

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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> Responses to Information Requests

## Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment please email [Basesdedonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca](mailto:Basesdedonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca).

14 October 2014

### CHN104970.E

China: Religious texts used by the Church of the Almighty God (Eastern Lightning)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### 1. Relationship to Christianity and to the Bible

Sources describe the Church of the Almighty God (*Quannengshen*), also known as Eastern Lightning, as being a "quasi-Christian" group (*The Guardian* 18 Aug. 2014; Dui Hua 17 Dec. 2012; US n.d.). Some Christian groups consider the Church of Almighty God to be "heretical" (*The Guardian* 18 Aug. 2014; Australia 19 Mar. 2013, 15).

The group believes that Jesus Christ has been incarnated as a Chinese woman (China Source 4 Apr. 2014; Dunn Jan. 2009, 98; Chan and Bright 2005). The Dui Hua Foundation [1] explains that the group "believes that divine revelation has identified a 'female Christ' who will reign over a new age in which humankind will be judged and only believers will survive" (Dui Hua 17 Dec. 2012) .

In addition, a 31 March 2014 article about the Church of Almighty God published on the ChinaSource [2] website states that the group "denies the Trinity and subscribes to a completely modalistic view of God," explaining that "[t]hey say that when Jesus speaks of the Father he is merely speaking from a human perspective. When he prays to the Father, he does so from the perspective of a created being" (ChinaSource 31 Mar. 2014).

The Associated Press (AP) states that the group follows an "unorthodox reading of Christian scripture" (AP 11 June 2014). In a 2005 article in the *Christian Research Journal*, published by the Christian Research Institute [3], the authors state that the Church of Almighty God

believes that the Bible is out-of-date and that those who limit God's revelation to just the Bible are like the Pharisees who held on to the Old Testament and rejected Christ. Followers are told to give up the truth of the past and build their foundation on the Holy Spirit's word for today: the writings of the "female Christ," which are "God's new word". (Chan and Bright 2005)

Similarly, in a scholarly article on the Church of Almighty God, Emily C. Dunn, a scholar at the Asia Institute of the University of Melbourne, who wrote her doctoral dissertation on the group, states that "Eastern Lightning presents its teachings as fulfilling the prophecies of both Old and New Testaments, but also argues that overzealous adherence to the Bible and misinterpretations of it prevent Christians from accepting God's new work" (Dunn Jan. 2009, 100). Dunn's full article is provided as an attachment to this Response to Information Request.

According to ChinaSource, the core teaching of the Church of Almighty God is as follows:

[t]he Trinity is a false doctrine. Instead, one God simply used different names in the three different ages:

- God was called "Jehovah" in the Age of Law (the Old Testament period).
- He was called "Jesus" in the Age of Grace (from the time of Jesus until, presumably, the early 1990s when Eastern Lightning started).
- He is called "The Almighty God" in this final Kingdom Age (and currently The Almighty God is a certain Chinese woman). (ChinaSource 4 Apr. 2014)

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, Dunn explains that the group believes that God's "interaction with humankind" has been marked by three ages:

[t]he first of these, the Age of Law (*lüfa shidai*), corresponds with the events of the Old Testament. Eastern Lightning adopts a chronology which is based on a literal interpretation of the Bible, and believes that the events spanning the Age of Law (i.e. from the creation of the world to the birth of Christ) occurred over a period of four thousand years. During this time, God revealed himself as Yahweh, and his principal 'work' was to create the world, lead the Israelites out of Egypt and give them his commandments.

The birth of Jesus marked the end of the Age of Law and the beginning of the Age of Grace (*endian shidai*), which covered events up until the advent of the Female Christ. Jesus was compassionate and loving, and during this time the divine mission was to die on the cross for the redemption of humans. However, Eastern Lightning teaches that Jesus was "only a normal man" until he began his ministry at the age of twenty-nine, three years prior to his crucifixion. This doctrine is supported with reference to Matthew 3:16, which records that immediately after Jesus' baptism, "heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him."

Eastern Lightning teaches that Jesus only partially completed the work of salvation. Although he offered himself as a sacrifice for sin, "men" continue to be "corrupted" (*baihuai*) by Satan; while Jesus' death has enabled the forgiveness of their sin, their sinful nature remains fundamentally unaltered.

It is for the transformation of this sinful nature that the Almighty God, through the Female Christ, is working in the present Age of The Kingdom (*guodu shidai*). Just as Jesus "did a newer work beyond the Old Testament", the Female Christ is today extending God's New Testament mission by "transforming people's nature" (*bianhua ren de benxing*). This is also referred to as "the work of conquering" (*zhengfu de zuogong*) or "the work of perfecting" (*chengquan de zuogong*). Despite appealing to the Bible to support its teachings, Eastern Lightning claims that since it does not prophesy the Female Christ's work in the present age, it is "outdated" and "aged and moldy" [*sic*]. (Dunn 5 Oct. 2014)

## 2. Religious Texts

The 31 March 2014 ChinaSource article states that "Eastern Lightning has produced more than 30 religious books" (ChinaSource 31 Mar. 2014). The authors of the *Christian Research Journal* article state that the group "has published numerous books, including *The Word Becomes Flesh* and *The Lightning Comes from the East*, and distributed hundreds of thousands of copies in China" (Chan and Bright 2005). A translation by the Dui Hua Foundation of a 2012 article on the group published in *Chinese Business View* (a newspaper distributed in Shaanxi) identifies similarly named publications *The Word Appears in the Flesh* and *Lightning from the East* as being distributed in China, adding that some of the group's publications include: *Almighty God, How Great You Are* (also known as *Sing a New Song with the Lamb*); *Christ's Words* (also known as *Judgment Begins with the Family of God*); *Works of the Spirit*; *Kingdom of Praise*; *Hymns of Truth*; and *New Songs* (*China Business View* 14 Dec. 2012). The authors of the 2005 *Christian Research Journal* article also add that "two of the books that are distributed among Chinese churches in America are titled *The Holy Spirit Speaks to All the Churches* and *God's Work through His Secret Appearing*" (Chan and Bright 2005).

According to the 31 March 2014 ChinaSource article, "the author of most, if not all, of these books purports to be Christ and the Almighty God. Usually the author talks about God in the third person but sometimes uses the first person" (ChinaSource 31 Mar. 2014). The authors of the *Christian Research Journal* article state that the content of the group's books "is nearly identical" and that "[m]uch of it is written in first person, as if by their 'female Christ,'" (Chan and Bright 2005).

Dunn explains in her 2009 article that,

Eastern Lightning's cosmology is presented in its sacred writings—a hefty tome entitled *The Word Appear[s] in the Flesh* (n.d.) (Hua zai roushen xianxian). Chinese Protestant reports of Eastern Lightning confirm that adherents regard this volume as canonical, and believe it to have been written by Eastern Lightning's deity, the Almighty God or Female Christ ...

The titles of the scripture have changed over time as new pronouncements have been added; this may also assist the group in evading detection by public security organs. Earlier versions of Eastern Lightning's scripture have included the titles *Lightning from the East* (Dongfang fachu de shandian) and *The Holy Spirit Speaks to the Churches* (Shengling xiang zhong jiaohui shuohua). (Dunn Jan. 2009, 97)

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, Dunn further states that the Church periodically publishes excerpts of the scriptures under different titles, eg "The Scroll that the Lamb has Opened" (c. 2006); "The Ark in the End-times" (c. 2012). In addition, the Church publishes hundreds of hymns under the title "Sing a New Song with the Lamb", collections of leaders' sermons, and also many compilations of anecdotes / testimonies from adherents. (Dunn 5 Oct. 2014)

### 3. Familiarity of Adherents with the Group's Teachings and Publications

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, Dunn indicated that the doctrines she believes all adherents of the Church of Almighty God would be familiar with are as follows:

1. Christ has returned as an 'ordinary' Chinese woman, who began speaking 'God's word' around 1991.
2. The Chinese Communist Party is the 'big red dragon' of the Book of Revelation --- an incarnation of Satan, persecuting God's elect. This dragon will be vanquished.
3. Unbelievers, including mainstream Christians, are bound for hell and may be punished in this lifetime in the form of lightning strikes, illness, accident or other forms of misfortune.
4. [A] division of history into three eras. [as explained above] (ibid.)

Dunn further states that, among the religious texts published by the Church of Almighty God, *The Word Appear[s] in the Flesh* is best known, and should be known throughout China. Note, however, that it is possible that some adherents do not read it thoroughly. Scholars of religion often observe that Chinese believers tend to believe in whatever is efficacious (i.e., whatever seems to work for them). They are not always concerned about the finer points of doctrine / scripture, and many adherents are reported to have a low level of literacy. (ibid.)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In her 2009 article, Dunn notes that

the group's literature can be downloaded from its websites, and comparison of these versions with hard copies distributed by Eastern Lightning in the People's Republic of China (PRC) confirms that the content on the web is the same as the material circulating on the ground. These texts can thus be regarded as representing the group's "official" doctrine, even if they cannot tell us how individuals interpret them. (ibid. Jan. 2009, 97)

English-language websites purporting to be operated by the Church of Almighty God claim to provide access to publications from the group including "Selected Pieces" from *The Word Appears in the Flesh* (Church of Almighty God n.d.a; ibid. n.d.b).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### Notes

[1] The Dui Hua Foundation is an NGO based in San Francisco which monitors and advocates for those detained in China, notably on religious and political grounds (Dui Hua n.d.).

[2] ChinaSource identifies itself as "a resource founded in 1997 in response to a growing need within the faith-based community for accurate information on China and its church" (ChinaSource n.d.).

[3] Based in Charlotte, North Carolina, the Christian Research Institute states that it "exists to provide Christians worldwide with carefully researched information and well-reasoned answers that encourage them in their faith and equip them to intelligently represent it to people influenced by ideas and teachings that assault or undermine orthodox, biblical Christianity" (CRI n.d.).

#### References

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## Additional Sources Consulted

**Publications:** *The Big Red Dragon and Indigenizations of Christianity in China*.

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact the Church of Almighty God were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response. A professor of World Christianity at Duke University was unable to provide information for this Response.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International; Asia Harvest; Asian Human Rights Commission; Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation; China Christian Council; China Church Voices; China Daily; China Digital Times; Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry; *The Christian Science Monitor*; Christianity Today; ecoi.net; Factiva; Global China Center; Global Times; Human Rights Watch; Human Rights Without Frontiers International; OMF International; Radio Free Asia; UK – Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Home Office; UN – Refworld; US – Department of State.

## Attachment

Dunn, Emily C. January 2009. "'Cult,' Church, and the CCP: Introducing Eastern Lightning." *Modern China*. Vol. 35, No. 1. <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/224620665/Cult-Church-And-the-CCP-Introducing-Eastern-Lightning>> [Accessed 30 Sept. 2014]

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