

# CHINA: 10 myths about The Church of Almighty God

*Most of what you find on the Internet about The Church of Almighty God is false. Here is why, and where to look for more reliable information.*

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The Church of Almighty God (CAG) is the largest Chinese Christian new religious movement. It is also known as “Eastern Lightning.” It has been founded in 1991, and after its rapid growth alarmed the Chinese regime, it was banned in 1995. It was heavily persecuted since, with hundreds of thousands arrested, hundreds of cases of torture, more than one hundred well-documented instances of death while in custody or as a consequence of police mistreatment, and several cases of organ harvesting. In the 21st century, to justify the persecution, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has launched a massive campaign of fake news against the CAG. Unfortunately, despite having been debunked by independent Western scholars, the fake news has been uncritically spread by some Western media and is still widely available on the Web, where Chinese propaganda is also active with anonymous or pseudonymous texts. Here is a guide to the most common myths and fake news.

***Myth 1. The Church of Almighty God Killed a Woman in a Chinese McDonald's***

False. On May 28, 2014, salesgirl Wu Shuoyan (1977–2014) was killed in a McDonald's diner in the city of Zhaoyuan, Shandong. Six “missionaries” entered the McDonald's and asked for the cell phone numbers of the customers. Wu refused to supply hers, was identified as an “evil spirit,” and killed.

Chinese authorities claimed that the perpetrators were CAG members, and used the claim to justify their persecution of the CAG. However, Western scholars who studied the documents

of the subsequent trial, where two of the assassins were sentenced to death, concluded that the group, although using the name “Almighty God,” was not related to the CAG. It was a different religious movement, which believed in a dual deity incarnated in the two female leaders of the movement: Zhang Fan (1984–2015), who was executed, and Lü Yingchun. At trial, Lü Yingchun clearly explained that she regarded the CAG as “a fake ‘Church of Almighty God’” and her own movement as “the real ‘Almighty God.’” Zhang Fan stated that, although they had read some CAG books, they never had any contact with the CAG (please refer to the above video). Scholars have unequivocally concluded that the assassins were not related to the CAG. The Chinese regime attributed the crime to the CAG to justify its persecution at home and abroad.

### ***Myth 2. The Church of Almighty God Is Violent***

False. The CAG, according to Chinese governmental sources, has four million members. It is surprising, and a testament to its peaceful nature, that only a handful of them have been accused of violent behavior (the rate is much higher in mainline religions). Moreover, the accusations were false. The most horrific accusation is about gouging out the eyes of a young boy in 2013 in Shanxi. Police records show that the crime was perpetrated by the boy’s aunt, who later committed suicide and had nothing to do with the CAG, which was accused of the incident only one year later by a website against “cults.” Chinese propaganda shows pictures of people beaten and mutilated by the CAG but has failed to produce any more specific evidence, detail, or court record, related to the prosecution of CAG members for these alleged crimes. More than 5,000 Chinese CAG members escaped abroad. If they are so violent, why not even one of them has been accused of any violent crime in the host countries?

### ***Myth 3. The Church of Almighty God Kidnaps Christians to Convert Them***

False. This has been alleged in 2002 by China Gospel Fellowship (CGF), a large Christian house church, which complained that CAG had “kidnapped” 34 of its leaders. Although CGF claims it reported the incident to the police, no CAG member was arrested or prosecuted for the crime. The CGF incident became the model for subsequent (and unsubstantiated) similar accusations by other Christian groups, but no police or court records were ever offered as evidence. One only needs to pause and think. CAG members are mercilessly hunted in China. Rewards are offered for their capture. How would they be able to mount a vast kidnapping operation in a police state like China? And CAG grows very fast: millions converted in a few decades. Would they run serious risks just to convert a few dozens more? And are people kidnapped and beaten likely to convert?

Forcing people to convert is against CAG theology. In a large church, it is not unlikely that some members, at some stage, used over-zealous or inappropriate recruitment practices. This was noted, and stopped, by the CAG highest administrative authority in 2005. His instructions read, “The gospel must be preached by using regular ways. This has been emphasized many times. Some people still use low and base means to preach the gospel. This must be forbidden. Whoever uses such means to preach the gospel must stop immediately. Anyone who uses them again will be expelled.”

A charitable explanation of the accusations by those Christian

groups is that some of their leaders were invited to seminars in China and went there without realizing the organizer was CAG (of course CAG, as a banned movement, cannot organize anything in China using its own name). A less charitable explanation is that they were embarrassed by the fact that so many of their members had converted to CAG and invented the “kidnapping” and other rumors as convenient explanations.

***Myth 4. The Church of Almighty God Predicted the World Would End in 2012***

False. Many Chinese of all faiths believed in the so called “Mayan” prophecies that the world would end in 2012. Some individual CAG members also did, but they were told they were wrong by the leaders. Those who insisted in talking about the end of the world were expelled. There was a very good reason for this. In CAG theology, there is no end of the world. Our world will be transformed, but will not end. And the transformation will not occur before the person the CAG worships as Almighty God (who was alive and well in 2012) will leave this world. The CCP accused the CAG of being involved in 2012 end of the world riots, but this was just another pretext to justify the persecution.

***Myth 5. The Church of Almighty God Brainwashes Its Followers***

False. Most academic scholars of new religious movements do not believe brainwashing exists at all. It is a convenient label used to discriminate against unpopular movements and explain why people convert to them. Courts of law in the United States (since 1990, with the landmark Fishman decision)

and elsewhere agreed: brainwashing is a pseudo-scientific myth. Even the tiny, controversial minority of scholars who believes in brainwashing admit its existence can be proved only through large-scale psychological studies of members of a specific group. No such study of CAG has ever been performed, and an independent study would obviously be impossible in China, making the conclusion that the CAG “brainwashes” its followers wholly unsubstantiated.

***Myth 6. Church of Almighty God Evangelism is Motivated by Money***

False. The fake news that CAG members receive money for every new person they convert has been invented by Chinese propaganda publications. Considering the number of converts, even the richest religious organization in the world would have been quickly bankrupted by giving money awards for each new convert. It is also false that members are milked of their money and compelled to buy expensive books. In fact, there is no membership fee. CAG rules mandate that, “Believers of The Church of Almighty God can enjoy all of the books of God’s words, spiritual books, and audio and video productions without charge”.

Obviously, monetary contributions are needed in a large organization such as the CAG. The CAG’s Principles, however, leave a large individual latitude. “Some insist on making an offering of ten percent [the tithe, common in many religious groups], while others contribute in different ways. As long as it is being offered willingly, God will gladly accept it. God’s house only specifies that those who have only believed in God for less than a year are temporarily exempt from providing any offerings, while poor people are not required to

provide any offerings but can make offerings according to their faith. The church will not accept offerings that might lead to family disputes. Those making an offering of money must pray several times, and only after they are sure they are completely willing and are certain they will never have any regrets are they to be allowed to make their offerings.”

### ***Myth 7. The Church of Almighty God Is Against the Family***

False. As in all religions, contrasts may emerge when one member of a family converts while the others don't, or when somebody decides to become a full-time missionary (a choice available in most religions) and parents or other relatives do not approve. However, studies of CAG's sacred scriptures and policy documents proved that the CAG has a positive view of marriage and the family as foreordained by God. CAG teaches that the family exists because of God's "sovereignty and orchestration," and reiterates God's requirement of honoring parents and respecting the marriage.

Sociological surveys conducted on CAG members outside of China also proved that most of them were converted by relatives and in turn tried to convert their relatives to CAG, although of course other methods of proselytization also exist. On the other hand, it is true that many families including one or more CAG believer are destroyed and separated—not by CAG, but by Chinese persecution. The High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations mentioned in a 2018 report that, “during 2014-2018, the Chinese Communist Party's monitoring, arrest, and persecution had caused at least 500,000 Church of Almighty God (CAG) Christians to flee their home, and several hundred thousand families had been torn apart.”

### ***Myth 8. The Church of Almighty God Advocates a Revolution in China***

False. The CAG believes that the Chinese Communist Party has constantly “resisted God” and persecuted Christians and other believers. The CAG think that this fulfills the prophecy of the “evil Great Red Dragon” in the Book of Revelation. However, by reading CAG scriptures and literature it becomes obvious that the CAG believes the Dragon will fall by itself under the weight of its errors, and does not advocate any revolution. CAG members are counseled to stay away from politics. And, again, each person needs to pause and think by herself. Since they managed to grow so rapidly and resist persecution, one may assume CAG leaders to be intelligent and realistic people. How can they believe that a small (for Chinese standards) and persecuted group of believers may organize a successful revolution against the Chinese Communist Party, government, and army?

### **Myth 9. The Church of Almighty God Is Clearly Not Christian**

False. That somebody is American, or Chinese, is an empirical statement. When in doubt, there are authorities (the respective governments) that can certify who is a citizen of their countries, and who isn't. Who is or isn't a Christian is a theological statement, and there is no universally recognized authority that can certify this status. Admittedly, CAG theology is different from traditional Christianity, as CAG believes Jesus Christ came back to Earth and incarnated as the Chinese woman it worships as Almighty God. American scholar Holly Folk, who has studied CAG theology, has found in



it a number of "Protestant continuities." As a conclusion, she declared it "a new Christianity with deep Christian roots," "a real Christianity." Different denominations and theologians use different definitions of Christianity, some broad and some very narrow. Catholics until the mid-20th century called Protestants non-Christians. Some fundamentalist Protestants still claim Catholics are not Christians. Who is Christian? Who decides?

### ***Myth 10. The Church of Almighty God Is a Cult***

False. As used by the Chinese Communist Party, "cult" or "evil cult" simply indicates a group the Party does not approve of, and whose persecution it tries to justify by spreading fake news. More generally, just as it happens for "brainwashing," most academic scholars do not use the word "cult," acknowledging it is a polemical rather than empirical label. A "cult" is a group somebody else do not like. All religions have been called "cults" in their early years. One can still find Protestant literature claiming the Roman Catholic Church is a cult, and arch-conservative Catholic literature making the same accusation against most Protestants. Anti-cultists propose checklist of the features of "cults": they are dogmatic, authoritarian, patriarchal, demand much from members, discriminate against their ex-members who left the group, and so on. Academics do not regard these criteria (most of which, by the way, would not be applicable to the CAG) as valid for distinguishing between "religions" and "cults," as the same features are also found within traditional religions. But, at any rate, "cult" is just a label used to discriminate against certain religions and movements, be it by totalitarian regimes, secular opponents of certain religions, or religionists disturbed by the competition. Almost all religions were, and are, accused by somebody of being "cults."

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