

WHERE DID EASTERN LIGHTNING COME FROM?

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Contents

How I bumped into Eastern Lightning.....	2
Different names	2
A few basic beliefs	2
Historical background	3
Watchman Nee	3
Witness Lee.....	4
Witness Lee and the doctrine of the Trinity.....	4
Witness Lee and the Shouters	7
The “Shouters” and the “Local Churches” (地方教会)	7
Some Shouters and the Trinity.....	8
The “Lord Changshou” sect.....	8
Eastern Lightning	9
Zhao Weishan—Founder of Eastern Lightning.....	9
The female Christ—Yang Xiangbin	12
1991 to 1993—Transition to Eastern Lightning	14
1995 Ministry of Public Security document	14
2000—Flight to America	15
Married with a kid?	15
Organizational Structure	17
He Zhexun talks.....	18
December 2012—Public Demonstrations	20
A few Eastern Lightning ideas	22
Miss Yang looks down on the Bible.....	22
What does the Bible say?	23
Miss Yang looks down on the cross	23

What does the Bible say?	23
Miss Yang wants to replace Jesus	23
What does the Bible say?	24

How I bumped into Eastern Lightning

I lived in China from 1999 to 2006. During that time I studied the Bible with two local friends. For several years, the two friends came to our house almost weekly. We ate together and studied the Bible together. They were quite zealous believers, and they were among my closest friends.

Not long after we left China in 2006 the younger friend joined the cult “Eastern Lightning.” He disappeared for three years. After three years he reappeared and got the older friend to join Eastern Lightning. We were very deeply saddened. Since then we have met with both friends once, and with the younger friend a second time to try to persuade them to leave the cult. We were unsuccessful.

In addition to being deeply saddened, I was puzzled. I was scratching my head. I thought to myself, “What a strange thing! Where on earth did it come from?”

In trying to help my friends, I’ve done a little research into the cult.

Tonight I want to share with you some information about where Eastern Lightning came from.

Different names

Eastern Lightning is known by different names. It is called “Eastern Lightning” (东方闪电). It is also called “The Church of the Almighty God” (全能神教会). This is what they mainly like to call themselves nowadays. It has also been called “The Real/Concrete God” (实际神) cult (as opposed to the “remote” God of the Bible).

A few basic beliefs

Here are a few of their basic beliefs:

Christ has already returned. The first time he came he was a Jew named Jesus. This time he is a Chinese woman.

There are three ages (or dispensations):

- The Age of Law (法律时代)—This is the Old Testament period.
- The Age of Grace (恩典时代)—This is the time of Jesus until the second incarnation of Christ.
- The Kingdom Age (国度时代)—This is the End Times, which apparently began sometime in the 1990’s.

Eastern Lightning denies the Trinity. Instead, they affirm that God simply used different names in the three different ages:

- God was called “Jehovah” in the Age of Law.
- He was called “Jesus” in the Age of Grace.
- He is called “The Almighty God” in this present Kingdom Age (and currently The Almighty God is a certain Chinese woman).

Historical background

Before we talk about Eastern Lightning itself, we need to talk about some history. Let’s begin our history lesson.

Watchman Nee

(倪柝声) (Fujian Province) (1903 – 1972)



Watchman Nee is the most famous Chinese Christian leader outside of China. He wrote many books and many foreign Christians read his books. I read one of his books in college and was encouraged and

edified. “In 1955, Watchman Nee was arrested in China, and remained in prison until his death in 1972.”¹

While Watchman Nee was a basically orthodox and influential Christian leader, he had some unusual views. His most famous unusual teaching was that denominations were wrong and that all believers in an area belong to the same local body. Churches in his group were known as Local Churches (地方教会) or Assembly Halls (聚会处). His group was also referred to as the Little Flock (小群).

Witness Lee

(李常受) (Shandong Province) (1905 – 1997)



Witness Lee became a follower and co-worker of Watchman Nee in China.

In 1949, Witness Lee went to Taiwan. In 1974, Witness Lee moved to the US. Witness Lee died in 1997.

Watchman Nee’s teachings were basically orthodox (正统), but Witness Lee’s weren’t.

Witness Lee and the doctrine of the Trinity

The theological connection between Witness Lee and Eastern Lightning is the doctrine of the Trinity.

¹ David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2003), 238.

The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity (三位一体) is that there is one God (一神) in three persons (三个位个).

This doctrine has been represented visually in the following way²:



As the diagram indicates, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are God, but the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father, etc.

Witness Lee denied that God was three persons.³ He considered the teaching that God is three persons to border on "tritheism." Witness Lee preferred the term "Triune God" (三一神) to the Term "Trinity"

² I copied this diagram by hand from p. 16 of Wing-chi So 蘇穎智, *Jiekai "Dongfang fachu de shandian" zhi miansha* 揭開《東方發出的閃電》之面紗 [The Woman Christ and Lightning from the East] (English title provided on copyright page), 3rd ed. (Hong Kong: Heart Publishers Ltd., 2013). Pastor So's diagram is apparently based on the traditional "Shield of the Trinity" or Scutum Fidei. See "Shield of the Trinity," *Wikipedia*, accessed, June 24, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shield_of_the_Trinity.

³ Though in places Witness Lee has referred to the "three persons" of the Godhead, his usual emphasis is that God is one person and that many in traditional Christianity separate the three too much and tend towards "tritheism." "The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not three separate persons or three Gods; they are one God, one reality, one person." Witness Lee, *The Triune God to Be Life to the Tripartite Man* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1996) under "The Triune God Being Processed to Be the Life-Giving Spirit" in chap. 5, <http://www.ministrybooks.org/alphabetical.cfm>.

(三位一体). He believed that the Father, the Son and the Spirit, though “distinct,” were one person. He believed that Jesus was the “Triune God mingled with man.”⁴ After Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus became the Spirit.⁵ Witness Lee always denied that his teaching was modalism (the heresy that asserts that God merely acted in different modes at different times and denies the three persons of the Godhead).⁶ Nevertheless, if it is not modalism it comes pretty close to it.⁷ Whatever the case, Witness Lee’s teachings and the changes they underwent in China were an important factor in the development of Eastern Lightning.

In China, Witness Lee’s quasi-modalistic teachings concerning the Trinity evolved into full-blown modalism. Witness Lee’s teachings underwent a number of mutations and transformations before becoming the Eastern Lightning doctrine that God was called “Jehovah” in the Old Testament, “Jesus” in the Age of Grace and now the “Almighty God” in the present Kingdom Age.

Leaving the Holy Spirit out of things for a minute, a pure common sense objection to complete modalism is that any person—believer or unbeliever—reading the New Testament gospels would see that Jesus and the Father are represented as two different persons. No one could honestly see them as the same entity. Jesus says he is sent by the Father (e.g., John 5:37) and he prays to the Father (e.g., John 17) and always speaks of the Father as though he is a separate person.

How does Eastern Lightning answer this objection? They 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:

耶稣当时祷告时称天上的神为父，只是站在一个受造的人的角度上称呼的……⁸

This is remarkably similar to Witness Lee’s argument concerning the same issue. In *Concerning the Triune God*, Witness Lee addresses the question in the following way:

⁴ Witness Lee, *God’s New Testament Economy* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1986), Kindle edition, under “God Manifest in the Flesh” in chap. 2. Online version available at <http://www.ministrybooks.org/alphabetical.cfm>.

⁵ “The Son who became flesh died and resurrected and became the life-giving Spirit.” Ibid., under “The Spirit, as the Son, with the Father—the Consummation of the Triune God” in chap.1.

⁶ Witness Lee, *The Crucial Points of the Major Items of the Lord’s Recovery Today* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1993) under “Note—What Is the Heresy of Modalism?” under “I. The Triune God,” <http://www.ministrybooks.org/alphabetical.cfm>.

⁷ There are different views among evangelicals about the orthodoxy of Witness Lee’s teachings. See, e.g., Elliot Miller, “Cultic, Aberrant or (Unconventionally) Orthodox? A Reassessment of the ‘Local Church’ Movement,” in “We Were Wrong: A Reassessment of the ‘Local Church’ Movement of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee,” special issue, *Christian Research Journal* 32, no. 6 (2009): 7, <http://www.equip.org/localchurch/>. For a rebuttal of Elliot Miller’s arguments, see Norm Geisler and Ron Rhodes, “A Response to the *Christian Research Journal*’s Recent Defense of the ‘Local Church’ Movement,” accessed June 21, 2013, <http://www.open-letter.org/>. I learned of these materials from a useful blog entry apparently (though not obviously) by a person named Brandon Adams: “The False Gospel of Witness Lee and Living Stream Ministries,” Contrast (blog), September 25, 2010, <http://contrast2.wordpress.com/2010/09/25/the-false-gospel-of-witness-lee-and-the-living-stream-ministries/>.

⁸ *Gaoyang zhankai de shujian* 羔羊展开的书卷 [The scroll opened by the lamb] ([Probably China]: Quannengshen jiaohui 全能神教会 [The Church of the Almighty God], not before 2003), 423.

. . . if you say the Son is the Father, then how could the Son pray to the Father? . . . The Lord of hosts is both the Sender and the One sent. Since the Lord of hosts is both the Sender and the Sent One, why could it not be that the Lord is the Son who prays and also the Father who listens to the praying? The Father who listens to the praying is the Son who prays; and the Son who prays is also the Father who listens to the prayer.⁹

This is clearly at variance with any kind of normal reading of the New Testament accounts.

Witness Lee and the Shouters

Let's leave theology for now and go back to historical development.

In 1967 Witness Lee started the “Calling Out” (or “Shouting”) Movement (呼喊运动). He said that the Age of the Word had ended, and now it was the Age of the Spirit. Witness Lee taught that believers must “eat the Lord” (吃主) and the way to do this was by calling out or shouting his name (呼喊主名). Calling out his name was the way to release the Spirit in this Age of the Spirit.¹⁰

After Deng Xiaoping's “opening up” of China in 1979, many foreigners visited China. At some point between 1978 and the early 1980's, Witness Lee sent many followers from overseas to Wenzhou in Fujian Province to contact believers from Watchman Nee's Local Church movement. They reportedly brought with them large amounts of Witness Lee's books, pamphlets and recordings. Within a few short years, their influence had spread throughout Zhejiang, Fujian, Henan, Guangdong and other places.¹¹ During their meetings they would shout “Jesus is Lord!” in an attempt to practice Witness Lee's teaching about calling out the Lord's name. This is how they got the nickname “Shouters” (呼喊派).¹²

The “Shouters” and the “Local Churches” (地方教会)

The term “Shouters” is not a precise term. It is unfortunately the case that many true believers have been labeled as Shouters even when they are not Shouters. Many people who are called “Shouters” may be true believers. Not all Shouters accept Witness Lee's teachings, and not all followers of Witness Lee

⁹ Witness Lee, *Concerning the Triune God—The Father, the Son and the Spirit* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1976?), under “The Son Who Prays Is the Father Who Listens,” <http://www.ministrybooks.org/alphabetical.cfm>.

¹⁰ Leung Ka-lun 梁家麟, *Gaige kaifang yilai de Zhongguo nongcun jiaohui* 改革開放以來的中國農村教會 [The Rural Churches of Mainland China Since 1978] (English title provided on copyright page) Jidujiao yu Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu congshu 基督教與中國文化研究叢書 [Christianity and Chinese culture research series] 4 (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1999), 168, 168n36.

¹¹ See Leung, *Zhongguo nongcun jiaohui* 中國農村教會 [The Rural Churches of Mainland China], 170-71 and Zhang Dakai 张大开, *Pouxie xiejiao zuzhi “Dongfeng shandian”* 剖析邪教组织 “东方闪电” [Analyzing the cult “Eastern Lightning”] (China?: 2006), 6. No publisher is identified.

¹² Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, 89.

are Shouters.¹³ In particular, many Local Churches that follow Watchman Nee and Witness Lee are law-abiding groups that reject the term “Shouters.”¹⁴

Some Shouters and the Trinity

Some (not all) Shouters took Witness Lee’s strange doctrine of the Trinity one step further and became complete modalists. These groups held that the Father became the Son and was no longer the Father; the Son became the Spirit and was no longer the Son.¹⁵ That is, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are modes by which God manifests himself in different eras. They are not distinct persons.

The “Lord Changshou” sect

One branch of the Shouters held Witness Lee in such high esteem that they began to regard his authority and status as greater than Christ’s.¹⁶ They called Witness Lee, “Lord Changshou” (常受主)¹⁷ (Changshou is Witness Lee’s given name). This, of course, goes far beyond the actual teaching of Witness Lee, who never proposed to set himself above Christ.¹⁸

It has been reported that in 1995 this branch of the Shouters distributed 15 million tracts in 20 major cities in China declaring that Witness Lee was the living Christ and that he would become the new king of the universe.¹⁹ One can easily see how this cult became a pattern for Eastern Lightning.

¹³ Chinese Ministries USA, Campus Crusade International 華人事工國際學園傳道會, “Xinyang wenda huibian: Yiduan yu xinyang (gengxin ban) (si); Huhanpai” 信仰問答彙編: 異端與信仰 (更新版) (四); 呼喊派 [Collection of Q&A on religion: Cults and religion (updated version) (4); The Shouters], accessed June 24, 2013, <http://www.chineseministries.com/books/Frameset-ga.htm>.

¹⁴ See “Jiepo duli” 解剖毒瘤 [Dissecting the traces of poison], Contending for the Faith 真理辯正 (website), http://www.cftfc.com/com_chinese/apologetics/reading.asp?title_no=4-10&chap_no=4-10-01. This website is a project to “defend and confirm the New Testament ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee and the practice of the local churches.” It is apparently run by the Witness Lee groups “Living Stream Ministry” (水流職事站) and the “Taiwan Gospel Book Room” (台灣福音書房).

¹⁵ Chinese Ministries USA, Campus Crusade International, “Xinyang wenda huibian: Yiduan yu xinyang (gengxin ban) (si); Huhanpai” 信仰問答彙編: 異端與信仰 (更新版) (四); 呼喊派 [Collection of Q&A on religion: Cults and religion (updated version) (4); The Shouters], accessed June 24, 2013, <http://www.chineseministries.com/books/Frameset-ga.htm>.

¹⁶ Leung, *Zhongguo nongcun jiaohui* 中國農村教會 [The Rural Churches of Mainland China], 169.

¹⁷ Chinese Ministries USA, Campus Crusade International, “Xinyang wenda huibian: Yiduan yu xinyang (gengxin ban) (qi); ‘Changshouzhu’ pai” 信仰問答彙編: 異端與信仰 (更新版) (七); “常受主” 派 [Collection of Q&A on religion: Cults and religion (updated version) (7); The “Lord Changshou” sect], accessed June 24, 2013, <http://www.chineseministries.com/books/Frameset-ga.htm>.

¹⁸ There is a strange undated audio clip in which you can hear Witness Lee telling some “brothers and sisters” to stop worshipping him. “Li dixiong lunji changshouzhu pai de luyin” 李弟兄論及常受主派的錄音 [Recording of Brother Lee speaking about the Lord Changshou sect], audio, around 4 minutes, posted on Contending for the Faith 真理辯正 (website), accessed on June 31, 2013, http://www.cftfc.com/com_chinese/apologetics/reading.asp. My own feeling about Witness Lee is that he had wrong teachings about the Trinity and he probably did promote his own personality and authority more than he should have.

¹⁹ It has been suggested that perhaps these tracts were not distributed by Shouters but by enemies of the Shouters to get them in trouble. Leung, *Zhongguo nongcun jiaohui* 中國農村教會 [The Rural Churches of Mainland China], 173, 173n51.

This “Lord Changshou” sect believes that you must call upon the Lord Changshou to be saved; that Jesus is someone of the past and will not return to save the world; and that Lord Changshou will return to save the world.²⁰

Eastern Lightning

Zhao Weishan—Founder of Eastern Lightning

(赵维山) (Heilongjiang Province) (born 1951)

²⁰ Chinese Ministries USA, Campus Crusade International, “‘Changshouzhū’ pài” “常受主”派 [The “Lord Changshou” sect] <http://www.chineseministries.com/books/frameset-ga.htm>.



Zhao Weishan

Source: Kaiwind 凯风网 (<http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/tuwen/2013/0326/322.html>).²¹ Apparently taken from a video called “Shipo xiejiao ‘quannengshen’” 识破邪教“全能神” (Seeing through the “Almighty God” cult).²²

²¹ Posted with the article “Jiaozhu Zhao Weishan” 教主赵维山 [Savior Zhao Weishan], Kaiwind 凯风网 (website), December 30, 2012, accessed June 28, 2013, <http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/tuwen/2013/0326/322.html>.

²² China Anti-Cult Association 中国反邪教协会, “Shipo xiejiao ‘quannengshen’” 识破邪教“全能神” [Seeing through the “Almighty God” cult] (China: China Anti-Cult Association, December 2012), video, 29:17, posted on Kaiwind 凯风网 (website) on December 26, 2012, accessed on June 27, 2013, <http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/shipin/2013/0124/284.html>.

The following account is taken from a China Central Television news report posted on *People's Daily Online*.²³

Eastern Lightning was started by a physics teacher from Heilongjiang named Zhao Weishan (赵维山).

Between 1986 and 1989 Mr. Zhao preached at house meeting points (家庭聚会点) in and around Acheng City (阿城市) in Heilongjiang Province. Some believers praised him and followed him.

He liked the praise and felt ambitious. In 1989 Mr. Zhao, He Zhexun and some others went to Henan looking for the True Way (真道).

While in Henan, Mr. Zhao, Mr. He and others joined the Shouters (呼喊派). Not only the Shouters, but the Lord Changshou branch of the Shouters.

Back in Acheng during 1989's Spring Festival, Mr. Zhao testified that Witness Lee is the Christ of the End Times and the King of Kings.

In March 1989, Mr. Zhao was made head of the Changshou sect “常受教” in Heilongjiang and was named “Lord of Power” “能力主.” He Zhexun was made the Leader “带领” of the Hengshan Church (恒山教会) (a Shouter church).

At the end of 1990 because of pressure from the public security authorities and other reasons, the Changshou sect “常受教” was broken up. Mr. Zhao saw his opportunity and sent some of his core people to various Changshou sect areas and got those believers to believe in the Lord of Power (that is, himself) instead of Witness Lee. He wrote his own tract, called “Preaching the Word” (讲道). Under this tract's influence, his followers gave up the Bible and Witness Lee's *Life-Study of the Bible* (生命读经).²⁴

In 1991, the Harbin Public Security Bureau suppressed Mr. Zhao's Shouter church, the Yongyuan Church (永源教会) in Yongyuan County (永源县) of Acheng City (阿城市).²⁵ Mr. Zhao and his close supporters fled back to Henan Province.

²³ China Central Television 中国中央电视台, “Quannengshenjiao mudi shi tuifan zhengfu jian ‘shen de guodu’” 全能神教目的是推翻政府建“神的国度” [The goal of the Church of the Almighty God is to overthrow the government and establish “The Kingdom of God”], *People's Daily Online* 人民网, December 22, 2012, accessed May 21, 2013, <http://hb.people.com.cn/BIG5/n/2012/1222/c194083-17903485-1.html>.

²⁴ According to Wikipedia, Witness Lee's *Life-Study of the Bible* contains over 25,000 pages of commentary on every book of the Bible. See “Witness Lee,” *Wikipedia*, accessed, June 25, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witness_Lee#Works. For an online version of this work, see Witness Lee, *The Life-Study of the Bible* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, n.d.) accessed on June 25, 2013, <http://www.ministrybooks.org/life-studies.cfm>.

²⁵ The name of the church is different in the 2006 account given by the Christian writer Zhang Dakai (张大开). In Zhang's account Zhao's church is called the Eternal Foundation Church (永存的根基教会). Zhang says that in 1991, Zhao had several thousand followers. The local public security authorities declared the Eternal Foundation Church an illegal organization, closed down their underground printing press and sought to arrest Zhao and others. Zhao and core supporters fled to the Shouters in Qingfeng County (清丰县) of Henan Province. Zhang Dakai 张大开, *Pouxie xiejiao zuzhi “Dongfeng shandian” 剖析邪教组织“东方闪电”* [Analyzing the cult “Eastern Lightning”], 7.

The female Christ—Yang Xiangbin

(杨向彬) (born around 1973) (Shanxi Province)

比赵维山小二十岁的杨向彬



(女基督)

Yang Xiangbin

Source: Fan quannengshen lianmeng 反全能神联盟 [The alliance for opposing the Almighty God] (website) (<http://www.fqns1m.com/html/?682.html>).²⁶ Appears to be taken from a video called “Shipo xiejiao ‘quannengshen’” 识破邪教“全能神” (Seeing through the “Almighty God” cult).²⁷

²⁶ I have very serious reservations about most of the photographs on the Internet purporting to be Yang Xiangbin or Zhao Weishan. I believe this photograph and the photograph above of Zhao Weishan are genuine for various reasons. One reason is that they appear to be taken from a video produced by the China Anti-Cult Association that I consider to be credible. Most other photographs on the Internet have not been published by authoritative news agencies or institutions. It seems to me likely that the China Anti-Cult Association obtained its photographs from the public security authorities to produce its video as part of the December 2012 media/propaganda blitz against Eastern Lightning. One reason more recent photographs on the Internet are suspicious is that it is less likely that

Except where indicated by footnotes, the following account is still from the above-mentioned 2012 China Central Television report.²⁸ This main account is supplemented where indicated by parts from a 2006 book on Eastern Lightning by a Christian writer using the name Zhang Dakai (张大开).²⁹

Around 1990 Yang Xiangbin failed her College Entrance Exam (高考落榜) and could not attend university. The blow was great and she experienced psychological problems afterwards. Demon possession was also suspected.³⁰

Medical treatment didn't help, so some Christians took her to church and prayed for her. She seemed to get better for a while, and enthusiastically studied the Bible. Then she started going to the meetings of the Shouters. She accepted the teachings of Witness Lee and began reading his writings all of the time. Then her symptoms began to reappear. She frequently told the believers that the Holy Spirit had moved her and she saw dreams and visions. And she was always interpreting them.³¹

After Mr. Zhang's 1991 return to Henan, Mr. Zhang and Miss Yang became lovers.

the public security authorities would have recent photographs and more likely they could obtain a few photographs of relevant individuals taken before the cult started and secrecy became an obsession. One reason I feel doubtful about more recent photographs of Yang Xiangbin is because they all look suspiciously similar. It almost looks as if different clothes and different hair styles were pasted on an identical face (a projected older face?). This particular credible photograph of Yang Xiangbin was posted with an extremely doubtful photograph of Zhao Weishan together with the article "Qianggu zuiren 'Zhao Weishan yu zicheng nü jidu'" 千古罪人《赵维山与自称女基督》 [Villains for all time "Zhao Weishan and the one who calls herself the female Christ"], Fan quannengshen lianmeng 反全能神联盟 [The alliance for opposing the almighty god] (website), accessed June 25, 2013, <http://www.fqnsim.com/Html/?682.html>.

²⁷ China Anti-Cult Association, "Shipo xiejiao 'quannengshen'" 识破邪教“全能神” [Seeing through the "Almighty God" cult], video, 29:17, <http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/shipin/2013/0124/284.html>.

²⁸ China Central Television, "Quannengshenjiao mudi shi tuifan zhengfu jian 'shen de guodu'" 全能神教目的是推翻政府建“神的国度” [The goal of the Church of the Almighty God is to overthrow the government and establish "The Kingdom of God"] <http://hb.people.com.cn/BIG5/n/2012/1222/c194083-17903485-1.html>.

²⁹ Zhang Dakai 张大开, *Pouxu xiejiao zuzhi "Dongfeng shandian" 剖析邪教组织“东方闪电”* [Analyzing the cult "Eastern Lightning"]. The accounts are basically consistent, with minor discrepancies. Zhang writes from a Christian perspective and has more insight into the religious background of the groups involved. The CCTV account is generally, but not always, more detailed. The biggest discrepancy is the surname of the female Christ. All of the December 2012 China news reports identify her as Yang Xiangbin. Most, if not all, accounts prior to 2012, including Mr. Zhang's 2006 account, identified her as a Miss Deng (邓). I tend to believe the CCTV accounts because they are based on police investigations and the police had more resources to investigate than the Christian writers writing earlier. I don't see any reason why the police would want to falsify this type of information. The cult has been so secretive, it would not be surprising if the false name Deng got circulated purposefully. In any case, the cult has tried hard to keep her identity secret. It's not surprising that there would be some confusion. Here's a thought: maybe Deng was one of the other ladies who comprised "God Himself" (神本题), see below.

³⁰ This last sentence on demon possession is, of course, not from China Central Television but from Zhang Dakai's account. *Ibid.*, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.* This entire paragraph is from Zhang Dakai's account.

1991 to 1993—Transition to Eastern Lightning

Near the end of 1991, Miss Yang wrote a “Word of God” (神话) in which she announced the end of the “Lord of Power” (that is, believing in Zhao Weishan) and that people should believe in “God Himself” (神本体).

“God Himself” was divided into different parts: All-Authority (全权), All-Complete (全成), All-Prepared (全备), All Glory (全荣), All-Victorious (全胜), All-Knowing (全智), All-Reverence (全尊) and All-Worthy (全贵). Mr. Zhang was, unsurprisingly, All-Authority. Miss Yang was All-Complete.³²

At some point, Miss Yang declared that she had been possessed by the Holy Spirit (“被神的灵附身”). She also wrote a “Word” (话语) concerning herself being God. Many of the co-workers and followers started believing that she was God.³³

At a meeting in Ruyang (汝阳) in Henan Province in the summer of 1993, Mr. Zhao, relying on a “Word of God” (神话), proclaimed that Miss Yang was The Only True God (独一真神), The Almighty God (全能神) and the Female Christ (女基督). This, apparently, was the formal beginning of Eastern Lightning.

1995 Ministry of Public Security document

A 1995 Ministry of Public Security document labeled the Shouters as a cult. It also labeled some of its offshoots as cults including the “Changshou Sect” (常受教) (these are the folks who worship Witness Lee); the “Lord of Power” (能力主) (this perhaps refers to folks who worshipped Zhao Weishan before the cult evolved into Eastern Lightning) and the “Real/Concrete God” (实际神) (this is another name used for Eastern Lightning).³⁴

³² In Zhang Dakai’s 2006 account, there were only seven—not eight parts. Mr. Zhang was, as in the CCTV account, All-Authority, but the female Christ was not All-Complete (全成)—she was Almighty (全能) (ibid., 7).

³³ Ibid., 8.

³⁴ “Gonganbu guanyu chajin qudi ‘huhapai’ deng xiejiao zuzhi de qingkuang ji gongzuo yijian” “公安部关于查禁取缔“呼喊派”等邪教组织的情况及工作意见” [Opinion of the Ministry of Public Security on the circumstances and work related to investigating and stamping out cults such as the “Shouters”]. This document was transmitted jointly by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the General Office of the State Council with document *Ting Zi* [1995] No. 50 (厅字[1995]50号) in November of 1995. I have been unable to find a copy of this document, but it is referred to in the 2000 document “Gonganbu guanyu rending he qudi xiejiao zuzhi ruogan wenti de tongzhi” 公安部关于认定和取缔邪教组织若干问题的通知 [Notice of the Ministry of Public Security on several issues related to recognizing and stamping out cults], document *Gong Tong Zi* [2000] No. 39 (公通字[2000]39号), a copy of which has been posted by the Committee for the Investigation of Persecution of Religion in China 中国宗教迫害真相调查委员会 on its website at <http://www.china21.org/docs/CONF1-MPS-CHINESE.htm>. An English translation produced by the Center for Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute is available on its website at <http://crf.hudson.org/files/publications/religiouslibertyFeb2002.pdf>.

2000—Flight to America

Facing increased police pressure, Mr. Zhao, Miss Yang and others fled to the US on September 6, 2000. He continued to direct the cult organization in China from the US.³⁵

Married with a kid?



Mr. Zhao and Miss Yang's marriage photo?

Source: Kaiwind 凯风网 (http://kaiwind.com/redian/qdhr/201303/07/t20130307_874314.htm).³⁶

A few further details are given in an article by someone named Zheng Yi (郑怡) posted on the Chinese anti-cult website Kaiwind (www.kaiwind.com).³⁷ The information in this article is perhaps less reliable

³⁵ China Central Television, “Quannengshenjiao mudi shi tuifan zhengfu jian ‘shen de guodu’” 全能神教目的是推翻政府建“神的国度” [The goal of the Church of the Almighty God is to overthrow the government and establish “The Kingdom of God”] <http://hb.people.com.cn/BIG5/n/2012/1222/c194083-17903485-1.html>.

³⁶ Posted with the following article: Zheng Yi 郑怡, “Pomie de ‘huangdi’ meng” 破灭的“皇帝”梦 [The shattered dream of being “emperor”], Kaiwind 凯风网 (website), March 7, 2013, (http://kaiwind.com/redian/qdhr/201303/07/t20130307_874314.htm). The rather sarcastic caption for this photograph given on the Kaiwind website is “The Wedding Picture of Zhao Weishan and his Almighty God” (赵维山和他的全能神结婚照).

than the other information discussed above, which came largely from China Central Television reports. It is not entirely clear who exactly is behind the Kaiwind website, though they clearly seem to have some special connection to China's government. They are certainly promoting China's anti-cult objectives with a viewpoint indistinguishable from the government's viewpoint.

I tend to give this particular article credence. One reason is the photograph, which I have been unable to find elsewhere. The photograph's caption indicates that it is a wedding picture. I believe the persons in the photograph bear a very strong resemblance to the other pretty reliable photographs provided above. The photograph itself looks like a Chinese wedding picture. Though this picture was presumably taken in the early 90's, Chinese wedding pictures at least in the 80's tended to be very simple and looked like this. The photograph looks authentic—at least, it doesn't look obviously fake. It seems more genuine than most photographs of Zhao and Yang on the Internet. Another reason is because Kaiwind does seem to have special access to government information (although some of the photographs it uses are very doubtful³⁸). A third reason is that the account, while adding a few interesting details, seems to be generally consistent with other known information.

In any case, this Kaiwind article states that Mr. Zhao already had a wife and daughter back home, but he went ahead and married Miss Yang anyway. They had a son together.

In order to flee to America, Zhao Weishan obtained a passport using the name Xu Weishan (徐维山). He went to Japan first and then to the US in 2000. In 2001 he applied for political refugee status and brought his and Miss Yang's son to the US.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See note 26 above.

Organizational Structure



Source: Kaiwind 凯风网 (<http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/tuwen/2013/0326/319.html>).³⁹ Apparently taken from a video called “Shipo xiejiao ‘quannengshen’” 识破邪教“全能神” (Seeing through the “Almighty God” cult).⁴⁰

Nominally, the head of the cult was the female Christ, Miss Yang. But according to the China Central Television report, Miss Yang was merely a puppet who was good at writing “sophistical” (歪理) essays.

The real head of the organization was Zhao Weishan. He was called “the one used by the Holy Spirit” (圣灵使用的人) or the Chief Priest (大祭司).

Underneath the Chief Priest, there was a 7-member Supervision Group (监察组), of which Mr. Zhao was a member but not the head.

For a period of time He Zhexun (何哲迅) was the head of the Supervision Group (监察组组长).

³⁹ Posted with the article “‘Quannengshen’ zuzhi jigou 2” “全能神”组织结构 2 [“The Almighty God” organizational structure 2], Kaiwind 凯风网 (website), March 26, 2013, accessed June 26, 2013, (<http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/tuwen/2013/0326/319.html>).

⁴⁰ China Anti-Cult Association, “Shipo xiejiao ‘quannengshen’” 识破邪教“全能神” [Seeing through the “Almighty God” cult], video, 29:17, <http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/shipin/2013/0124/284.html>.

In 2007, Mr. Zhao no longer trusted He Zhexun and forced him to step down from his position as Supervision Group Head.⁴¹

He Zhexun talks



He Zhexun

Source: Kaiwind 凯风网 (<http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/tuwen/2013/0326/315.html>).⁴² Apparently taken from a video called “Shipo xiejiao ‘quannengshen’” 识破邪教“全能神” (Seeing through the “Almighty God” cult).⁴³

He Zhexun was with Mr. Zhao from the very beginning in Heilongjiang. In 1989 he went with Mr. Zhao to Henan and joined the Changshou sect of the Shouters together with him. They both went back to Heilongjiang together and spread the word about Witness Lee, the “Christ of the End Times” (末世基督).

⁴¹ China Central Television, “Quannengshenjiao mudi shi tuifan zhengfu jian ‘shen de guodu’” 全能神教目的是推翻政府建“神的国度” [The goal of the Church of the Almighty God is to overthrow the government and establish “The Kingdom of God”] <http://hb.people.com.cn/BIG5/n/2012/1222/c194083-17903485-1.html>.

⁴² Posted with the article “‘Quannengshen’ jingnei fuzeren He Zhexun” “全能神”境内负责人何哲迅 [He Zhexun, the responsible person for “The Almighty God” in China], Kaiwind 凯风网 (website), March 26, 2013, accessed June 26, 2013, (<http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/tuwen/2013/0326/315.html>).

⁴³ China Anti-Cult Association, “Shipo xiejiao ‘quannengshen’” 识破邪教“全能神” [Seeing through the “Almighty God” cult], video, 29:17, <http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/shipin/2013/0124/284.html>.

At some point after Mr. Zhao fired him as Supervision Group Head in 2007, he was arrested.

At first he refused to talk.

Eventually, the police investigator got photographs of He Zhexun's home, his wife and child and showed them to Mr. He. The photos showed that his home was in serious disrepair and his wife and child were looking ill and emaciated (憔悴). His family had no economic support because he had abandoned them to spread the word about the female Christ. When he saw the photographs, he held his head in his hands and cried bitterly.

But he still wouldn't talk.

Later, the police investigator said to He Zhexun, "You've been so faithful to Zhao Weishan. Why were you removed as Supervision Group Head?"

This apparently hit a nerve. He Zhexun was quiet for a long time. Then finally he began to talk.⁴⁴

He Zhexun is presumably the source of much of our new information regarding the Eastern Lightning cult. Remember, Eastern Lightning has been a very secretive cult. And even a year ago we knew much less about it than we know now. I do not believe that any photographs of Yang Xiangbin could be obtained a year ago.

⁴⁴ This account is from Wang Zaihua 王在华, "Neibu zhengquan duoli: "quannengshen" xiejiao jinzita jiegou hongran daota" 内部争权夺利: "全能神"邪教金字塔结构轰然倒塌 [Internal power struggles: The pyramid structure of "The Almighty God" cult collapses with a crash], CCTV.com 央视网 (the China Central Television website), December 21, 2012, <http://news.cntv.cn/2012/12/21/ARTI1356090628978831.shtml>.

December 2012—Public Demonstrations



Source: Kaiwind 凯风网 (<http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/tuwen/2012/1230/224.html>).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Posted with the article “‘Quannengshen’ shengcheng yao zhengjiu renlei” “全能神”声称要拯救人类 [“The Almighty God” claims that (he/she?) wants to save mankind], Kaiwind 凯风网 (website), January 4, 2013, accessed June 28, 2013, (<http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/tuwen/2012/1230/224.html>).



Source: Kaiwind 凯风网 (<http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/tuwen/2013/0326/325.html>).⁴⁶

On December 7, 2012, Mr. Zhao called for nationwide public activities.

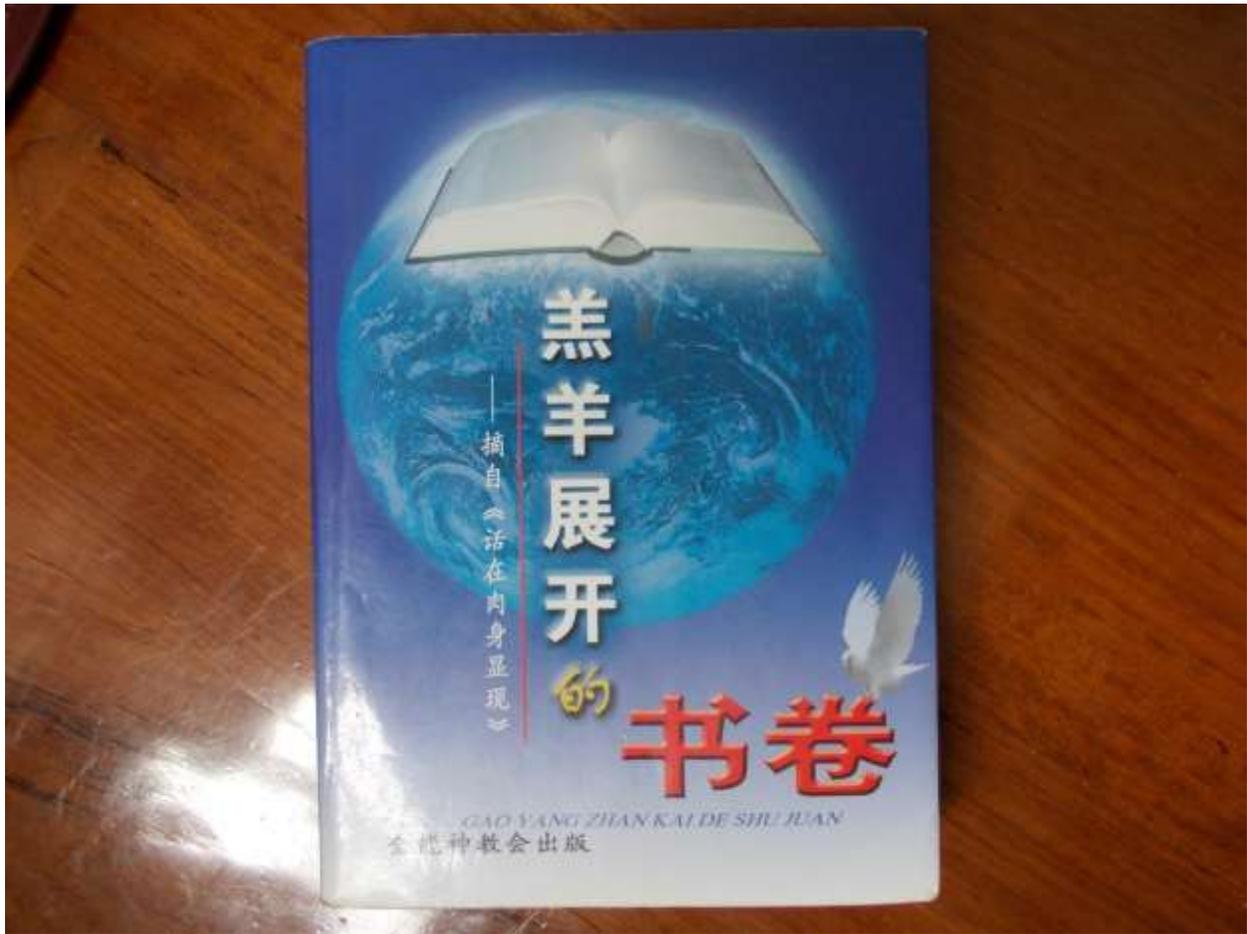
The public security authorities responded. As of December 2012, more than 1,000 members had been apprehended.⁴⁷ The Chinese media also responded. A large number of articles were published describing and condemning the cult. The China Anti-Cult Association also released a video concerning the cult.

It's difficult to know what Mr. Zhao's objectives were, but it did seem that one objective was to make use of the Mayan end-of-the-world worries to recruit new members.

⁴⁶ Posted with the article "Juji naoshi 3" 聚集闹事 3 [Gathering together to make trouble—3], Kaiwind 凯风网 (website), March 26, 2013, accessed June 28, 2013, (<http://zt.kaiwind.com/a/qns/tuwen/2013/0326/325.html>).

⁴⁷ China Central Television, "Quannengshenjiao mudi shi tuifan zhengfu jian 'shen de guodu'" 全能神教目的是推翻政府建“神的国度” [The goal of the Church of the Almighty God is to overthrow the government and establish "The Kingdom of God"] <http://hb.people.com.cn/BIG5/n/2012/1222/c194083-17903485-1.html>.

A few Eastern Lightning ideas



The Scroll Opened by the Lamb (Gaoyang zhankai de shujuan 羔羊展开的书卷).⁴⁸

The above book was given to me by my good friends who joined Eastern Lightning. (I still consider them good friends and hope that one day they will return to the Lord.) My friends hoped to convert me. I read all 804 pages of it. Of course it's complete nonsense. Below I want to just mention a few central ideas of Eastern Lightning and point out the opposing Biblical viewpoint.

Miss Yang looks down on the Bible

Here are some quotes from this Eastern Lightning book:

- 有很多人看圣经看得太多.....⁴⁹
- 当神的工作与圣经对不上号时，人便急得满头大汗.....⁵⁰

⁴⁸ My wife took this photograph in our apartment.

⁴⁹ *Gaoyang zhankai de shujuan* 羔羊展开的书卷 [The scroll opened by the lamb] ([Probably China]: *Quannengshen jiaohui* 全能神教会 [The Church of the Almighty God], not before 2003), 78.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

- 所以神的第二次道成肉身无根也无据.....而且在赫赫有名的圣经里也难以找着。就圣经那么多章节没有一字一句提到此事.....⁵¹

What does the Bible say?

- 天地要废去，我的话却不能废去。（太 24： 35）
- 神非人，必不致说谎，也非人子，必不致后悔。他说话岂不照着行呢？他发言岂不要成就呢？（民 23： 19）
- 草必枯干，花必凋残，惟有我们神的话必永远立定。（赛 40： 8）

(If we say that God can do something different from what he said, we are saying that his words are not reliable. If we say that God's words are not reliable, we are saying that God is not reliable. This is of course nonsense and blasphemy.)

Miss Yang looks down on the cross

- 他 [耶稣] 只是为了完成救赎的工作，但并不是来作成全的工作，所以就这样，神的工作只是就绪一半，作完了救赎的工作，只是整个计划当中的一半工程。⁵²

What does the Bible say?

- 我们凭这旨意，靠耶稣基督只一次献上他的身体，就得以成圣。（来 10： 10）
- 因为他一次献祭，便叫那得以成圣的人永远完全。（来 10： 14）

Miss Yang wants to replace Jesus

- 因为人都认为神来了就是医病赶鬼，行异能、给人物质的祝福，神作这些审判刑罚的工作就是为把人观念当中的这些东西都除去，让人认识神的实际、神的正常，除去人心目中耶稣的形象，让神新的形象占有人。⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., 84.

⁵² Ibid., 80.

⁵³ Ibid., 165.

What does the Bible say?

- 耶稣基督，昨日今日一直到永远是一样的。你们不要被那诸般怪异的教训勾引了去。因为人心靠恩得坚固才是好的。（来 13： 8-9a）

(If you remember nothing else from this talk, please remember this sentence.)

End of talk.