002 to 2012
- The Roland Emmerich film 2012 (2009) went popular. Members started embracing the Mayan prophecy that the world is going to end in December 21, 2012 (failed).
- Fueled social panic, followers attempted to convert and “save” as many people as possible.
- Former member Mr. Tian:
  - Heard of group in summer of 2012. The more he learned the more he was paranoid.
  - “When everyone around you is accumulating food and water and recourse supplies, it changed my perception of what was real. I had to follow.”
- The strategy was to slowly draw people in. Told people there are 3 steps to believing in god. First, believe in Joseph, then in Christ, then in the female reincarnation of Christ (The Unification Church)

# Going to the Extreme

- On May 28, 2014, a group of Eastern Lightning's missionaries went into a local Macdonalds in Shandong.
- They presented their religious message and demanded customers to supply their cell phone numbers for future contacts.
- Wu Shuoyan, a 37-year-old refused, and she was beaten by two members with mops and chairs to death.
- The attack was captured on camera, and the attackers were arrested.
- One of the perpetrator told the media: "She was a demon, she was an evil spirit. We give no thought to the law. We only believe in God. I felt good doing it."

# 2014 Murder



# Development of cult after 2014

- Group denied any connection with the murder.
- After the 2014 attack, police started arresting anyone associated with Eastern lightning.
- Leaders instructed members to go underground, and meet using Skype.
- Many fled mainland China and moved to other countries, expanding to Hong Kong (2000 in 2015), Macau, South Korea, Spain, and the US.
- The church launched their website in 2015.
- They focused on massively outputting art productions. Releasing feature films, documentaries, short movies, and painting.



**The Lord Jesus Has Returned: Words and Testimonies Expressed by Almighty God, Christ of the Last Days**  
"For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even to the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27).  
"I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:12-13).

THE WORD  
OF ALMIGHTY GOD

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English Christian Song "The Joy of Praising God" | Kids Dance  
21M views • 4 years ago



Christian Movie | "Where Is My Home" | Heartwarming and...  
21M views • 6 years ago



Christian ... an Undiv...  
9.3M view

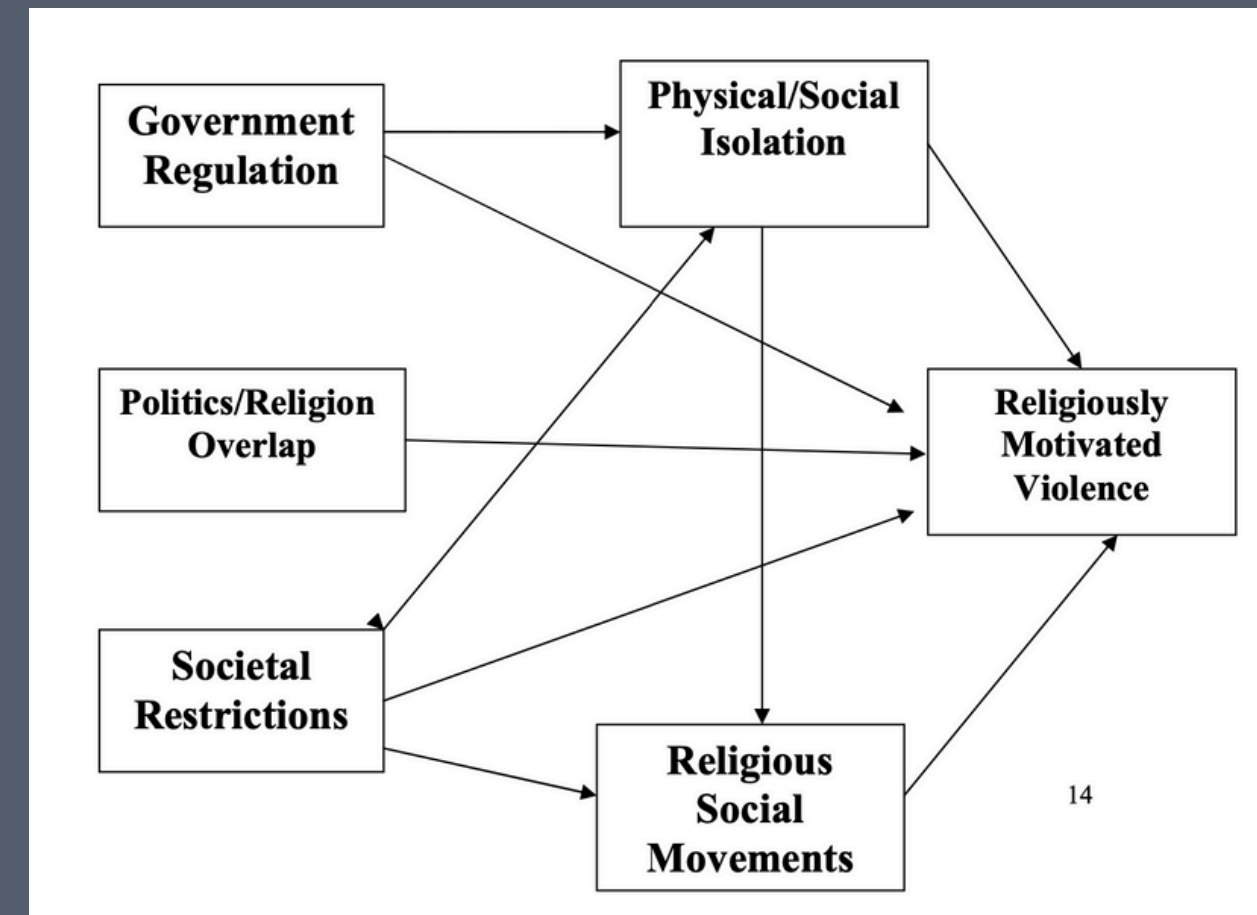


"A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism." The Chinese Communist Party—the spectre of communism, is the bloodiest satanic regime in history to persecute religious beliefs. It frantically suppresses and cruelly massacres Christians, causing the whole of mainland China to fall into an atmosphere of terror where blood is in the air, black clouds hang over cities and anger and blame is spread across the land!

# Wars and Rumors of Wars: Explaining Religiously Motivated Violence

Finke and Harris (2014)

- Restrictions on religion imposed by the state or society lead to heightened tensions and grievances among religious groups, potentially leading to violence.
- Probability of violence increases when religious groups face strong restrictions.
- “Religious groups chose violence to improve the lot of their institutions and constituents, by resisting repression and gaining political power (Lannaccone & Berman (2006).”
- The Eastern Lightning was formed in a time of high governmental oppression. This fueled collective violent acts.



# Material Resource and Community

- Baumeister & Leary (1995) “People who have anything in common, who share common (even unpleasant) experiences, or who simply are exposed to each other frequently tend to form friendships or other attachments.”
- Provided a community for Christians that weren't accepted by society.
- Stark & Brainbridge (1980) “Persons were sometimes drawn by their attachment to group members to move into the Moonie commune while still openly expressing rejection of the Moon ideology.”
- Tight-knit villages and large size families constitute rural areas in China. Thus, recruitment worked better (Credonia)

# Exploiting psychological vulnerabilities

- Milgram, S. (1963). Behavioral study of obedience: Ordinary people are willing to commit incomprehensible acts of violence so long as someone in authority assures them it is the right thing to do.
- Volunteers would administrate lethal electric shocks to a stranger.
- Members of the Eastern lightning committed violence and assault as they thought they were “helping” people. They see God as their authority.

# Power over incentives

- The cult posed threat of harassment, violence, or death if members leave. “If attempt to disassociate, will be strike by lightning.”
- Group has deep roots in rural areas in China. When targetting impoverished and un-educated population, it is easier to control people’s incentives then in turn control people’s beliefs because it is hard to discern the risks and truths.

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THANK YOU!