

October 18, 2017

## Background

The Church of Almighty God (CAG), also known as Eastern Lightning (EL), is one of the religious groups most severely persecuted by the Chinese Communist government. Chinese Communist Party (CCP) itself does not deny the severity of the persecution of CAG, but maintains that it is justified by CAG's criminal activities, including a horrific case of homicide. But these are completely false accusations and mere slanders.

CCP's propaganda has been massive, and successful in persuading even some respected Western media that CAG killed a customer in a McDonald's diner in Zhaoyuan, Shandong Province in 2014. The Zhaoyuan murder did indeed happen, but the crime, which we unreservedly condemn, was perpetrated by a different religious group and had no connection with our Church at all. This is also the conclusion all Western scholars who studied CAG came to, after examining documents and reports published not by CAG but by CCP-related Chinese official sources. Please refer to our press release on the incident:

<https://www.holyspiritspeaks.org/truth-emerges/>

Since 2017, CCP has tried to mobilize influential voices of American and Western experts, scholars, journalists, and patriotic emigrant leaders to generate favorable media comments overseas. Within this context, it has utilized an old rumor about a kidnapping incident that was created by China Gospel Fellowship (CGF) early in 2002, in order to influence Westerners and justify its persecution of CAG. As for the kidnapping of CGF leaders and co-workers in 2002, those with discernment and knowledge of the actual state of religion in China would easily be able to see that the story is full of contradictions, and reach the conclusion that the incident is completely fabricated.

## CGF's Story

Readers ignoring the Chinese context and background may perhaps be impressed by the fact that reports about the alleged kidnapping appeared on the Websites of CGF and other groups connected with CGF while it was reportedly taking place, and they were later novelized in books, such as the ghost-written *Kidnapped by a Cult*. Moreover, some of the CGF leaders, i.e. the very persons who had a vested interest in inventing the kidnapping story, asked to be interviewed by Western journalists and others and repeated their fabricated version. All these circumstances would easily cause some to believe this one-sided story. However, just by paying a little more attention, they would be able to conclude that the reports are contradictory and inconsistent and their falsity is obvious.

Summing up, the kidnapping story invented by CGF reads as such:

1. On April 30, 2001, introduced by two CGF sisters who were later said by CGF to be CAG's double agents, Brother Yang, a CGF preacher, met a Mr. Lian, and learned that he was the general secretary of Singapore's Haggai Leadership Institute. Yang was told that Haggai was willing to help the House Churches in China train their leaders and co-workers. Since Haggai

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.holyspiritspeaks.org/statement/>

was an institution they respected, CGF leaders were very happy to work with it. In June 2001, Yang and Brother Shen, who was a primary leader of CGF, met Mr. Lian again to further discuss their cooperation on the training plan, and submitted the resumes of CGF leaders and co-workers who would participate in the training. The resumes included their offices in the church, family condition, church status, phone numbers, pictures, and photocopies of their ID cards.

2. In March 2002, the person they knew as Mr. Lian of Haggai called Yang again and asked to meet and talk about the training in detail. They met again, together with two CGF leaders both named Shen, and Mr. Yu, who was introduced to them as the vice-president of Haggai, indicated the attendants and the way to carry out the training plan. On April 13, 2002, the two Shens and Zhang, all top leaders of CGF, confirmed the final training plan with Mr. Yu, Mr. Lian, and a lady who said to be from the finance department of Haggai.

3. On April 16, 2002, the 34 primary CGF leaders and co-workers traveled to six places in different provinces according to their final plan. Accounts vary, but agree on the fact that they (and presumably their friends and relatives at home) did have the telephone numbers of the locations. Although they were not told about the addresses, at least in some instances they figured them out.

4. Training started on April 17. The CGF leaders were told to surrender their cell phones for security reasons. After a few days, they realized that the training was not led by Haggai, but by CAG. They were not allowed to leave the premises, where they were submitted to intense indoctrination and different forms of pressure.

5. Although they were prevented from leaving the places where they were held, at least two CGF leaders were able to escape (and found out the exact address of the home where they had been confined). Although initially reluctant to involve the police, because CGF was itself a group condemned by CCP as an “evil cult” and persecuted in China, they finally overcame their fears and went to Beijing to report to the police. After that, police pressure induced CAG to release 34 kidnapped leaders and co-workers in succession within about two months, except one who had converted to CAG.

### **Why CGF Story Cannot Be True**

1. CCP’s persecution of CAG started in 1991. Hundreds of thousands of its leaders and members were mercilessly hunted, arrested, placed in jails, tortured, and not a few of them died or “disappeared” while in custody. Monitors were installed in the streets in every city and province, and every residential and village committee was used by CCP to strictly monitor outsiders. Significant rewards were offered and paid to those who denounced CAG members to the police. We could only carry out some limited underground religious activity in China in order to avoid being captured and sent to jail, or worse. That, operating under this condition, CAG was able to imprison and detain leaders and co-workers of CGF for about two months is utterly unbelievable.

2. A key point readers of the more or less novelized accounts and cliffhangers produced by CGF and other Christian groups may miss is that in 2002 CGF was itself regarded as an “evil cult” by Chinese authorities and persecuted. Indeed, when caught, some CGF members were tortured to death (see e.g. <http://www.hrichina.org/chs/content/2988>, and <http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/1/3/18/n59604.htm>). We acknowledge that CGF was and is a large religious group, who was able to successfully train its members to withstand CCP’s brutal

persecution. A key part of this training was impressing on CGF members that under no conditions the names and whereabouts of CGF leaders and co-workers should be disclosed to strangers. CGF leaders stayed out of jail only because CGF had been successful in keeping their inside information secret, and thus CCP did not know who and where they were. We are asked to believe that, in this situation, when a Mr. Lian, unknown to them, asked CGF to supply names, offices in the church, family condition, church status, phone numbers, pictures, and the photocopies of their ID cards of the top CGF leaders and co-workers in China, they immediately gave the information to him incautiously, without any in-depth check of Mr. Lian's identity or background. It was unthinkable. Moreover, this breach of all rules CGF operated under, and suicidal mistake, should have been made not by a common member but by the top leaders with high safety awareness and knowledge of the identity and whereabouts of primary leaders and co-workers of the group in China. Who would believe such a story?

3. CGF maintains that they trusted Mr. Lian because he mentioned the name of the Haggai Leadership Institute, and they knew and respected Haggai. Again, this may impress Western readers unfamiliar with the religious situation prevailing in China in 2002. There, it was well known by most Christians that Haggai was cooperating and working with China State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) as well as with the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and China Christian Council (CCC) (see e.g. <https://web.archive.org/web/20171008125624/ziyouxing.772077.com/index.php/Mobile/category/article/id/19.html>). SARA, TSPM, and CCC have been known to most Chinese Christians as CCP's instruments to control Christianity in China and persecute unrecognized "House Churches" such as CGF. Accordingly, the last organization CGF would have trusted would have been Haggai, who had been in long-term cooperation with the CCP, and certainly no CGF leader would have supplied Haggai with details of the CGF hierarchy in different provinces. This would have been tantamount to giving the names and addresses of CGF leaders and co-worker to the Chinese Communist police.

4. It is hardly believable that CGF, being itself a religious group persecuted by the CCP, would have visited the police and disclosed to it the names of their 34 top leaders and co-workers, that they had successfully kept secret for several years. But, assuming for a moment this really happened, that the Chinese police reacted as described in CGF's story is simply impossible. It is argued that CGF had the phone numbers and the addresses at least of some locations where its leaders were being held. CCP was engaged from ten years by 2002 in a ruthless persecution of CAG, and it is well-known that Chinese authorities just love show trials, where the groups they condemned as "cults" will be defamed before both domestic and international audiences, so that people will be frightened away from the "cults." Had they been informed that CGF leaders had been kidnapped and were imprisoned by CAG, the Chinese police would have quickly realized that they had in their hands the best story, the mother of all weapons in their propaganda war against CAG. They would have immediately stormed the premises where CGF leaders were detained, arrested the CAG members involved, probably arrested the CGF leaders and elders as an added bonus as well (after all, they were leaders of a "cult" condemned as such by the CCP, too), dismantled both CGF and CAG with a single operation, and quickly celebrated a huge show trial inviting as many Chinese and international media as possible for vigorous promotion. That's what the CCP normally desires to do. But nothing of this happened.

We are simply told in CGF accounts of the so-called kidnapping incident that the higher authority in Beijing accepted this case, and the police “put pressure” on CAG, and then CAG quietly released the CGF leaders unharmed in succession, except the one who voluntarily remained with CAG. To get such a result, how the police “put pressure” on CAG? Why were there no details? As a very successful case of the police rescuing the victims, why did the government not publicize and report it at that time? If the fact were like what CGF said, the case, according to the Administrative Procedure Law, should have been transferred to the relevant Procuratorate for verification and prosecution after the public security organ had filed and investigated the case, and finally the People’s Court would have heard the case and tried the defendants. However, there were no police raids, no arrests, no trials. Could anybody be convinced by such a story?

5. While the arguments 1 to 4 above should settle the issue, we would like to add three reasons why the alleged kidnapping of CGF leaders would not make sense according to CAG theology and practice. First, it has been stipulated distinctly in CAG’s administrative decrees that “God’s household is not short of members, and there is no need to make up its numbers with people who have no use. All those who do not believe gladly must not be led into the church.” These are the words of Almighty God we must seriously abide by. That’s why our Church has strict requirements for admission. Only those who have true belief in Almighty God and attend Church meetings willingly can be admitted, after their applications are approved by Church leaders and deacons. Second, any sensible person should realize that kidnapping and holding people against their will is not exactly the best missionary strategy to persuade and convert them and gain the true heart of other believers. Third, according to our Church’s Principles for Expelling and Purging People, so far we have expelled from 300,000 to 500,000 members from CAG. We had no reasons to resort to extreme and bizarre maneuvers to gain some 30 more.

### **Why the Story Was Invented by CGF**

Interestingly, for the past ten years, the 2002 kidnapping incident of the CGF has not been one of the main tools of the CCP’s propaganda against CAG in China. The good reason for this is that the above inconsistencies would be immediately apparent to a Chinese audience and no one would take the fabrication for real. However, the story was told by CGF and was believed by some Western Christians, journalists, and others, based on the fact that CGF leaders belong to a large denomination, and that CGF itself was persecuted by CCP. This does not make the inconsistencies less striking, but raises the question why CGF invented and spread the story in the first place.

The answer is not difficult. Before 2002, there had been many believers of CGF joining CAG. The leaders of CGF were aware that they would lose their positions and salaries if too many of their members accepted Almighty God and converted to CAG. In order to deceive their members and keep them away from CAG, they had fabricated many rumors to slander and defame CAG. But they failed, as many co-workers and members of CGF kept joining CAG, including some nationally well-known leaders, such as Xie Qiang, who had been the leader of one of CGF missions (see e.g. <https://www.holyspiritspeaks.org/19-i-have-received-almighty-gods-great-salvation>). The massive outburst of conversions from CGF to CAG determined an unprecedented crisis within CGF, and the top leaders realized they had no way to stop losing their members. Even their regional leaders and elders were leaving CGF to join CAG, an organization they had been condemning and attacking. Rather than admitting their failures,

seeking the reasons why they lost their believers, and revising their hostility to CAG, CGF leaders disregarded Jesus' teaching, "do not bear false witness" (Mark 10:19), and invented the horrific kidnapping incident. The fundamental reason was that they wanted to deceive and frighten their members away from CAG, and at the same time to achieve their aim to discredit CAG and explain to their devotees and outsiders why so many of their members and leaders were leaving the CGF to join CAG.

After the so-called kidnapping reported by CGF in April 2002, a lot more believers and primary leaders of CGF joined the CAG (see more details at <https://www.kingdomsalvation.org/tiezheng-048.html>). This shows that even CGF's own members did not believe that the kidnapping really happened, which further proves that the incident was simply invented. Christians should remember that, as stated in the Ten Commandments, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16). Responsible media should refrain from repeating CGF's kidnapping story uncritically, without examining the gross inconsistencies that expose it as patently false.