

Schnellrecherche der SFH-Länderanalyse vom 20. Januar 2017 zu China: Eastern Lightning/Church of Almighty God

Fragen an die SFH-Länderanalyse:

- Was ist die Organisation/Glaubensgemeinschaft *Eastern Lightning* (*Quannengshen*)?
- Was ist über den Gründer von *Eastern Lightning* bekannt?
- Wie rekrutiert *Eastern Lightning* neue Mitglieder?
- Werden Mitglieder von *Eastern Lightning* in ganz China von den chinesischen Behörden verfolgt?
- Ist eine legale Ausreise trotz Verfolgung respektive Verdacht der Zugehörigkeit zu einer christlichen Gruppierung möglich?

Die Informationen beruhen auf einer zeitlich begrenzten Recherche (Schnellrecherche) in öffentlich zugänglichen Dokumenten, die uns derzeit zur Verfügung stehen, sowie auf den Informationen einer sachkundigen Kontaktperson. Diese Schnellrecherche aktualisiert Teile der Schnellrecherche der SFH vom 2. Juni 2015 zum selben Thema.

1 Eastern Lightning

Christliche Glaubensrichtung. Gemäss der Publikation *Lightning from the East: Heterodoxy and Christianity in Contemporary China* von *Emily Dunn*, Forscherin an der Universität Melbourne, vom Mai 2015 ist *Eastern Lightning*, auch unter dem Namen *The Church of Almighty God* bekannt, eine neue religiöse Bewegung. Nach deren Lehre sei Jesus Christus als chinesische Frau auf die Erde zurückgekehrt, um die Menschheit zu richten und das gegenwärtige Zeitalter zu beenden. Die Bewegung sei 1991 in der Provinz Henan entstanden. Gemäss einem Bericht des *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* (IRB) vom 11. März 2013 ist *Eastern Lightning* in ganz China verbreitet.

Gründer Zhao Weishan und Ehefrau Yang Xiangbin, der «weibliche Christus». Zhao Weishan begründete *Eastern Lightning* laut *CNN*-Bericht vom 3. Februar 2015 in den frühen 1990er-Jahren. Demnach sei er zuvor Physiklehrer und ferner Mitglied und dann Oberhaupt zweier anderer Sekten gewesen. Eine der Grundlagen seiner Glaubenslehre stelle die Annahme dar, dass Yang Xiangbin, seine um 20 Jahre jüngere Partnerin, eine Reinkarnation von Jesus Christus darstellt. Gemäss *Dunn* (Mai 2015) berichteten chinesische protestantische Quellen zunächst, eine unverheiratete Frau mit dem Nachnamen Deng, die bei Zhengzhou in Henan lebte, sei der «weibliche Christus» («*female Christ*»). *Eastern Lightnings* Website hätte dies verneint, jedoch keine Angaben zu ihrer wirklichen Identität gemacht. Laut der Publikation *Dunns* begannen chinesische Medien im Jahr 2012, eine Frau namens Yang Xiangbin aus Shanxi als den «weiblichen Christus» zu identifizieren. Gemäss Berichten aus dieser

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Zeit habe Zhao Weishan sie nach der Unterdrückung seiner neuen religiösen Bewegung in Heilongjiang in Henan getroffen, als sie einen religiösen Text namens «Gottes Wort» verfasste. Er habe ihr Potenzial und das Potenzial ihrer Schriften erkannt, neue Anhängerinnen und Anhänger zu erreichen, und sie seien ein Paar geworden. 1993 habe er sie zum «weiblichen Christus» erklärt.

Aufruf zum Kampf gegen kommunistische Regierungspartei, deutliche Kritik an der chinesischen Nation und am chinesischen Staat. *Eastern Lightning* ruft laut IRB-Bericht vom 11. März 2013 zum Kampf gegen den «grossen roten Drachen» («*the great red dragon*») auf, womit die kommunistische Regierungspartei Chinas gemeint ist. Auch im IRB-Bericht vom 16. Oktober 2014 wird festgehalten, dass *Eastern Lightning* der Partei gegenüber in offener Feindschaft steht. Gemäss *Dunn* (Mai 2015) erklären die Schriften von *Eastern Lightning* wiederholt und unzweideutig, dass China das «schmutzigste Land» und die Menschen dort «am meisten vom Teufel verdorben» seien. Die Rückständigkeit und Armut des Landes würden in diesen Schriften als Beweis für Sündigkeit und Unterlegenheit ausgemacht, und Gott habe China gemäss der Schriften von *Eastern Lightning* als Ort der zweiten Wiederkunft Christi ausgewählt, da die Dunkelheit des Landes den Glanz Christi betone.

Radikalisierung der Lehre von *Eastern Lightning* gegenüber der Gründungszeit. Gemäss *Dunn* (Mai 2015) betonen die Schriften von *Eastern Lightning* in starkem Masse die Pflicht zur Selbstaufopferung für Anhängerinnen und Anhänger. Auch würden optimistischere Textteile aus der Gründungszeit in neueren Übersetzungen ins Englische ausgelassen. Repressionen durch politische und religiöse Gegner könnten laut *Dunn* zu einer Radikalisierung geführt haben, die sich in der heutigen strengerer Lehre niederschläge. Die daraus resultierende Verwegenheit und das Engagement der Anhängerinnen und Anhänger würden von Protestantinnen und Protestanten und Regierungsbehörden gleichermassen gefürchtet.

Verschiedene Schätzungen zu Mitgliederzahlen. IRB (11. März 2013) ist *Eastern Lightning* im Auftreten weitgehend von einer grossen Verslossenheit geprägt. Entsprechend schwierig sei es, die numerische Grösse der Gruppe zu erfassen. Verschiedene Schätzungen ihrer Mitgliederzahlen reichen denn auch von einigen hunderttausend bis hin zu mehreren Millionen Anhängerinnen und Anhängern, wie dem IRB-Bericht vom 16. Oktober 2014 zu entnehmen ist.

Internationale missionarische Aktivitäten. Laut einem zusammenfassenden Bericht zu *Eastern Lightning*, den *Dunn* am 18. Februar 2015 auf der Internetplattform *World Religions and Spirituality Project* veröffentlichte, setzte sich Zhao Weishan um das Jahr 2000 herum aus China ab, um in den USA um politisches Asyl zu ersuchen. Es sei demnach möglich, dass Yang Xiangbin mit ihm zusammen aus China ausgereist ist. Über den konkreten Einfluss, den Zhao Weishan zum heutigen Zeitpunkt auf die Mitglieder seiner Glaubensgemeinschaft hat oder ausübt, können auf der Basis der vorliegenden Informationen keine Aussagen gemacht werden. Klar scheint aber, dass *Eastern Lightning* auch ausserhalb Chinas Fuss gefasst hat. So erwähnt derselbe Bericht missionarische Bemühungen, die *Eastern Lightning*-Mitglieder weltweit unternehmen. Entsprechende Aktivitäten könnten in den chinesisch-stämmigen Bevölkerungsteilen einzelner amerikanischer Grossstädte, sowie Englands, Kanadas, Italiens, Schwedens und Südkoreas beobachtet werden.

Emily Dunn, Mai 2015:

«Eastern Lightning, also known as The Church of Almighty God, is a new religious movement which teaches that Jesus Christ has returned to earth in the form of a Chinese woman to judge humankind and end the present age. It recalls its genesis in Henan province thus:

In 1991, a sister in the church was moved by and received word from the Holy Spirit, and testified to «God's name» and «God's arrival.» Everyone was excited, but did not understand what was going on. Then Christ began to speak, issuing forth talks one after the other. People were passing them around and felt they were the words of the Holy Spirit, and surely from God.

(...) Eastern Lightning scripture states repeatedly and unequivocally that China is the «filthiest country» and its people most corrupted by the Devil. The nation's backwardness and poverty are singled out as evidence of sinfulness and inferiority (...). Thus, Eastern Lightning's proclamation that God has chosen China as the site of the Second Advent is not an expression of national pride, but precisely the opposite. He has chosen China because its darkness magnifies His brilliance (...).

Chinese Protestant sources previously reported that the object of Eastern Lightning's devotion was an unmarried woman with the surname Deng (...) who lived near Zhengzhou in Henan. For its part, Eastern Lightning's website vehemently denied this, but did not supply an alternative identity for her (...).

The denial was quite possibly honest, as in late 2012, Chinese media began to identify the Female Christ as Shanxi woman Yang Xiangbin (...) instead. Reports from this time have stated that in 1991, Zhao Weishan was in the doldrums following the suppression of his fledgling new religious movement in Heilongjiang. He fled to Henan, where he came across Yang (...), who had experienced a mental breakdown after failing her university entrance examination, and had been writing a religious text that she called «God's Word.» Zhao recognized the potential that she and her writing held to attract followers, they became lovers, and Zhao declared her to be the Female Christ in 1993. (...)

What makes Eastern Lightning exceptional is the degree to which it prescribes self-sacrifice. Scripture goes so far as to state that «Before people are refined to the extent that they are half dead and have tasted death, the refining will not end... People will all have to be refined to that extent, without any hope or support.» It is also significant that Eastern Lightning's writings were not always so morose. The quotation above contrasts with the optimistic exclamations that permeated the first writings of 1991 (...). Despite appearing towards the front of Chinese versions of The Word Appeared in the Flesh, these earlier writings are omitted from recently translated English versions. This suggests that the leadership of the movement is now emphasizing the more somber tone of the Female Christ's later pronouncements, and that repression at the hands of political and religious opponents has engendered the radicalization of Eastern Lightning's teachings. These teachings foster a boldness and dedication that is feared by

Protestants and government organs alike.» Quelle: Dunn, Emily, *Lightning from the East: Heterodoxy and Christianity in Contemporary China*, Mai 2015, S. 1, 65, 71, 79: www.brill.com/products/book/lightning-east.

IRB, 11. März 2013:

«1. Background

*The **Church of Almighty God is known by many names, including Eastern Lightning** (Dui Hua 17 Dec. 2012; UCANews 20 Dec. 2012; CFAR n.d.a), **Lightning from the East** (SCMP 18 Dec. 2012; Time 5 Nov. 2001), the Real God Church (Dui Hua 17 Dec. 2012; CRI 2005), the Second Saviour Sect (UCANews 20 Dec. 2012), Dongfang Shandian, , the Lord's Hidden Advent in China and Endtime Work of God (CFAR n.d.a). **Several sources describe the group as a 'cult'** (UCANews 20 Dec. 2012; FT 17 Dec. 2012; Dui Hua 17 Dec. 2012). **Sources describe the group as 'secretive'** (AFP 20 Dec. 2012) or '**clandestine**' (The New York Times 19 Dec. 2012).*

*Sources report that the Church of Almighty God is banned in China (FT 17 Dec. 2012; US 30 July 2012, 4; UCANews 20 Dec. 2012). According to the China Aid Association (ChinaAid), a US-based Christian NGO that seeks to advance religious freedom in China (19 Feb. 2012), **[a]lmost all of China's house churches support the efforts of local authorities to crack down, in accordance with the law, on Eastern Lightning**, which calls itself a Christian group but has long used violence to harm and persecute house churches, as well as endangering social order. (ChinaAid 20 Dec. 2012) (...)*

2. Location of Group

*According to two sources, the group appears to be **present throughout China** (Dui Hua 17 Dec. 2012; FT 17 Dec. 2012). CFAR says that its headquarters are in Zhenzhou in Henan (n.d.a). (...)*

3. Beliefs

Sources report that members of the Church of Almighty God believe that Jesus Christ has returned as a woman living in China (Dui Hua 17 Dec. 2012). Two sources say that the church believes that she lives in Henan Province (SCMP 18 Dec. 2012; CFAR n.d.a). Some sources also indicate that the group has produced a third testament of the Bible (Shanghaiist 20 Dec. 2012; GlobalPost 18 Dec. 2012; CFAR n.d.a). According to the Dui Hua Foundation, an US-based NGO dedicated to human rights in China (Dui Hua n.d.), the group believes that this female Christ 'will reign over a new age in which humankind will be judged and only believers will survive' (ibid. 17 Dec. 2012). CFAR reports that members believe that believers can find salvation through this female Christ (n.d.a). Other sources report that those who do not accept her will experience a 'terrible' death (UCANEWS 20 Dec. 2012; SCMP 18 Dec. 2012) or 'severe punishment' (UCANEWS 20 Dec. 2012). The woman is also known as 'Lightning Deng' (SCMP 18 Dec. 2012) or simply 'Deng' (The New Yorker 19 Dec. 2012; The Telegraph 24 June 2002).

Sources report that the group calls for a battle against the ‘great red dragon’ (Los Angeles Times 17 Dec. 2012; Shanghaiist 20 Dec. 2012; FT 17 Dec. 2012). Some sources explain that the ‘great red dragon’ in question is the Chinese Communist Party (AFP 20 Dec. 2012; GlobalPost 18 Dec. 2012; FT 17 Dec. 2012). According to a historian quoted by the Financial Times, the call for the destruction of the Communist Party was a recent development (ibid.). Corroboration of this statement could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

4. Activities

The group is reported to be ‘highly aggressive’ (CFAR n.d.a) **and uses ‘strong-arm’ tactics to recruit followers** (The New York Times 19 Dec. 2012; SCMP 17 Dec. 2012). According to several sources, the Church of Almighty God tries to convert members from other Christian groups (UCANews 20 Dec. 2012; Shanghaiist 20 Dec. 2012; CFAR n.d.a). Two sources indicate that the group has published a manual on how to convert other Christians (Shanghaiist 20 Dec. 2012; CFAR n.d.a). Sources report that some Christian groups have accused members of the Church of Almighty God of attempts to infiltrate their own groups (UCANews 20 Dec. 2012; SCMP 18 Dec. 2012).

Some sources indicate that the group has been involved in attacks against other Christian groups (Shanghaiist 20 Dec. 2012; Dui Hua 17 Dec. 2012). According to sources, the group has been accused of using methods such as kidnapping (Los Angeles Times 17 Dec. 2012; UCANews 20 Dec. 2012), brainwashing (UCANews 20 Dec. 2012; Time 5 Nov. 2001; CFAR n.d.a), and torture (UCANews 20 Dec. 2012; CFAR N.d.). As an example, sources report that, in 2002, the group was accused of kidnapping 34 Chinese Christians in order to forcibly convert them to their beliefs (The Telegraph 24 June 2002; SCMP 8 May 2002).

Several sources report that members of the church were announcing the coming of the apocalypse on 21 December 2012, the date of the end of the world according to some interpretations of Mayan prophecy (AFP 20 Dec. 2012; UCANews 20 Dec. 2012; FT 17 Dec. 2012). Two sources report that the church appeared to use the Mayan doomsday prophecy as an opportunity for recruitment of members (UCANews 20 Dec. 2012; Shanghaiist 20 Dec. 2012).» Quelle: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, China: The Church of Almighty God, also known as ‘Eastern Lightning,’ including its history, beliefs, and where it is present; treatment of members by government authorities, [CHN104304.E], 11. März 2013: www.refworld.org/docid/542a79ae4.html.

CNN, 3. Februar 2015:

«A female Christ?

Eastern Lightning was founded in the early 1990s by Zhao Weishan, a physics teacher with a history of membership of radical quasi-Christian sects, who preached about a female Christ figure hailing from China, said Dunn.

The group's moniker was drawn from a verse in the New Testament: "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".

In a video produced by Chinese police warning about the group, it is claimed that **Zhao first became a member of a radical religious movement, known as the Shouters, in 1987. It said he honed his expertise at religious "scams" there, before branching off in 1989 with a movement, based in Heilongjiang Province, elevating himself as the object of veneration.**

When the group was broken up by authorities, said the video, Zhao abandoned his family and **fled to Shandong and Henan provinces. He teamed up with a woman 20 years his junior, and began preaching that she was the Female Christ, with himself as the new movement's high priest,** according to the video.

The police referred to the woman as **Yang Xiangbin; Dunn said she was also known to followers as "Lightning" Deng,** although the group had released statements online denying this was the case.

"But **they don't say whether she's still alive or where she is or what her name is,**" said Dunn. "They don't tell you anything but that she was a middle-aged woman who was inspired by God and God spoke to her, so she started speaking God's word."

The police video said Zhao fled to the United States in 2000.» Quelle: CNN, 'Eastern Lightning': The Banned Religious Group that Has China Worried, 3. Februar 2015: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/06/world/asia/china-eastern-lightning-killing/>.

IRB, 16. Oktober 2014:

«1. Members and Leaders

According to several sources, members of the Church of Almighty God in China are estimated to **number in the millions** (BBC 13 Aug. 2014; Dui Hua 10 July 2014; The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014). However, CNN states that estimates of its membership range **from hundreds of thousands to a million members** (CNN 8 June 2014).

In a statement sent to CNN, members of the Church of Almighty God who operate the church's English-language website said that "our church doesn't exactly have a spokesperson because nobody can fully represent' the group' (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that Zhao Weishan is the founder of the Church of Almighty God (Xinhua 20 Aug. 2014; The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014; CNN 8 June 2014). According to the Chinese state news agency Xinhua, Zhao Weishan is also known as Xu Wenshan (Xinhua 20 Aug. 2014). Zhao has reportedly been living in the United States for over ten years (ibid.; The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014; CNN 8 June 2014). Xinhua specifies that Zhao Weishan fled to the United States in September 2000 along with his wife Yang Xiangbin, who the Church of Almighty God claims is a female incarnation of Jesus

Christ (20 Aug. 2014). Two sources refer to this female incarnation of Christ as 'Lightning Deng' (The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014; CNN 8 June 2014).

2. Activities Attributed to the Church of Almighty God

According to the BBC, **the Church shows 'outright hostility' towards the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** (13 Aug. 2014). Sources report that the Church calls on its members to fight against the CCP (The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014; The New York Times 11 June 2014; CNN 8 June 2014).» Quelle: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, China: The Church of Almighty God (Quannengshen), also known as 'Eastern Lightning,' including its leaders, location and activities attributed to it; treatment of members by authorities (March 2013-September 2014) [CHN104965.E], 16. Oktober 2014:

www.irb.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455559&pls=1.

Emily Dunn, 18. Februar 2015:

«Zhao is reported to have entered the U.S. and sought political asylum on the basis of religious persecution in around the year 2000, possibly with Yang. By 2014, The Church had been reported to be proselytizing in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and the group's website, Facebook page and YouTube uploads also indicated attempts to recruit from Chinese-speaking communities in San Francisco, Seattle, England, Canada, Italy, Sweden, and South Korea. Within China, it has transformed from an exclusively rural movement, to one that can increasingly be found in major cities. The number of adherents within China cannot be ascertained due to the group's illegal status, but an estimate of one million members is credible.» Quelle: Emily Dunn, World Religions and Spirituality Project VCU: 'Church of Almighty God/Eastern Lightning', 18. Februar 2015: <http://wrs.vcu.edu/profiles/ChurchOfAlmightyGod.html>.

2 Missionierung

Bedeutung der Missionierung im chinesischen Protestantismus, spezieller Fokus von *Eastern Lightning* auf der Missionierung von Protestanten. Gemäss der Dissertation von *Emily Dunn* vom August 2010 hat die Missionierung in den Texten und in der religiösen Praxis individueller Anhängerinnen und Anhänger von *Eastern Lightning* eine grosse Bedeutung und spiegelt sich im beeindruckenden Wachstum der Bewegung seit ihrer Gründung. Missionierung sei laut den Texten von *Eastern Lightning* eine Pflicht für alle Mitglieder. Dies entspreche der starken Bedeutung der Missionierung im chinesischen Protestantismus. Diese habe trotz des staatlichen Verbots des Predigens ausserhalb von für die Religionsausübung bestimmten Orten zu einem beeindruckenden Wachstum des Protestantismus in China während der letzten 25 Jahre geführt. Jedoch konzentrierten sich *Eastern Lightning*-Anhänger auf die Missionierung von Protestantinnen und Protestanten; von letzteren erwarteten sie weniger als von der allgemeinen Bevölkerung, dass sie die Behörden über ihre Aktivitäten informieren würden.

Missionierung durch die Verteilung und Verbreitung religiöser Schriften. Gemäss *Dunn* (August 2010) verteilen *Eastern Lightning*-Mitglieder religiöse Schriften

an potenzielle Anhängerinnen und Anhänger. Oft seien dies Texte mit anekdotischen Berichten von «Bekehrungen» und Visionen.

Berichte von gewaltsamen Missionierungsversuchen durch eine Minderheit von Anhängern von *Eastern Lightning* und anderer christlicher Gruppen in China.

Dunn (August 2010) verweist auf glaubhafte Berichte der *China Gospel Fellowship* (CGF), einer nicht registrierten chinesischen protestantischen Gruppierung, sowie eines Entführungsofers und weiterer Kontaktpersonen über die Entführung von 34 führenden Mitgliedern der CGF durch *Eastern Lightning*-Mitglieder am 16. April 2002 mit dem Ziel, sie zur Lehre von *Eastern Lightning* zu «bekehren». Gemäss CGF benutzten die *Eastern Lightning*-Mitglieder auch Betäubung durch Drogen, Täuschung, sexuelle Verführung, Bestechung von örtlichen Polizeibeamten und die Androhung göttlicher Vergeltung, um die entführten Personen zu missionieren. Gemäss *IRB Canada* (16. Oktober 2014) bestehen der Gruppe gegenüber auch Anschuldigungen, dass in ihrem Namen Morde ausgeführt worden seien. *Dunn* (August 2010) erwähnt weitere Berichte von Entführungen, Ausübung von Gewalt und Belästigungen durch *Eastern Lightning*-Mitglieder mit dem Ziel der «Bekehrung». Auch über Mitglieder von anderen christlichen Gruppierungen in China werde berichtet, dass sie Zwang und Gewalt anwendeten, um andere zu missionieren. Es handele sich jedoch um eine Minderheit von Mitgliedern neuer religiöser Bewegungen. Die Führungspersonen von *Eastern Lightning* unterstützten die Anwendung von Gewalt nicht, könnten dies aber nicht bei allen ihrer Anhängerinnen und Anhänger durchsetzen. Gemäss einem Artikel der *New York Times* vom 11. Juni 2014 hat *Eastern Lightning* zwar eine Reputation für Zwangsmissionierung, die Kritiker als Gehirnwäsche beschreiben, sei aber nicht für Gewalt bekannt.

Missionierung durch Wanderpredigerinnen und -prediger. Wie bei anderen Mitgliedern von *Eastern Lightning* handelt es sich laut *Dunn* (August 2010) bei Wanderpredigerinnen und -predigern normalerweise um Frauen, die älter als 30 Jahre sind. Sie verliessen ihr Heim und ihre Familie und reisten in andere Dörfer oder weit entfernte Provinzen, wo sie bei «Gastfamilien» von *Eastern Lightning* lebten und dort missionierten. Dies sei eine verbreitete Praxis. Damit führe *Eastern Lightning* die chinesische protestantische Vision der Verbreitung des Evangeliums von Ost nach West und die Aussendung von Missionarinnen und Missionaren ins ganze Land weiter fort. Jedoch scheine die Gruppe diesbezüglich einen besonders starken Druck auf Mitglieder auszuüben, sich als Wanderprediger zu betätigen.

Missionierung über Netzwerke und durch Infiltrierung anderer christlicher Gruppen. Laut *Dunn* (August 2010) klagten Mitglieder anderer christlicher Gruppen *Eastern Lightning*-Mitglieder an, sich als Protestanten auszugeben, an den Aktivitäten von Kirchengemeinden teilzunehmen und bei deren Mitgliedern Vertrauen aufzubauen, bevor sie diese von der Lehre von *Eastern Lightning* zu überzeugen versuchten. Diese Methode sei in den Texten der Gruppe beschrieben und diene dazu, das Risiko einer Verfolgung zu minimieren. Sie werde aber auch deshalb benutzt, weil sie sich als besonders effektiv erwiesen habe.

Emily Dunn, August 2010:

«The importance of proselytizing in both Eastern Lightning texts and individuals' religious practice is reflected in the impressive growth of the movement over the past twenty years. (...)

Eastern Lightning's texts present proselytizing as a duty common to all believers. (...) This is consistent with a strong norm of proselytizing in Chinese Protestantism. While the state prohibits citizens from «compelling» others to believe and stipulates that "No religious organization or believer should propagate or preach religion outside places designated for religious services", the phenomenal growth of Protestantism over the past quarter of a century could not have occurred without millions of believers actively promoting their faith, seeking to persuade their friends, family, colleagues and strangers of its veracity and efficacy. In interactions with Eastern Lightning, however, the roles are reversed as Protestants are proselytized. Eastern Lightning views all outside the movement as bound for hell, but focuses on evangelizing Protestants and members of Protestant-related new religious movements because they are thought less likely than the general population to inform the authorities of their activities, and no doubt also due to cultural and religious similarities.

*This chapter investigates the techniques used by Eastern Lightning in recruiting Protestants to their religion. It proceeds to introduce **four different methods**, information about each of which can be gleaned from four different texts. First, Eastern Lightning adherents distribute literature—most notably, anecdotes of karmic retribution and visions of supernatural phenomena—in an attempt to persuade its audience to put their trust in the Female Christ. Second, some adherents resort to abduction and physical coercion. Third, Eastern Lightning evangelists travel to areas of China where the group has little or no presence in order to establish new congregations. Fourth, Eastern Lightning adopts a clandestine approach which sees recruiters covertly gathering information on potential converts, and relying upon cultivated networks of social relations to attract them. (...)*

Anecdotal testimonies

Eastern Lightning members distribute religious texts to prospective recruits by introducing the materials during the course of a conversation, pressing them into the hands of strangers on the street, or leaving them in public locations such as train stations for passers-by to discover. (...)

Coercion

Protestants have expressed dismay at Eastern Lightning's proselytizing efforts from their first encounters with the group, depicting the group's teachings as heretical and its use of anecdotes of judgment as intimidating. In 2002, however, an incident of mass abduction brought their fear and indignation to fever pitch. The China Gospel Fellowship (中华福音团契 Zhonghua Fuyin Tuanqi), one of one of the nation's largest networks of unregistered Protestant churches, was formed in Tanghe County in the south of Henan province in the late 1970s. It has spread throughout China and now boasts an estimated membership of between 2.3 and 5 million. On April 16 2002,

members of Eastern Lightning abducted thirty-four of the network's most senior leaders, and held them against their will for up to two months in an attempt to convert them and, ultimately, their congregations. The scale and audacity of the act shocked many in the Chinese and overseas Protestant communities, and illustrated Eastern Lightning's organizational capacity and social and religious threat. In the days following the abduction, the China Gospel Fellowship (CGF) set up a website devoted to recounting the ordeal, to which they uploaded regular updates on the victims' welfare and later added theological critiques of Eastern Lightning.

*Given that the Chinese government and Protestants have been antagonistic towards Eastern Lightning from its inception and have an ideological and organizational interest in discrediting new religious movements, we do well to meet the report of the kidnappings with a degree of caution. This said, **the China Gospel Fellowship does not have a history of making false allegations, and is regarded as a mainstream evangelical church by most Christians both inside and outside China.** In addition, the Fellowship's written account of the abduction is **consistent with an account verbally related to me by one of the victims in Shenzhen in March 2006, and with multiple second-hand oral reports** that I received during my fieldwork from theologians, church leaders and lay Protestants who had been in contact with other victims. For these reasons, **I treat the CGF's reports of the incident as broadly accurate (...).***

(...)

The CGF reports that the Eastern Lightning captors initially seemed kind, but also accuses the latter of drugging them, using deception, sexual seduction and flirtation, bribing local police and threatening divine retribution at various later points during their detention. (...)

*Although the CGF incident is by far the largest-scale event of its kind orchestrated by Eastern Lightning to date, other abductions are frequently reported. In 2001, for example, Time interviewed a Catholic nun who had been abducted by Eastern Lightning for five days under the pretence of an invitation to preach in another village. **Protestants also frequently allege that Eastern Lightning uses violence to procure allegiance;** injuries including broken legs and severed ears were reportedly inflicted upon a nine believers in rural areas of Tanghe and Sheqi counties of Henan province in late 1998. In 2006, I spoke with Protestants who recounted **harassment such as pounding on doors in the depths of night, and evangelists refusing to leave their home until they made a commitment to the religion.***

*While allegations of violence and intimidation are most commonly made of Eastern Lightning, reports of coercion and violence between other Christian-related groups also lend credibility to reports of violence between Eastern Lightning and Protestants. Factionalism between Catholic communities in north China has seen violent clashes between Catholic villages and neighborhoods, and between priests ministering in registered and unregistered churches. Chinese judicial organs have also found that Eastern Lightning adherents have themselves fallen victim to another new religious movement, the Three Grades of Servant. **These activities***

indicate a pattern of internecine conflict which may involve only a small proportion of the membership of new religious movements, but has made a significant impact upon Protestants' perception and depiction of them.

*Coupled with Eastern Lightning's aforementioned denial of coercion, this evidence suggests that the highest level of Eastern Lightning's leadership does not condone the use of violence, but has proven unable to impress this upon some followers. Leadership is evidently unable to control the beliefs of adherents in the areas of the identity of the Female Christ and miracles and exorcisms; here, too, there is evidence that challenges the CCP's depiction of Eastern Lightning as «tightly organized», and leads us to question the extent to which Eastern Lightning's texts reflect religious practice. **Eastern Lightning's leadership forbids the use of violence, but some followers take matters into their own hands.** Such tactics, however, seem ultimately unfruitful. Just one of the 34 China Gospel Fellowship leaders who were captured was persuaded to switch religious affiliation. The incident catalyzed both domestic and international condemnation of Eastern Lightning, and led Protestants to increase their efforts to educate against it. In comparison, the sending of evangelists throughout the nation and use of networks of personal relations has proven far more effective in yielding converts. (...)*

Migrating evangelists

(...)

*Like other Eastern Lightning adherents, migrating or itinerant evangelists are usually women above the age of thirty. They leave their homes and husbands, children and possibly parents, and travel to other villages or distant provinces, where they may lodge with local Eastern Lightning «host families» (接待家庭 jiedai jiating) for months or even years. While it is unclear just what proportion of Eastern Lightning believers embark upon migratory or peripatetic evangelism (as opposed to evangelism within their local communities), **anecdotal evidence from Eastern Lightning and Protestant sources—together with the impressive growth of the movement across the nation—suggest that it is common.** (...)*

(...) Eastern Lightning continues the Chinese Protestant vision of sending the gospel from east to west, and its practice of dispatching missionaries throughout the nation. It does, however, appear to exert an unprecedented degree of pressure upon its evangelists to «do their bit» for the organization and their Almighty God. Some believers are reluctant to go, but their concerns are dismissed as they are told to sacrifice all in order that they might prove their loyalty to God, and bring more people before Him. (...)

“Sounding out and paving the way”

Protestant writing accuses Eastern Lightning evangelists of habitual deception. The proselytizers are said to pretend to be Protestants, participate in church communities and intentionally cultivate goodwill with potential converts. Only then do they reveal themselves to be Eastern Lightning believers and urge their audience to join the movement. (...)

Since Protestants have expressed strong interest in discrediting Eastern Lightning, allegations of underhand tactics must be met with caution. However, they are supported by sources emanating from Eastern Lightning, which suggest that the movement's unusual tactics have been developed in order to reconcile the conflicting imperatives of evangelism and personal security in the face of hostile authorities. (...)

(...) Eastern Lightning favors the strategy of «sounding out» in large part because it minimizes the risk of persecution; social bonds reassure the recruiter that the target is unlikely to turn them in to authorities. As Carsten Vala and Kevin O'Brien have argued in relation to recruitment to unregistered Protestant churches in north China, «networks reduce risks». The risks associated with proselytizing on behalf of Eastern Lightning are considerable indeed. (...) In addition to shielding the evangelist from persecution, Eastern Lightning uses the strategy of «sounding out» because it has proven to be effective in recruiting Protestants to the movement.»

Quelle: Dunn, Emily, Heterodoxy and Contemporary Chinese Protestantism: The Case of Eastern Lightning, Dissertation an der Universität Melbourne, August 2010, S. 132-135, 139-141, 144-145, 146, 151, 152, 156, 157, 159:

<https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/39832>.

IRB Canada, 16. Oktober 2014:

«2. Activities Attributed to the Church of Almighty God

(...)

According to the New York Times, 'the group is not known for violence' (11 June 2014). However, sources report that members of the group have been accused of committing violent acts, including murders (Xinhua 20 Aug. 2014; BBC 13 Aug. 2014; CNN 8 June 2014). In an interview with the BBC, a church member's relative said that "[t]he cult is anti-family ... [i]t throw[s] away family relationships and encourage each other to do the same" (quoted in BBC 13 Aug. 2014). He added that "[w]hoever is more resolute in rejecting their family is given a higher rank" (ibid.). Similarly, an Agence France-Presse (AFP) article indicates that according to Chinese state media, the church 'brainwashed its members and encourage them to isolate themselves from family and friends' (19 Aug. 2014). A Xinhua article indicates that in 'many' of the 'numerous suicides and murders' that the church's members have reportedly been responsible for, the victims were a family member of the perpetrator (Xinhua 20 Aug. 2014).

According to Xinhua, the Church of Almighty God has been 'illegally' collecting money (ibid.). The BBC wrote that the church's members have 'persuade[d] new members to hand over money in exchange for salvation' (13 Aug. 2014).» Quelle: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, China: The Church of Almighty God (Quannengshen), also known as 'Eastern Lightning,' including its leaders, location and activities attributed to it; treatment of members by authorities (March 2013-September 2014) [CHN104965.E], 16. Oktober 2014:

www.irb.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455559&pls=1.

New York Times, 11. Juni 2014:

«Last month, as she waited for her husband and 7-year-old son at a McDonald's in the eastern Chinese province of Shandong, Wu Shuoyan was approached by members of a Christian sect who were on an aggressive recruitment drive. After Ms. Wu refused to give them her number, several members of the group beat and kicked her to death, an act of brutality captured by cellphone and widely shared on the Internet.

Although the Chinese public's outrage initially focused on the many bystanders who failed to intervene, the national news media has sought to shift the indignation toward what the government calls "evil cults" — the roughly two dozen outlawed religious sects often demonized by the authorities as coercive and dangerous.

In the two weeks since the killing, state-run publications have produced a steady drumbeat of alarming articles detailing what they say are the predations of the Church of Almighty God, the group blamed for the McDonald's attack. On Tuesday, the Xinhua news agency said the authorities had rounded up about 1,500 cult members, although it appears many of those were arrested as early as 2012. (...)

Despite its reputation for coercive proselytizing that critics describe as brainwashing, the group is not known for violence (...).» Quelle: New York Times, Campaign to Crack Down on Fringe Sects in China Worries Mainstream Churches, 11. Juni 2014:

www.nytimes.com/2014/06/12/world/asia/china-rounds-up-hundreds-in-crackdown-on-fringe-sects.html?_r=0.

3 Einschränkungen der Religionsfreiheit und Verfolgung von *Eastern Lightning*-Mitgliedern

Einschränkungen der Religionsfreiheit in China. Gemäss dem Bericht zur internationalen Religionsfreiheit 2015 des *US Department of State* vom 10. August 2016 kontrolliert der chinesische Staat weiterhin die Religionsausübung und schränkt die Aktivitäten und die persönliche Freiheit von religiösen Personen laut Berichten von Nichtregierungsorganisationen und Medien ein, wenn diese als Bedrohung für die Interessen des Staates oder der Chinesischen Kommunistischen Partei wahrgenommen werden. Nur religiöse Gruppen, die zu einer der fünf vom Staat erlaubten «patriotischen religiösen Vereinigungen» («*patriotic religious associations*») (der buddhistischen, der taoistischen, der muslimischen, der katholischen und der protestantischen Vereinigung) gehören, sind befugt, sich bei den Behörden zu registrieren, und dürfen offiziell Gottesdienste abhalten.

Misshandlung, Inhaftierung, Festnahme, Folter, Verurteilung und Drangsalierung von Mitgliedern registrierter und nicht registrierter religiöser Gruppierungen durch die Behörden. Auch 2015 gab es gemäss *US Department of State* (10. August 2016) Berichte, dass die Regierung Anhängerinnen und Anhänger sowohl von registrierten als auch von nicht registrierten religiösen Gruppen wegen Aktivitäten im Zusammenhang mit ihrem religiösen Glauben und Religionspraktiken physisch misshandelte, inhaftierte, festnahm, folterte, zu Gefängnisstrafen verurteilte und drangsalierete.

Laut dem Jahresbericht 2016 der US-amerikanischen *Congressional-Executive Commission on China* (CECC) vom 6. Oktober 2016 haben Vertreterinnen und Vertreter der Chinesischen Kommunistischen Partei und der Regierung grosse Handlungsfreiheit, was Religionsausübung, innere Angelegenheiten und Glaubensinterpretationen anbelangt. Diesbezügliche Entscheidungen würden oft auf der Basis von Partei- und Regierungsinteressen getroffen.

Seit April 2016 liegt ein besonderer Fokus der Regierung auf religiösen Angelegenheiten. Laut CECC (6. Oktober 2016) beriefen Vertreterinnen und Vertreter der Regierung und der kommunistischen Partei im April 2016 die erste Nationale Konferenz zu Religiöser Arbeit seit 15 Jahren ein. Dies zeige, dass die Behörden religiöse Angelegenheiten in Zukunft prioritär behandeln möchten. Präsident Xi Jinping erklärte religiöse Angelegenheiten zu einem Gebiet von «besonderer Bedeutung» und wies Regierungs- und Parteibehörden an, sicherzustellen, dass Gläubige «patriotisch [sind], die nationale Einheit bewahren und den Gesamtinteressen der chinesischen Nation dienen». Er betonte, dass religiöse Gruppen eine «Brücke» zwischen Partei und Regierung einerseits und Gläubigen andererseits seien und daher die «Führung der Partei» und das chinesische politische System unterstützen müssen.

Eastern Lightning als Sekte eingestuft und gesetzlich verboten. Bestimmte religiöse und spirituelle Gruppierungen sind in China gemäss *US Department of State* (10. August 2016) gesetzlich verboten. Zu diesen gehört *Eastern Lightning*. Die Glaubensgemeinschaft gehört zu einer Reihe von christlichen Gruppen, die die chinesische Regierung als «böartige Sekten» («*evil cults*») einstuft. *IRB Canada* (16. Oktober 2014) zitiert die von der Nachrichtenagentur Xinhua angegebene Definition einer Sekte («*cult*»), die gemäss chinesischer Gesetzgebung eine «illegale Organisation ist, die Menschen durch die Vergöttlichung ihres Oberhauptes zu kontrollieren versucht, ihre Mitglieder unter dem Deckmantel der Religion täuscht sowie Aktivitäten betreibt, die der Gesellschaft schaden». Im Juli 2015 verabschiedete das *National People's Congress Standing Committee* (NPCSC) laut *US Department of State* (10. August 2016) ein Gesetz zur Nationalen Sicherheit, das «kultische Organisationen» («*cult organizations*») explizit verbietet.

Es drohen mehrjährige bis lebenslängliche Gefängnisstrafen. Laut IRB-Bericht vom 16. Oktober 2014 sieht das chinesische Strafgesetz für die aktive Partizipation bei einer verbotenen religiösen Gruppierung eine Gefängnisstrafe von drei bis sieben Jahren ohne Bewährung vor. In besonderen Fällen – «*if the circumstances are especially serious*» – kann das Strafmass auch auf über sieben Jahre Gefängnis ohne Bewährung angehoben werden. Gemäss *US Department of State* (10. August 2016) hat ein durch das NPCSC im August 2015 verabschiedeter Zusatz zum Strafgesetz die Höchststrafe für das «Organisieren und Benutzen einer Sekte, um die Umsetzung des Gesetzes zu untergraben» («*organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law*») von bis dahin 15 Jahren Gefängnis auf lebenslänglich erhöht.

Politisch motiviertes Vorgehen der chinesischen Behörden. Der Bericht des IRB vom 16. Oktober 2014 weist auf einen Bericht des *Guardian* vom 18. August 2014 hin, in dem argumentiert wird, dass die chinesischen Behörden grundsätzlich die Ausmerzung von *Eastern Lightning* anstreben würden. So sollen Mitglieder der Glaubensge-

meinschaft zur Zielscheibe behördlicher Verfolgung geworden sein, obwohl ihre Aktivitäten keine Gesetze verletzt hätten. Mit Verweis auf einen Artikel der *New York Times* vom 11. Juni 2014 wird im IRB-Bericht ausserdem ein Strafverteidiger zitiert, der das Vorgehen der Behörden als politisch motiviert bezeichnet. Dem stimmt laut IRB-Bericht auch das deutsche *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* zu. Es interpretiert die Vorgehensweise der chinesischen Behörden als politische Massnahme gegen eine ausdrücklich parteikritische Organisation.

Wiederholte Repressionswellen in den vergangenen Jahren. Als die Glaubensgemeinschaft im Dezember 2012 verkündete, der Weltuntergang würde unmittelbar bevorstehen, wurden laut IRB-Bericht vom 16. Oktober 2014 in insgesamt 16 chinesischen Provinzen 1300 Mitglieder von *Eastern Lightning* verhaftet. Sie wurden des Verbreitens von Gerüchten und der Schwindelei beschuldigt. Die meisten der Verhafteten wurden zu drei Jahren Gefängnis verurteilt, in einem Fall betrug das Strafmass allerdings acht Jahre.

Eine weitere Welle der Repression gegen Mitglieder von *Eastern Lightning* wurde gemäss demselben IRB-Bericht losgetreten, nachdem ein Mordfall in der Provinz Shandong im Mai 2014 mit der Gruppierung in Verbindung gebracht worden war. Der Mörder rechtfertigte seine Tat offenbar mit seiner Angehörigkeit zu *Eastern Lightning*. In den darauffolgenden Monaten wurden fast 1000 Mitglieder von *Eastern Lightning* festgenommen und im August 2014 waren bereits Haftstrafen gegen mehrere Dutzend von ihnen verhängt worden. Die Repressionswelle betraf darüber hinaus auch hunderte Angehörige weiterer nicht-anerkannter Glaubensgemeinschaften, die in dieser Phase gezielt bekämpft wurden.

Mitglieder von *Eastern Lightning* in ganz China verfolgt. Gemäss Email-Auskunft von *Emily Dunn*, Forscherin an der Universität von Melbourne, vom 18. Januar 2017 werden Mitglieder von *Eastern Lightning* in ganz China verfolgt. Unter Umständen würde diese Praxis von lokalen Behördenvertretern unterschiedlich gehandhabt.

US Department of State, 10. August 2016:

«The People's Republic of China's constitution states citizens have "freedom of religious belief" but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities" and does not define "normal." In practice, the government exercised state control over religion and restricted the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents when these were perceived to threaten state or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interests, according to nongovernmental organization (NGO) and international media reports. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant), are permitted to register with the government and are officially permitted to hold worship services.

Over this past year, there continued to be reports that the government physically abused, detained, arrested, tortured, sentenced to prison, or harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices. (...)

Certain religious or spiritual groups are banned by law. The criminal law defines banned groups as “cult organizations,” and those belonging to them can be sentenced to prison. A judicial explanation states this term refers to “those illegal groups that have been found using religions, qigong [a traditional Chinese exercise discipline], or other things as a camouflage, deifying their leading members, recruiting and controlling their members, and deceiving people by molding and spreading superstitious ideas, and endangering society.” There are no published criteria for determining, or procedures for challenging, such a designation. The government maintains a ban on the Guanyin Method Sect (Guanyin Famen or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), Zhong Gong (a qigong exercise discipline), and Falun Gong. The government also considers several Christian groups to be “evil cults,” including the Shouters, Eastern Lightning, Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church (Quan Fanwei Jiaohui), Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (San Ban Puren), Association of Disciples, Lord God Sect, Established King Church, Unification Church, Family of Love, and South China Church.

A National Security Law passed in July by the National People’s Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) explicitly bans “cult organizations.” An amendment to the criminal law passed by the NPCSC in August increases the maximum possible sentence for “organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law” from 15 years to life in prison.» Quelle: USDOS (US Department of State), 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom – China, 10. August 2016:

www.ecoi.net/local_link/328358/469137_de.html.

Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 6. Oktober 2016:

«In both law and practice, the Chinese government continued to violate the rights of its citizens to religious freedom, violating both the Chinese government’s international obligations and the standards set by China’s Constitution. Chinese Communist Party and government officials have broad discretion over religious practice, internal affairs, and interpretations of faith, which is often exercised based on Party and government policy interests.

Government and Party officials convened the first National Conference on Religious Work in 15 years in April 2016, signaling that officials aim to prioritize religious affairs. Chinese President and Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping declared religious affairs to be an area of “special importance” and directed government and Party authorities to ensure that religious believers are “patriotic, preserve national unity, and serve the overall interests of the Chinese nation.” Xi emphasized the Party view that religious groups are a “bridge” connecting the Party and government to religious believers and that groups must therefore support the “leadership of the Party” and the Chinese political system.» Quelle: CECC - Congressional-Executive Commission on China: Annual Report 2016, 6. Oktober 2016, S. 22-23:

www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1226_1476097497_2016-annual-report.pdf.

IRB, 16. Oktober 2014:

«3. Treatment by Authorities

3.1 Legal Status

Sources note that **the Church of Almighty God is among 14 ‘evil cults’ banned by Chinese authorities** (The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014; Xinhua 8 Aug. 2014; ChinaAid 19 June 2014). Xinhua specifies that **‘[a]ccording to Chinese law, a cult is an illegal organization that tries to control people by deifying the sect leader, deludes members under the guise of religion, and engages in activities that harm society’** (11 Oct. 2014). Article 300 of the Criminal Law of China establishes penalties for the ‘use’ of organizations considered as ‘sects’:

*Whoever forms or uses superstitious sects or secret societies or weird religious organizations or uses superstition to undermine the implementation of the laws and administrative rules and regulations of the State shall be **sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than three years but not more than seven years; if the circumstances are especially serious, he shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than seven years.*** (China 1979, Art. 300)

The Dui Hua foundation, an NGO based in San Francisco that monitors and advocates for the rights of detainees in China, notably those detained on religious and political grounds (Dui Hua n.d.), also refers to Article 300, stating that

*[u]nder Article 300 of the Criminal Law, individuals who participate in cult organizations may be charged with ‘organizing/using a cult to undermine implementation of the law’ and face prison sentences of 3-7 years. **According to a joint interpretation issued by the Supreme People’s Court and Supreme People’s Procuratorate in 1999, cult crimes can be applied when one ‘resists group bans by relevant departments, resumes banned groups, establishes other sects, or continues [illegal] activities.’*** (Dui Hua 10 July 2014)

According to the Guardian, authorities ‘have made **repeated attempts to eradicate’ the Church of Almighty God** (18 Aug. 2014). The BBC reports that members of the Church of Almighty God have accused authorities of ‘persecution’ (13 Aug. 2014). Human rights observers have criticized certain government actions against the Church of Almighty God (The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014; The New York Times 11 June 2014). The Guardian reports that **according to a Hong Kong-based researcher for Human Rights Watch, the government has “gone after members of Eastern Lightning for organising activities that [are not] against the law”** (18 Aug. 2014). Likewise, the New York Times quotes a defence lawyer as saying that **actions by authorities against the group were politically motivated and that they were an ‘effort to eradicate an entire group of believers, not just the ones who committed crimes’** (11 June 2014).

The Information Centre on Asylum and Migration of the German government’s Federal Office for Migration and Asylum (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF) states that **‘[o]ne reason why the authorities designate the sect as an ‘evil cult’ [...] is that it rejects the state and the [Communist] party,’** adding that ‘the Communist Party regards every group which organises itself outside the state structures as a potential threat to its power’ (BAMF 2 Jan. 2013). Reuters similarly

states that 'the party brooks no challenge to its rule and is obsessed with social stability,' adding that '[i]t has **cracked down on cults, which have multiplied across the country in recent years**' (Reuters 19 Aug. 2014).

3.2 Post- December 2012 Arrests

According to sources, over 1,300 members of the group throughout the country were arrested in connection to apocalyptic statements made by the group in December 2012 (US 10 Oct. 2013, 94; Dui Hua 29 Aug. 2013). Sources report that people were detained in 16 provinces (ibid.; US 10 Oct. 2013, 94). According to the Dui Hua foundation, 800 of these arrests were made in the provinces of Qinghai and Guizhou (Dui Hua 29 Aug. 2013). The US Department of State's Religious Freedom Report for 2012 notes that authorities also 'launched a media campaign against [members of the Church of Almighty God] for rumor mongering and swindling people' (US 20 May 2013, 12). (...)

3.4 May 2014 Killing in McDonald's and Reaction by Authorities

Multiple sources report that **the slaying of a woman in late May 2014 in Macdonald's restaurant in the city of Zhaoyuan, in Shandong province, was linked to members of the Church of Almighty God** (The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014; AP 11 June 2014; CNN 8 June 2014). The woman was reportedly publicly beaten to death after refusing to provide her phone number to six members of the group (ibid.; ChinaAid 19 June 2014; AP 11 June 2014). The incident was caught on video and broadcasted nationwide (Reuters 19 Aug. 2014; BBC 13 Aug. 2014; CNN 8 June 2014). Sources indicate the attack caused 'shock' (CNN 8 June 2014), 'public outrage' (BBC 13 Aug. 2014) and 'a national outcry' (Reuters 19 Aug. 2014) in the country. According to two sources, the Church of Almighty God accused the authorities of linking the murder to the group (The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014; CNN 8 June 2014).

Sources report that **authorities launched a crackdown on cults following the killing** (Reuters 19 Aug. 2014; The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014; AP 11 June 2014). According to sources, authorities announced in June 2014 that over 1,500 cult members had been detained (The Guardian 18 Aug. 2014; The New York Times 11 June 2014; AP 11 June 2014). Sources reported that it was also announced that 59 individuals had been sentenced for up to four years imprisonment under charges of "using a cult [organisation] to undermine enforcement of the law" (AP 11 June 2014; The New York Times 11 June 2014). However, some of the arrests reportedly went back to two years and also involved alleged members of another group known as the Disciples Sect (ibid.; AP 11 June 2014). AP stated that '[r]eports of the detentions appeared to be an effort to reassure the public following outrage over violence and other illegal activity blamed on cult adherents' (ibid.).

In August 2014, Chinese authorities announced that 'nearly 1,000' alleged members of the Church of Almighty God have been arrested since June 2014 (AFP 19 Aug. 2014; Xinhua 19 Aug. 2014; Reuters 19 Aug. 2014). According to Xinhua, those arrested were 'allegedly involved in more than 500 [separate] cases' (19 Aug. 2014). AFP noted that the arrests included "high-level organizers and backbone members" and that those arrested reportedly came from six different provinces (AFP

19 Aug. 2014). According to Reuters, '**China has sentenced dozens of followers' of the Church of Almighty God since the killing in the McDonald's restaurant** (Reuters 19 Aug. 2014).

The ChinaAid Association, an NGO that monitors and promotes religious freedom in China (ChinaAid 19 Feb. 2012), reported that there were concerns among Chinese Christians 'that the government will escalate their persecution of house churches through the front of combating cult organizations' (ibid. 19 June 2014). The New York Times likewise reports that 'some Chinese religious leaders worry that campaigns against heterodox groups will spill over and affect congregations that are doctrinally mainstream but unsanctioned by the Communist Party, which seeks to manage all religious activity' (11 June 2014).» Quelle: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, China: The Church of Almighty God (Quannengshen), also known as 'Eastern Lightning,' including its leaders, location and activities attributed to it; treatment of members by authorities (March 2013-September 2014) [CHN104965.E], 16. Oktober 2014: www.irb.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455559&pls=1.

4 Ist eine legale Ausreise aus China trotz Verfolgung respektive Verdacht der Zugehörigkeit zu einer christlichen Gruppierung möglich?

Rechtliche Grundlagen für ein Ausreiseverbot. In seinem Bericht vom März 2014 legt das *Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation* (ACCORD) die Umstände dar, unter denen die chinesischen Behörden bestimmten Personen die Ausreise aus China verweigert. Demnach wird eine Person am Verlassen des Landes gehindert, sofern ein strafrechtliches Urteil gegen sie ausgesprochen, aber noch nicht vollzogen wurde. Auch Personen, die sich in einem unabgeschlossenen Zivilprozess befinden, wird die Ausreise verwehrt. Darüber hinaus kann eine Person daran gehindert werden, China zu verlassen, wenn sie als Gefahr für die nationale Sicherheit eingestuft oder beschuldigt wird, nationalen Interessen zuwiderzuhandeln. Personen, die im Verdacht stehen, die Ausreisebedingungen nicht zu erfüllen, können beim Versuch, das Land zu verlassen, an Ort und Stelle verhört werden.

Ausreiseverbote werden durchgesetzt. Gemäss demselben Bericht werden diese Bestimmungen sowohl an Flughäfen als auch an anderen Grenzübergängen durchgesetzt. In verschiedenen Fällen nannten Grenzbeamte in der Vergangenheit gegenüber chinesischen Bürgerinnen und Bürgern die «Gefährdung der nationalen Sicherheit» als Grund für das Verweigern der Ausreise.

Sicherheitsdienste an Flughäfen haben Zugriff auf Polizeidaten. Im IRB-Bericht vom 6. März 2014 ist festgehalten, dass die Geheimhaltung der chinesischen Behörden es enorm erschweren, die spezifischen Taktiken und Methoden der Behörden zu durchschauen. Es gibt jedoch Hinweise darauf, dass die Sicherheitsdienste der Flughäfen Zugang zur Onlinedatenbank des Chinesischen Büros für Öffentliche Sicherheit haben. Sie haben entsprechend Zugriff auf Informationen zu gerichtlich verurteilten oder polizeilich gesuchten Personen. Sofern

eine Person in der entsprechenden Datenbank erfasst ist, kann sie daher von den Sicherheitsdiensten beim Versuch der Ausreise identifiziert werden.

ACCORD, März 2014:

«Article 12 Under any of the following circumstances, Chinese citizens are not allowed to exit China:

(1) Hold no valid exit/entry documents, or refuse or evade border inspection;

(2) Are sentenced to criminal punishments, the execution of which have not been completed, or are suspects or defendants in criminal cases;

(3) Are involved in unsettled civil cases and not allowed to exit China upon decision of the people's courts;

(4) Are subject to criminal punishment for impairing border administration, or are repatriated by other countries or regions due to illegal exit from China, illegal residence or illegal employment, and the No-Exit-from-China period has not expired;

(5) May endanger national security or interests, and are not allowed to exit China upon decision by competent departments under the State Council; or

(6) Other circumstances in which exit from China is not allowed in accordance with laws or administrative regulations. (...)

The Exit and Entry Administration Law further stipulates in its Articles 59, 65, 66, 67, 68 and 69 of Chapter 6:

“Article 59 Persons suspected of violating the regulations on exit/entry administration may be interrogated on the spot; upon on-the-spot interrogation, the aforesaid persons may be interrogated in continuation in accordance with the law under any of the following circumstances:

(1) Are suspected of illegally exiting or entering China;

(2) Are suspected of assisting others in illegally exiting or entering China;

(3) Are foreigners suspected of illegally residing or working in China; or

(4) Are suspected of endangering national security or interests, disrupting social or public order, or engaging in other illegal or criminal activities.

On-the-spot interrogation and continued interrogation shall be conducted in accordance with the procedures prescribed in the People's Police Law of the People's Republic of China.

Where public security organs under local people's governments at or above the county level or exit/entry border inspection authorities need to summon the persons suspected of violating the regulations on exit/entry administration, they shall handle the matter in

accordance with the relevant regulations of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Penalties for Administration of Public Security. [...]

Article 65 Where persons are not allowed to exit or enter China upon decisions made in accordance with the law, the decision-making authorities shall duly inform the exit/entry border inspection authorities of such decisions in accordance with relevant regulations; where the circumstances in which the persons are not allowed to exit or enter China disappear, the decision-making authorities shall duly cancel the aforesaid decisions and inform exit/entry border inspection authorities of the cancellation.

Article 66 On the basis of the need for safeguarding national security and maintaining the order of exit/entry administration, exit/entry border inspection authorities may, when necessary, search the persons entering and exiting the country. Personal Search shall be conducted by two border inspectors who are the same sex as the persons subject to the search. (...)

The US Department of State (USDOS) notes in its annual report on human rights of February 2014:

"The government exercised exit control for departing passengers at airports and other border crossings and utilized this exit control to deny foreign travel to dissidents and persons employed in sensitive government posts. Throughout the year lawyers, artists, authors, and other activists were at times prevented from freely exiting the country. Border officials and police cited threats to 'national security' as the reason for refusing permission to leave the country. Authorities stopped most persons at the airport at the time of the attempted travel. (...)" (USDOS, 27 February 2014, section 2d)» Quelle: ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation, China: COI Compilation – March 2014, März 2014, S. 305ff:
www.ecoi.net/file_upload/90_1396338234_accord-2014-03-china.pdf.

IRB, 6. März 2014:

«The Laogai Research Foundation representative noted that, in addition to monitoring and restricting the movements of political dissidents, the authorities also "often monitor and harass" their family members, including by denying them permission to travel abroad (26 Feb. 2014). The representative noted that his organization has "no evidence that the Chinese authorities routinely target the families of individuals charged with committing non-political crimes" (Laogai Research Foundation 26 Feb. 2014). He also stated that

[i]t should be noted that **Chinese secrecy laws make it extraordinarily difficult to obtain accurate information on politically sensitive subjects, such as restrictions on the freedom of travel As such, it is often impossible to obtain official records regarding surveillance techniques and capabilities, criminal investigations in politically sensitive cases, the treatment of certain ethnic minority groups, and procedures involved in restricting the ability of an individual to travel. Moreover, despite recently announced intent to clarify the**

content of state secrets laws, such regulations remain vague and subject to the discretion of Communist Party officials. (ibid.) (...)

3. Information Sharing by Public Security Officials

*In 10 February 2014 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Executive Director of the Dui Hua Foundation affirmed that **airport security officials have access to the Public Security Bureau of China's online database of citizens who have been convicted of crimes or are wanted by the authorities** [also known as Policenet or the Golden Shield]. Similarly, the representative of the Laogai Research Foundation stated that reports on "experiences of activists who have been detained while trying to board an international flight provide clear evidence that airport officials are connected to Policenet" (26 Feb. 2014). A colleague of Cao Shunli, who was also prevented from travelling to Geneva for the human rights training in September 2013, later publicized her own experience at the airport in Guangdong (HRIC 11 Oct. 2013). According to the Laogai Research Foundation, the colleague indicates that when her passport was swiped by airport authorities,*

scanning equipment immediately made noises alerting airport officials that she was wanted by police. She was subsequently detained in the Guangdong Baiyun Airport and told that Shanghai police would not let her leave. She was then transported from Guangdong to Shanghai for detention and questioning. This woman's experience provides concrete evidence of airport officials coordinating with police departments in tracking and detaining a political dissident. (26 Feb. 2014) (...)

4. Security and Exit Control Procedures

The representative of the Laogai Research Foundation wrote that the

*Chinese government checks the passports of citizens attempting to leave the country in order to ensure that they are suitable for foreign travel. Customs officials stamp the passports of citizens approved for foreign travel. **Public security officials often confiscate passports held by individuals deemed unsuitable for foreign travel.** (23 Feb. 2014») Quelle: IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, China: Exit controls and security measures at airports for Chinese citizens travelling overseas, including procedures at check points and the use of computerized identity verification; sharing of information with officials at airports (2011-February 2014) [CHN104761.E], 6. März 2014: www.ecoi.net/local_link/287615/421569_de.html.*