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Volume 3, Issue 5, September–October 2019

Contents

Articles

- 3 Would the Real Article 300 Please Stand Up? Refugees from Religious Movements Persecuted as *Xie Jiao* in China: The Case of The Church of Almighty God
Massimo Introvigne, James T. Richardson, and Rosita Šorytė
- 87 Channelling for Salvation: The History and Beliefs of the Dutch Spiritual Church-Society (NSK, 1945–1993)
Lotje Elisabeth Vermeulen
- 108 Experiences of Affiliation to the Italian Soka Gakkai: An Analysis According to the Rambo et al. Integrated Model
Raffaella Di Marzio

**Would the Real Article 300 Please Stand Up? Refugees from
Religious Movements Persecuted as *Xie Jiao* in China:
The Case of The Church of Almighty God**

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ABSTRACT: In order to be granted asylum in the democratic countries where they escape from China, refugees of The Church of Almighty God should prove that they have a “well-founded fear” that, should they return to China, they would be persecuted. In some countries, the debate focuses on the interpretation of article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Law, which imposes jail penalties on those active in groups persecuted as *xie jiao* (“heterodox teachings,” sometimes translated as “cults”). Chinese embassies often inform authorities abroad that article 300 is only enforced against members of *xie jiao* who commit serious crimes. However, a study of the official interpretive documents and of 200 cases of members of The Church of Almighty God sentenced in China supports the conclusion that normal religious activities, such as attending worship services, trying to convert friends and relatives, or distributing religious literature are among the “crimes” punished under article 300 with severe jail penalties.

KEYWORDS: Religion-Based Refugee Claims, Article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Law, *Xie Jiao*, New Religious Movements in China, Chinese Refugees, The Church of Almighty God.

Introduction

These are difficult times for religious freedom. As more countries turn back from democracy and the rule of law, or refuse to accept the principle of the rule of law altogether, attacks on freedom of religion and belief are increasing. The greatest offenders are China and Russia, but many other nations are also exhibiting limitations on religious freedom, or other conditions that result in believers wanting to flee. This has caused many believers to become refugees, with increasing numbers seeking asylum in various democratic nations.

Under both international conventions, to which almost all democratic countries subscribe, and national laws such as the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, the applicant in an asylum case must prove:

- 1) a well-founded fear of persecution or that he or she has suffered past persecution;
- 2) that race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion was or will be (if removed) the central reason for the persecution;
- 3) if the above criteria are demonstrated, then asylum should be granted in the exercise of discretion.

This article focuses on China, and one particular religious group, The Church of the Almighty God (CAG), a Christian new religious movement established in 1991, which teaches that Jesus has returned to earth incarnated as a Chinese woman (currently living abroad), who brings the final truth and the opportunity of eradicating our sinful nature. The theology of the CAG (see Introvigne 2020) is outside the scope of this article, as is the situation of other groups persecuted in China.

We focus on the fact that CAG members suffer severe persecution in China and, as such, are entitled to protection as refugees abroad. The CAG claims that, before December 2018, over 400,000 CAG members were arrested because of such basic religious activities as attending gatherings, keeping religious books at home, or engaging in missionary activities. Many were tortured, and there are claims that more than 110 CAG members died while in custody or as a consequence of persecution (The Church of Almighty God 2019). While it is impossible to confirm these figures independently, frequent references in

Chinese media to hundreds of CAG members arrested in one or another province make them believable (Introvigne 2020).

It is worth noting that, although the CAG is the most persecuted Christian new religious movement in the history of Communist China, the campaign against it is not unprecedented. The waves of arrests and persecution against non-Christian religious movements, such as Yiguandao in the 1950s and Falun Gong after its clash with the Chinese regime in 1999, were of comparable magnitude and ferocity (see below for Yiguandao; for the context, see Ownby 2016). The persecution of Falun Gong has been studied by one of the authors (Edelman and Richardson 2003; Richardson and Edelman 2004; Edelman and Richardson 2005) and, although the theologies are obviously very different, can be compared to the repression of the CAG both in its scope and gory details (see Tong 2009, and the review of his book by Richardson 2010). It also, like CAG, generated waves of refugees who fled to democratic countries.

As of August 15, 2019, over 5,500 CAG members have escaped China and sought asylum in nearly two dozen countries. The largest number is in South Korea (1,010), followed by U.S. (about 1,000), Italy (845), Spain (517), France (444), Saipan (326), Germany (310), Japan (276), Canada (255), and Australia (233). Only 10% (588) have been granted asylum so far, and 1,954 have been rejected, with 511 receiving deportation orders (although only a few have actually been deported).

The success rate of their applications varies greatly by country. Canada has granted 184 out of 255 requests, followed by Italy with 133 out of 845, Germany with 64 out of 310, New Zealand with 53 out of 62, Finland with 37 out of 39. If we look at percentages, the most favorable countries are Finland (95%), New Zealand (85%), Sweden (7 out of 9, or 78%), and Canada (72%).

The lowest percentage countries with large number of applicants are South Korea (1,010) and Japan (517), where no application has been accepted and the majority has been rejected. No application has been accepted in Spain either (482), and an estimated 2% only in the United States, but these countries have respectively zero and one case of rejection, the main problem for obtaining the protection quickly there being that interviews are scheduled years after the applications are filed. As for formal rejections, South Korea has 689, France 406, Italy 332, and Germany 242. The actual departure orders total 511: France has issued 236, South Korea 183, Netherlands 27, Switzerland 25, Germany 14,

Belgium and Canada 11 each. In fact, only 9 CAG refugees have been deported: 3 respectively from Switzerland and Canada, 2 from Germany, and one from Sweden (Introvigne 2020).

There are several different reasons why applications are rejected, discussed by one of the authors in a previous article (Šorytė 2018). Here, we analyze only one reason of rejection, which is often quoted by South Korean courts (but also by the Court of Milan, in Italy: see Calvani 2019), i.e. the claim that reports that the CAG is persecuted in China are grossly exaggerated and, while it is true that the CAG is banned in China, penalties for its members are mild.

This is contrary to what international reports on religious freedom by global institutions have to say about the CAG. For example, the U.S. Department of State Report on International Religious Freedom for the year 2018, published on June 21, 2019, mentioned claims that in the year 2018 only, Chinese “authorities arrested 11,111 of its [CAG] members,” and “subjected 525 of its members to ‘torture or forced indoctrination,’” adding that some were tortured to death while in custody (U.S. Department of State 2019b). The U.S. Department of State Report on Human Right Practices for 2018 also mentioned that “members of the Church of Almighty God [...] reported systematic torture in custody” (U.S. Department of State 2019a). The USCIRF (U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom) similarly reported that “in 2018, the Chinese government harassed and arrested thousands of followers of ...the Church of Almighty God. Many of those detained during the year... suffered torture and other abuses, in some cases resulting in deaths or unexplained disappearances while in custody” (USCIRF 2019, 40). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights, summarizing NGOs submissions at the 2018 Universal Periodic Review of China, mentioned 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” (United Nations Human Rights Council 2018).

Why, thus, is the persecution doubted by some authorities? One reason is that groups persecuted as *xie jiao*, such as the CAG, are confused with other forms of illegal religion, which are at least occasionally tolerated in China. The expression *xie jiao* is translated in Chinese official documents into English as “cults” or “evil cults.” The translation, however, is misleading, and is connected to an attempt to

argue that the problem of “cults” is not only Chinese, but international. In fact, the notion of *xie jiao* was born in the Ming period, and a more correct translation is “heterodox teachings.” The Ming preoccupation with *xie jiao* was rooted in a century-old tradition of Chinese millenarian movements trying to overcome the governments. While some of them posed very real threats to the Empire, others were outlawed based on a variety of political and religious consideration. What teachings were “heterodox” was determined by the Emperor, and lists of *xie jiao* were based on both theological and political grounds. For example, Christianity as a whole was classified as a *xie jiao* in 1725, but no longer regarded as such after 1842, due to Western political and military pressure (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 27–31).

The Republican and Communist governments inherited this old notion and policy. The category of *xie jiao* was used both in Taiwan, during the Martial Law period (and beyond), and in Mainland China in the 1950s for the now forgotten massive persecution of Yiguandao, a large Chinese non-Christian new religious movement, which in fact became the model for the subsequent repression of other groups. In the campaign against the *xie jiao* of 1953–1954, largely directed against Yiguandao, according to police reports, 820,000 “leaders and organizers,” and 13 million followers were arrested or otherwise persecuted (Shao 1997, 452–55). Yiguandao was thus almost eradicated in Mainland China.

Xie jiao, however, was not the main term used during these campaigns. As David Palmer has noted, the CCP preferred to define the persecuted groups as “reactionary secret societies” (*fandong huidaomen*) or “feudal secret societies” (*fengjian huidaomen*), labels which reflected Mao Zedong’s (1893–1976) idea that actually some secret societies had played in Chinese history a progressive rather than reactionary role. *Huidaomen* was also used to emphasize that banned groups, although they might use the mask of religion, were not “really” religious, were similar to organized crime, and remained outside the area of religious liberty theoretically guaranteed by the Chinese Constitution (Palmer 2012, 113–34).

However, *xie jiao* came back as the most used term in the 1990s. Hong Kong scholars David Palmer and Edward Irons believe that a return to the prevalence of the label *xie jiao*, which was again preferred to *huidaomen*, was determined by the CCP’s attempt to elicit the sympathy of both those opposed to “cults” in the West and the mainline Christian churches, which feared the competition of new religious movements they regarded as heretical (Palmer 2012; Irons 2018).

Although the first group to be declared a *xie jiao* was the Shouters, a Christian movement, in 1983, a systematic theory of the *xie jiao* as “evil cults” emerged only with the incidents of the late 1990s that persuaded the CCP that Falun Gong was a dangerous competitor and a mortal enemy.

This generated the inclusion of a new crime, “organizing or using a *xie jiao* to sabotage the implementation of law,” in the Chinese Criminal Law in 1997, the creation of a special security agency called Office 610 (from the date of its establishment, June 10, 1999) for dealing with the *xie jiao*, and the establishment throughout China and in some centers of the Chinese diaspora abroad of branches of a Chinese Anti-Xie-Jiao Association (again, called in English “Chinese Anti-Cult Association”), directly connected with the CCP. When these measures came into effect, the old practice of compiling official lists of *xie jiao* had already been revived, with the first national list published in 1995 (Irons 2018).

In 2018, it was officially announced by the CCP that the central Office 610 and the “Central Leading Anti-Xie-Jiao Group” will be disbanded and their functions absorbed into the CCP Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, as well as the Ministry of Public Security. According to Irons, this signaled that more, rather than less, efforts at eradicating the *xie jiao* will be required from the law enforcement structure by the CCP’s highest leadership in the future (Irons 2019).

Legal Background

All the three authors have filed affidavits in cases concerning CAG refugees. We have argued that, apart from any factual reports about the persecution, the fact that being a member of the CAG in China means living in a “well-founded fear of persecution” is demonstrated by Chinese law itself.

One may object that the Chinese Constitution affirms the principle of religious liberty. However, article 36 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China states that only “normal religious activities” are permitted and protected by the State. The devil is in the detail: yes, religion is constitutionally protected, but no, religion is not protected if the CCP perceives it as not “normal.” In China, whether a religion is normal or not is ultimately determined by the CCP.

There is no positive definition in Chinese law of what a “normal” religion is, or should be. The CCP may label any religious group it doesn’t approve of as “abnormal.” There are, however, quite a few *negative* definitions and examples of religions, or organizations claiming to be religious, that are not “normal,” and consequently fall outside of the Constitutional protection of religion.

One source is article 36 of the Constitution itself. It lists four categories of prohibited religious activities, which are thus regarded as not “normal”:

- religious activities that “disrupt public order”;
- those that “impair the health of citizens”;
- attempts to “interfere with the educational system of the state”;
- operating a religious body or carrying out religious activities “subject to any foreign domination.”

Although there are several laws dealing with religions that are not “normal” in China, article 300 creates a separate category. The groups banned as *xie jiao* are not regarded as religious, but as “pseudo-religions” hiding anti-government and anti-social activities behind the mask of religion. While other religions may argue that they do not really fall into the four categories of prohibited religious activities mentioned in article 36 of the Constitution, for those listed as *xie jiao* the case is already judged.

This has been disputed by a State Attorney of the Immigration Office in Korea, objecting to an affidavit by one of the authors (Richardson), and arguing, on the basis of information received from the Chinese Embassy, that,

According to article 27 of Public Security Administration Punishments Law of the People’s Republic of China, if the activity is not as severe as article 300 in the Criminal Law, but contains organizing, instigating, threatening, inducing or inciting others to engage in activities of *xie jiao* or secret societies, those that use *xie jiao*, secret societies or superstitions to disturb social order and jeopardize other people’s health, will be detained for 10 to 15 days and fined less than 1000 Yuan; those whose offenses are lighter, they will be detained for 5 to 10 days and fined less than 500 Yuan. (Reference 4. Article 27 of Public Security Administration Punishments Law of the People’s Republic of China).

Regarding the application of article 300 of the Criminal Law, the Supreme People’s Court and the Supreme People’s Procuratorate have made specific interpretation of it. (Reference 3. Interpretation of the Supreme People’s Court and the Supreme People’s Procuratorate on several questions of the applicable laws to handling criminal cases such

as organizing and using cult organizations to undermine law enforcement.) The INTERPRETATION stipulates the details of application of article 300: organizing and using *xie jiao* organizations etc. to attack state agencies and enterprises; illegal congregation and protests; inciting members to attack public venues; inducing others to commit suicide or hurt themselves; raping women by means such as seduction and threats; cheating people out of their money; inciting state separation and subversion of state power; etc.

The laws of China and their execution are not punishing the faith of *xie jiao* members, but rather the anti-society activities born out of their faiths. The degree of the penalty also varies based on the type and amount of their activity. Therefore, if one only believes in a *xie jiao*, but does not engage in any activity of leading other people or actively participates in preaching, and if he/she does not commit any crime, he/she cannot possibly become a target of suppression without any reason.

This interpretation of article 300 is outdated and partial at best, and reflects intentional misleading by the Chinese Embassy at worst. It is certainly true that if one simply “believes” in certain religious doctrines but “does not engage in any activity,” does not participate in any gathering, and does not tell anybody about the belief, even China has no way of detecting and punishing a crime. Chinese surveillance technology is very advanced, but does not yet extend to scrutinizing thoughts. However, being compelled to believe silently, in fear of being arrested in case of “engaging in any activity” such as attending a prayer meeting or sharing the faith with relatives and friends, constitutes precisely the “fear of persecution” mentioned by international and domestic refugee laws.

As we will demonstrate through a study of the law, the official documents interpreting it, and the judged cases, the main legal provision typically applied against whomever is “engaged in an activity” connected with a *xie jiao*, and certainly of the CAG, is indeed article 300 of the Criminal Law (*very rarely* article 27 of the Public Security Law), and article 300 punishes as “crimes” activities that are the most typical forms of exercise of religious liberty, including gathering for worship, preaching, and even keeping religious books at home.

The Story of Article 300

It is worth noting that Article 300, introduced in 1997, has been amended in 2015. Most unfortunately, several court decisions throughout the world quote

the version of 1997, ignoring the amendment. In the 1997 version, article 300 mandated that,

Whoever organizes and utilizes superstitious sects, secret societies, and evil religious organizations [*xie jiao*] or sabotages the implementation of the state's laws and executive regulations by utilizing superstition is to be sentenced to not less than three years and not more than seven years of fixed-term imprisonment; when circumstances are particularly serious, to not less than seven years of fixed-term imprisonment.

Whoever organizes and utilizes superstitious sects, secret societies, and evil religious organizations [*xie jiao*] or cheats others by utilizing superstition, thereby giving rise to the death of people is to be punished in accordance with the previous paragraph.

Whoever organizes and utilizes superstitious sects, secret societies, and evil religious organizations [*xie jiao*] or has illicit sexual relations with women, defraud money and property by utilizing superstition is to be convicted and punished in accordance with the regulations of articles 236, 266 of the law (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Vienna n.d.).

However, Amendment IX to the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China was adopted at the 16th Session of the Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress on August 29, 2015, and came into force on November 1, 2015. Amendment IX reformulated several articles of the Criminal Law, including Article 300, as follows:

Whoever organizes or utilizes any superstitious sect, secret society, or cult organization [*xie jiao*] or uses superstition to sabotage the implementation of any law or administrative regulation of the state shall be sentenced to imprisonment of not less than three years but not more than seven years in addition to a fine; if the circumstances are especially serious, be sentenced to imprisonment of not less than seven years or life imprisonment in addition to a fine or forfeiture of property; or if the circumstances are minor, be sentenced to imprisonment of not more than three years, criminal detention, surveillance or deprivation of political rights in addition to a fine or be sentenced to a fine only.

Whoever organizes or utilizes any superstitious sect, secret society, or cult organization [*xie jiao*] or uses superstition to cheat any other person, which leads to the person's serious injury or death shall be punished in accordance with the provisions of the preceding paragraph.

Whoever also commits the crime of raping a woman or swindling any person of his or her property while committing a crime as mentioned in paragraph 1 shall be punished according to the provisions on the joinder of penalties for plural crimes ("Amendment IX to the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China" 2015).

What mostly changed between the 1997 and the 2015 versions were the harsher penalties for “organizing and/or using a *xie jiao*.” In 1997, they were “not less than three years and not more than seven years of fixed-term imprisonment; when circumstances are particularly serious, not less than seven years of fixed-term imprisonment.” The 2015 version mentions “not less than three years but not more than seven years in addition to a fine” for the average cases. In the worst, most “serious” cases, however, the penalty will be “not less than seven years or life imprisonment in addition to a fine or forfeiture of property.” However, when “the circumstances are minor,” one can escape with “imprisonment of not more than three years, criminal detention, surveillance or deprivation of political rights in addition to a fine or be sentenced to a fine only.” On the one hand, life imprisonment appears for the first time in 2015, raising the ceiling of the statutory penalty, escalating the punishment, and including additional penalties, such as fines and the forfeiture of property. On the other hand, even “minor circumstances” in the “use” of a *xie jiao* are now classified under the category of criminal offenses, enlarging the scope of criminal law (although “minor circumstances” warrant lesser penalties). Provisions in the 2015 version cover the full scale of penalties (with the exception of the death penalty), applicable to members of groups listed as *xie jiao*.

The new formulation solves the problem raised by some Italian judges, who objected that refugees reporting that they were sentenced to less than three years under article 300 were lying, since the minimum penalty is three years. But in fact, the minimum penalty *was* three years in the 1997 version, while provisions under the 2015 version explicitly state that it is possible to be sentenced to jail terms shorter than three years when circumstances are “minor.”

We will discuss here only the first paragraph of article 300, punishing those who “organize or use a *xie jiao*.” The cases of homicides, theft or rape connected with a *xie jiao* do not concern any of the several hundred cases of CAG refugees we have examined. They are not wanted in China for sexual abuse or homicide, only for “using” a *xie jiao*. One of the authors has dealt elsewhere with accusations that members of the CAG killed a woman in a McDonald’s diner in 2014 in China, concluding these are false and the homicide was committed by a different religious movement (Introvigne 2017; Introvigne 2018; Introvigne and Bromley 2017). At any rate, CAG asylum seekers are not personally accused of any violent crimes.

The formula “organizing and using a *xie jiao* to sabotage [or ‘undermine’] the implementation of the law,” routinely used in Chinese decisions, may be misleading in democratic countries. “Sabotage the implementation of the law” may evoke some grandiose anti-government plans. In fact, “sabotaging the implementation of the law,” as interpreted by the CCP, simply means here not respecting Chinese law, and Chinese law includes a prohibition to be active in any capacity in a *xie jiao*.

Happily, detailed examples were supplied by an official interpretation of 2017, and there are also significant cases further clarifying the issue. In some Korean refugee cases, it was argued that precedents are not binding under Chinese law. While this conclusion is questionable, what we will try to show here is that article 300 is consistently interpreted in the same way by Chinese courts, and that this corresponds to official and binding interpretive documents.

The “Supreme People’s Court and Supreme People’s Procuratorate Interpretation on Several Issues Regarding the Applicable Law in Criminal Cases such as those of Using *Xie Jiao* to Sabotage the Implementation of Law” was passed on January 4, 2017 by the 1706th session of the Adjudication Committee of the Supreme People’s Court, and on December 8, 2016 by the 58th meeting of the 12th session of the prosecutor’s committee of the Supreme People’s Procuratorate. It was promulgated on January 25, 2017, and took effect on February 1, 2017.

Since previous interpretive documents are still quoted in decisions about refugees, it is important to note that article 16 clarifies that,

The “Supreme People’s Court and Supreme People’s Procuratorate Interpretation on Several Issues Regarding the Specific Application of Law in Criminal Cases of Organizing or Exploiting Cults to Commit Crimes” (Legal Interpretation [1999] No. 18), the “Supreme People’s Court and Supreme People’s Procuratorate Interpretation on Several Issues Regarding the Specific Application of Law in Criminal Cases of Organizing or Exploiting Cults to Commit Crimes II” (Legal Interpretation [2001] No. 19), and the “Supreme People’s Court and Supreme People’s Procuratorate Explanation on Several Issues Regarding the Specific Application of Law in Criminal Cases of Organizing or Exploiting Cults to Commit Crimes” (Legal Release [2002] No. 7) are abolished simultaneously (Supreme People’s Court and Supreme People’s Procuratorate 2017: we use the translation of the reference indicated, but have corrected some typos and systematically replaced “cults” with “*xie jiao*”).

Article 1 deals with the old problem how to define a *xie jiao*, stating that

Unlawful organizations established falsely in the name of a religion, Qigong, or other things, that deify or aggrandize their ringleaders, and use methods such as the production and dissemination of superstitious fallacies to beguile and deceive others, developing and controlling members, and endangering society, shall be designated as “*xie jiao*” as used in article 300 of the Criminal Law.

Edward Irons has demonstrated that this formula, which already existed in previous documents, does not solve the definition problem. In practice, it is a *xie jiao* whatever movement the authorities decide to list as a *xie jiao* (Irons 2018). If anything, one can argue that in recent years being included in the official list of the *xie jiao* is *sufficient* to fall under the provision of article 300 but is not *necessary*. Article 300 has been applied, for example, against the Jehovah’s Witnesses, which are *not* listed as a *xie jiao* (ChinaAid 2019).

Article 2 is the most important part of the document, as it gives detailed practical examples of circumstances that are not “minor”:

In any of the following situations, those organizing or exploiting *xie jiao* to undermine the implementation of State laws or administrative regulations, shall be given between three- and seven-years imprisonment and a concurrent fine, in accordance with the first paragraph of Criminal Law article 300:

- (1) Establishing a *xie jiao*, or after a *xie jiao* has been shut down, restoring it, or establishing a separate *xie jiao*;
- (2) Assembling to surround, attack, forcibly occupy, or cause a commotion at State organs, enterprises, public institutions, or in public venues or religious activity sites; disrupting social order;
- (3) Illegally holding assemblies, protests, or demonstrations, disrupting social order;
- (4) Using violence, coercion or other means to compel others to join or to prevent others from leaving the *xie jiao*;
- (5) Organizing, instigating, or deceiving members or others into not performing legally prescribed obligations;
- (6) The use of ‘fake hotspots’, ‘pirate radio’ or other wireless platforms (stations) or wireless frequencies to promote *xie jiao*;
- (7) Engaging in *xie jiao* activities again, after having been previously criminally prosecuted, or having been given an administrative punishment in the last two years, for *xie jiao* activities;
- (8) Recruiting 50 or more *xie jiao* members;

(9) Amassing assets or causing economic harms in the amount of 1,000,000 RMB or more.

(10) Using currency as a medium to promote *xie jiao*, where the volume is 500 or more bills (items);

(11) producing or transmitting *xie jiao* propaganda, reaching any of the following measurement standards:

1. 1,000 or more copies (pages) of flyers, spray paintings, images, slogans, or newspapers;
2. 250 or more books or journals;
3. 250 or more audio tapes, video tapes or other A/V materials;
4. 250 or more logos or emblems;
5. 100 or more Discs, USB drives, memory cards, portable hard drives, and other mobile storage media;
6. 50 or more banners or streamers.

(12) Exploiting communications information networks in any one of the following situations:

1. Produced or transmitted 200 or more digital images or articles; 50 or more digital books, periodicals, or A/V items; or a digital archive of 5,000,000 or more characters, or 250 minutes or more of A/V materials.
2. Distributed information or made phone calls 1,000 times or more.
3. Exploiting online chatrooms reaching 1,000 or more people cumulatively, or exploiting communications groups or social media such as Weixin or Microblogs accounts with 1,000 or more cumulative group members or followers, to promote *xie jiao*;
4. Where *xie jiao* information has actually been clicked or viewed 5,000 or more times;

(13) Other situations of serious circumstances.

In our study of the relevant cases, we will see the number of books or videos found in the possession of CAG members mentioned in several decisions. Those determining harsh penalties are not very high. 1,000 flyers or 250 copies of a magazine is what somebody engaged in a religious missionary activity would normally carry or keep at home. And, as we shall see from the cases, “illegally holding assemblies ... to disrupt the social order” is consistently applied to CAG worship meetings in private homes.

Article 3 explains when the jail penalty may go *beyond* seven years,

In any of the following situations, those organizing or exploiting *xie jiao* to undermine the implementation of State laws or administrative regulations, shall be found to be “especially serious circumstances” as used in the first paragraph of Criminal Law article 300, and given 7 or more years imprisonment or indefinite detention, and given a concurrent fine or confiscation of assets:

- (1) Carrying out the acts provided for in items (1)-(7) of article 2 of this Interpretation, where the threat to society is especially serious;
- (2) Carrying out the acts provided for in items (8)-(12) of article 2 of this Interpretation, where the volumes reached are 5 times or more those provided for in article 2;
- (3) Other situations where the circumstances are especially serious.

Apart from the references to the volumes, meaning e.g. that distributing 5,000 flyers carries a *minimum* penalty of seven years, there is a large margin left to the courts, since what circumstances are “especially serious” is not explained.

While article 2 has a long list of circumstances that are *not* minor, article 4 is not very detailed on what circumstances are minor:

In any of the following situations, organizing or exploiting *xie jiao* to undermine the implementation of State laws or administrative regulations, shall be found to have “more minor circumstances” as provided for in the first paragraph of Criminal Law article 300, and be given up to three years imprisonment, short-term detention, controlled release, or deprivation of political rights, and/or a concurrent fine:

- (1) Carrying out the acts provided for in items (1)-(7) of article 2 of this Interpretation, where the threat to society is more minor;
- (2) Carrying out the acts provided for in items (8)-(12) of article 2 of this Interpretation, where the volumes reached are 1/5 or more than those provided for in article 2;
- (3) Other situations of more minor circumstances.

Every CAG member would be glad to escape with a fine only. This may theoretically happen, for instance if one is lucky enough to be arrested after having distributed 200 flyers only rather than 1,000 (provided others are not found in the suspect’s home). But in fact, it happens very rarely. There are refugees, normally very young, who report having served terms shorter than three years before fleeing China. But they are the exception rather than the rule.

Articles 5, 6, and 15 confirm the obsession with numbers of flyers, books, or CDs possessed or distributed, and establish a quite byzantine system:

- (5) Where, for the purpose of their transmission, *xie jiao* propaganda pieces in numbers reaching the standards provided in article 2, item (4) of this Interpretation are possessed

or carried, or are seized on the spot in the process of being transmitted; it is to be handled in accordance with the following distinct situations:

1. Where the propaganda was produced by the perpetrator, it is handled as a completed crime;
2. Where the propaganda was not produced by the perpetrator, it is handled as criminal preparations;
3. Where propaganda not produced by the perpetrator is seized in the course of transmission, it is handled as an inchoate crime [attempt];
4. Where the propaganda was not produced by the perpetrator, and a portion was already transmitted, it is handled as a completed crime, and the non-transmitted portion may be considered at sentencing, based on the circumstances.

(6) Where several instances of producing or transmitting *xie jiao* propaganda, or using communications information networks to promote *xie jiao*, have not yet been handled, the quantities or amounts are calculated cumulatively.

Where producing or transmitting *xie jiao* propaganda, or using communications information networks to promote *xie jiao*, involves different types or forms, they may be calculated cumulatively after converted according to the ratios of different volume amounts provided in this interpretation.

(15) Where it is difficult to determine whether items involved with a case are *xie jiao* propaganda, public security organs at the municipal level or higher may be commissioned to make a determination opinion.

Articles 7 and 11 to 14 deal with the case of *xie jiao* activities causing “serious injuries or death,” instigating to suicide, or otherwise leading to the commission of major crimes. A reference to attempting “self-immolation” in article 12 echoes accusations against Falun Gong, although self-immolation protesting the lack of religious liberty is mostly practiced by Tibetan Buddhists, who are not members of a *xie jiao*. Article 10 recommends severe punishments for those who, by using a *xie jiao*, also promote “separatism,” but again charges of separatism are normally filed against Tibetan Buddhists and Uyghur and other Xinjiang Muslims, whose religions are not considered *xie jiao*.

Article 8, on the other hand, may be applied to the CAG and to other “uses” of a *xie jiao* through normal missionary activities, imposing harsh penalties:

In any of the following situations, perpetrating the conduct in articles 2-5 of this Interpretation is to be given a heavy punishment:

- (1) Colluded with foreign institutions, organizations, or personnel to engage in *xie jiao* activities;

- (2) Established *xie jiao* institutions, developed membership, or organized *xie jiao* activities across provinces, autonomous regions, or directly governed municipalities;
- (3) Assembling to cause trouble and openly conducting *xie jiao* activities in important public venues, supervisory areas, on major State holidays or during major events;
- (4) Continuing to assemble to cause trouble and openly conducting *xie jiao* activities after a *xie jiao* has been shut down or been designated as a *xie jiao*;
- (5) State employees engaged in *xie jiao* activities;
- (6) Promoting *xie jiao* to minors;
- (7) Promoting *xie jiao* in schools or other educational and training institutions.

For instance, some CAG members are in contact with their co-religionists in the United States and South Korea, and their main leaders live abroad, which can be easily interpreted as “collusion” under article 8(1). CAG refugees continue their religious activities abroad after escaping from China, and others join the CAG abroad. Once they return to China, they might be arrested and punished with harsher penalties based on article 8(1). Several CAG evangelists are itinerant preachers, who move across provinces, thus falling under article 8(2). We also personally met refugees who, when in China, were state employees, including police officers, which calls for a heavier penalty under article 8(5). And certainly, all members of the CAG have continued their religious activities after their religion was listed as a *xie jiao* in 1995 and banned, thus falling under the provision of article 8(4).

Article 9 deals with repentant or “re-educated” *xie jiao* members:

Where the organization or exploitation of *xie jiao* to undermine the implementation of State laws or administrative regulations, meets the requirements of article 4 of this Interpretation, but the perpetrators can truly repent and clearly demonstrate that they have left the *xie jiao* and will not again engage in *xie jiao* activities, they may be not prosecuted or have punishment waived. Of these, where the perpetrator was deceived or coerced into participating in the *xie jiao*, it may be handled other than as a crime.

Where those organizing or exploiting *xie jiao* to undermine the implementation of State laws or administrative regulations, can truly repent and clearly demonstrate that they have left the *xie jiao* before the first-instance trial judgement, and will not again engage in *xie jiao* activities; it is to be handled according to the following discrete situations:

- (1) Where the circumstances of article 2 of this Interpretation are met, it may be determined to be ‘more minor circumstances’ as provided for in the first paragraph of Criminal Law article 300;

(2) Where the circumstances of article 3 of this Interpretation are met, it may be determined that it is not ‘especially serious circumstances’ as provided for in the first paragraph of Criminal Law article 300; and given between three- and seven-years imprisonment and a concurrent fine.

Cases show that the application of this provision is not generous. Confession is not enough. It is mentioned as an “alleviating circumstance” but in practice the penalty is often the same applied to co-defendants who did not confess. Even promising to abandon one’s faith is mentioned in the decisions, but often does not significantly alter the penalties.

Case Law: A Study of 200 Cases of CAG Members Sentenced Under Article 300

Chinese authorities are performing a sustained effort to digitalize and make available online PRC court decisions. Given the size of China, so far only a percentage of the decisions, particularly of the older ones, is available. Nonetheless, the data base *China Judgments Online*, managed by the Supreme People’s Court, is an impressive achievement, with 42,7 million pages of judgments uploaded as of February 2018 (Yu and Du 2018). As presented on the webpages of *China Judgments Online*, as of August 2019, there are 74,625,133 court decisions published, including decisions on 8,561,886 criminal cases. Refugees sometimes bring abroad with them copies of court decisions in their own cases, but the publication in the official *China Judgments Online* automatically solves any problem of authenticity.

Navigating the data base is not easy for those who are not Chinese lawyers or judges themselves. We limited our search to (a) cases concerning members of the CAG; (b) sentenced on the basis of article 300; (c) in the year 2018 and in the first seven months of 2019 (January–July), thus clearly after the official Interpretation of 2017; and (d) sentenced to imprisonment of 3 years or more. Although further research may surely discover additional cases, we found more than 200 individual CAG members who were thus sentenced under article 300 between January 2018 and July 2019 in the data base. The number of decisions is smaller, since the same decision may punish more than one individual. Obviously, this does not mean that only 200 odd CAG members were tried in China during the period we considered. As mentioned earlier, not all decisions find their way to the data base.

At the end of this paragraph, we offer a list of 200 cases we selected. Some may find them repetitious, but we should not forget that each name corresponds to a person who is spending years in Chinese jails, where conditions for inmates have been denounced as unacceptable by international observers (see e.g. U.S. Department of State 2019a).

From the list, we notice the predominance of female CAG members sentenced (158 out of 200), which confirms that there are more women than men in the CAG in general (Introvigne 2020). We would not insist on the differences between “using” and “organizing” a *xie jiao* “to sabotage the implementation of the law,” since where the border lies is unclear, and very often does not lead to different penalties.

All decisions present detailed personal information, including when the CAG members joined the Church, what position they held, what specific activities they performed (see the 200 cases listed below), what spiritual books, videos, and electronic texts they kept in their homes, etc. These decisions also show a correct understanding of the CAG’s hierarchical structure, and use CAG’s usual terminology. The CAG distinguishes between church leaders (*dai ling*), sub-district leaders, and district leaders, appointed on the basis of the number of CAG members in the corresponding areas. A “church leader” normally oversees a community including at least twenty, but less than fifty, members. If the group grows to exceed fifty, a separate community is established under a new “church leader.” Sub-district and district leaders oversee a plurality of churches. There are also provincial leaders, and leaders in charge of more than one province, but none was among the 200 of our list. One would expect that district leaders would get more severe penalties than church leaders, but this is not always the case.

Through the decisions, we also discovered the importance of those the courts call “liaisons” or “district liaisons,” i.e. CAG members responsible of delivering messages and documents from one church to another within a district. Another category of sentenced CAG members were said to work in “district logistic,” printing clandestinely or photocopying faith-related materials, binding them, transferring them to memory cards, as well as head-counting the members and keeping track of the donations received. Those working in these capacities were regarded as no less dangerous than church leaders, and received similar penalties. Several church members, including Ms. Yu Tianxia, Ms. Wang Baoyu, and Ms.

Jiang Liangjiao, were sentenced to 7 years in jail merely for delivering messages of the CAG.

What did CAG members do to be sentenced under article 300? The study of the cases confirms that police and courts try to identify and punish church leaders and district leaders, but also go after ordinary members. They are sentenced for different reasons. First, they try to convert others. In several cases, trying to convert relatives is enough to be sentenced—in these cases, relatives hostile to the CAG would normally testify against the defendant. For instance, one Ms. Li Yanming was sentenced to three years, plus four years of probation (in which she would be submitted to constant surveillance), for having tried to convert her relatives, despite having confessed and promised to renounce her faith. Ms. Li Shixiu also got three years for having tried to convert her relatives and neighbors, as did Ms. Shi Min for having brought her missionary message to unsympathetic neighbors.

Courts also apply the detailed tables of the 2017 official interpretation to assess penalties against those who kept at home flyers, books, videos, and CDs. The decisions show that this is a serious problem for CAG members. The CAG is a “religion of the book,” or books, and every CAG member possesses at least one book of the Church, but if one is caught keeping CAG books at home, harsh penalties will follow. Here, however, as in other cases, penalties are imposed somewhat capriciously. It is not surprising that two female district leaders who oversaw the production of more than 13,000 pieces of CAG literature, Ms. Mo Xiufeng and Ms. Wu Lin, got 9 and 8 years respectively. However, keeping smaller quantities of CAG literature is often enough to go to jail. Mr. Liu Zhaopu kept at home 334 CAG books, plus 1 laptop, 6 TF cards, and 72 CDs containing CAG materials. He was also accused of trying to convert others, and was sentenced to three and a half year in jail.

CAG members know the law too, and we see them struggling to find where they may safely store the books and brochures without being caught and sentenced. Several decisions punished CAG members who participated in storage plans, where books printed clandestinely were divided and placed in the home of different devotees. The decision of March 14, 2019 against one Mr. Li Chuanyou is emblematic. It seems he did not commit any other crime than taking a shovel and helping CAG members dig secret underground cellars where the books would be stored. That costed him three years in jail,

plus three of probation, after having been forced to admit his crime and write a “statement of repentance.”

Note that article 300 is applied even when there is no evidence that books and brochures were distributed to others. Carrying, or keeping them at home, is enough. Ms. Zhang Qingyun was boarding a plane, when she was found out to carry with her 5 SD cards and 1 MP4 player containing CAG-related books and information. She was sentenced to three years in jail. Both Ms. Song Lanying and one Ms. Sun were sentenced to four years in jail for storing hundreds of religious books and some DVDs of the CAG in their homes.

The CAG is well-known for shooting religious videos. Although most of them are produced abroad, the decisions reveal that some are made in China. The courts punished people who participated in the production of films in various capacity. Screenwriters were regarded as more dangerous (Mr. Liu Junhua, Mr. Wu Baozhen, and Mr. Yao Shuzhi all got ten years—although in the case of Ms. Jiang Ying and Ms. Wang Meiqing the fact that they confessed for once did make a difference, and they both got three years only, plus five years of probation). Actors got lesser penalties, although some of them also participated in the filming process, including Ms. Du Xiaoqin, who was sentenced to three years and six months. But three years and six months seems to be the standard for having performed in a CAG movie, as confirmed by the cases of Mr. Ji Chunlei, Ms. Li Mei, Ms. Li Yuan, Ms. Lu Meiqin, Ms. Shao Xuemei, Mr. Sun Fengpan, Ms. Yang Jinfang, Ms. Yang Limin, and Mr. Yong Huacheng.

The formula “participated in the filming” is more ambiguous, and may refer to both important roles in the production of a movie such as director or assistant director, or lesser tasks. Mr. Wang Huaixiang and Ms. Wang Jinzhi both got five and a half years. Ms. Zhu Chunyan, Mr. An Qinzhen, Ms. Li Huanqiao, and Ms. Zhu Tiantian also “participated in the filming” of CAG religious videos and got three years plus either three or four years of probation, with confessions and promises to renounce their faith working in their favor as alleviating circumstances.

Camera operators such as Ms. Jia Haicheng and Mr. Wang Zongyao got three years plus additional years of probation, even though both confessed and promised to renounce their faith. Working as a make-up artist for the CAG movies was not taken lightly by the courts either, and costed both Ms. Guo Eryan

and Ms. Wang Juan three years and a half in jail. In fact, as reported to us by one CAG leader, make-up artists also try to make actors unrecognizable, in order to protect them from prosecution, sometimes disguising male actors as women and vice versa (Ms. Zou Demei, personal interview, New York, June 10, 2019).

Besides videos, CAG members produce testimony texts, which are shared with co-religionist and prospective converts throughout the world, and often published online. When these texts come from China, they may include details of persecution and torture. As they are spread abroad, they further damage the already compromised image of human rights in China. Those who participate in these activities are severely punished by the courts. Coordinating the writing of testimony articles was an important factor in the sentencing of Ms. Li Fengying to a term of three and a half year in jail. On November 13, 2015, Ms. Zhu Guangjuan was sentenced to 3 years in jail for being active in the CAG, with 3 years of probation. She was later convicted of continuing her CAG activities, and for having sent a report about her arrest and interrogation to CAG members overseas during her probation. She got a fine of 3,000 RMB and 6 and a half years in jail, to be added to the previous 3 years.

As most other religions do, the CAG regularly organizes worship and study meetings. Groups persecuted as *xie jiao* are forbidden to do this in China. We know from our interviews with refugees that they sometimes gather in the cellars, fields or forests to avoid detection, but this is not possible everywhere, and in some provinces the winter is very cold. They move frequently, and rent new homes and apartments to avoid detection. Ms. Long Cuiping was sentenced to three years for assisting CAG members in renting houses. The fact that she confessed, and promised to have nothing more to do with the CAG in the future, was mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Most meetings take place in the homes of believers, where religious materials can be distributed outside of the gaze of the omnipresent surveillance cameras (as far as we know, so far only in Xinjiang the police installed surveillance cameras even *inside* the homes of Uyghurs and members of other Muslim minorities). A significant number of decisions punished CAG believers who hosted meetings in their homes (and normally committed the additional crime of distributing books and brochures there). Ms. Wang Jinrui kept 5 books and 184 brochures of the CAG, and organized four meetings in her home, for which she was sentenced to a jail penalty of five and a half years. She got

a harsher penalty because she had already been previously kept in custody for 15 days for attending CAG meetings. Mr. Li Gang got five years and 6 months for attending four meetings in the home of a co-religionist, as he had been sentenced to 3 years in jail for participating in CAG activities before, and the court thus determined that he was a recidivist felon. These meetings do not need to be large. Ms. Han Su'e was sentenced to four years for having hosted two CAG members in her home and participated in small worship meetings with them.

The meetings in the home of Ms. Yang Xuerong were probably well attended, as she deemed it fit to keep there a supply of 1,627 CAG books. The price she paid was four years and three months in jail.

CAG believers often distribute their literature and videos as files via the Internet, using VPN to circumvent censorship, or put them in small memory cards, to avoid been caught transporting or storing at home more visible boxes of books or DVDs. But caught they are nonetheless, and sentenced for this. Ms. Xu Guixiang and Ms. Xiao Guorong were both sentenced to five and a half years for having shared CAG materials in this way (Xiao was also convicted for sending reports to CAG leaders). Their male co-religionist, Mr. Yu Hai, got seven and a half years for having shared CAG video, audio, and text materials. Using memory cards for storing and delivering CAG-related materials is mentioned in various decisions, and Ms. Wang Fang'e was sentenced to three years for purchasing and repairing memory cards and MP4 players intended to be used by CAG members.

CAG is a missionary religion. Almost all members “preach the gospel,” as they say, and try to convert others. This puts them at risk, because those who do not like their missionary approach may report them to the police (and pocket the rewards offered to those who denounce a member of a *xie jiao*: see Introvigne 2020).

In most courts, three years seems a standard penalty for having tried to convert others to the CAG (see the cases of Ms. Guo YanLing, Ms. Tu Yurong, Mr. Liu Shengyou, Ms. Li Shixiu and others; Mr. Niu Yueting got three years and six months), although one Ms. Wu Youjin got seven years, perhaps because her missionary activity was too successful. Here, again, confessions and declarations to renounce the faith did not always grant significant benefits: Mr. Liu Shengyou confessed but got three years, just like others who did not confess. Sometimes, sharing the CAG faith within a small

personal circle was regarded as even worse than preaching to strangers. Ms. Chen Laiying got five years for evangelizing in her workplace.

A summary of the 200 decisions follows, indicating for each individual sentenced, the last and first name (when indicated in the published decisions: some provide only the last name), the sex, what crimes were imputed to him or her under article 300, the date of the decision, the penalty, and the shortened URL linking to the text of the decision in the *China Judgments Online* (CJO) database as of September 18, 2019. Unfortunately, these URLs change often. The decisions can always be found through searches based on names and dates, but we have archived the 200 we selected at the address <https://cesnur.org/2019/cjo.pdf>.

1

王灵洁

Wang Lingjie

Female

Was a CAG district leader, who organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/01/04

9 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/9Gnt7s>

2

周华兰

Zhou Hualan

Female

Was a CAG district leader, who organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/01/04

8 years imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/9Gnt7s>

3

蔡如华

Cai Ruhua

Female

Was a CAG district leader, who organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/01/04

8 years imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/9Gnt7s>

4

李晓玲

Li Xiaoling

Female

Served as an upper-level CAG leader in charge of organizing gatherings and missionary activities. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/01/04

3 years imprisonment plus 4 years of probation and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/9Gnt7s>

5

胡文萍

Hu Wenping

Female

Acted as a CAG church leader, organizing gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/02/08

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/T20Tme>

6

王秀美

Wang Xiumei

Female

Edited CAG texts, and kept at her living place 3 laptops including CAG-related files and over 60 CAG books.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/02/09

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/rYmRKr>

7

张得兰

Zhang Delan

Female

Edited CAG texts and kept CAG materials in her living place.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/02/09

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/rYmRKR>

8

冯春连

Feng Chunlian

Male

Supervised and transferred CAG money in the amount of 29 million RMB in cash.

Confession and promise to renounce his faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/02/12

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/2sVTp4> and <https://is.gd/Ehp1I0>

9

郭友兰

Guo Youlan

Female

Participated in editing and selecting for publication testimony articles written by CAG members. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/02/13

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/0EYmWR>

10

何焕相

He Huanxiang

Female

Participated in editing and selecting for publication testimony articles written by CAG members. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/02/13

3 years imprisonment plus 4 years of probation and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/0EYmWR>

11

邓旭然

Deng Xuran

Female

Participated in editing and selecting for publication testimony articles written by CAG members. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/02/13

3 years imprisonment plus 4 years of probation and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/0EYmWR>

12

莫秀凤

Mo Xiufeng

Female

Was a CAG district leader who organized the distribution of 13,512 books and flyers.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

9 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

13

吴琳

Wu Lin

Female

Was a CAG district leader and shared with Mo Xiufeng (see above) responsibility for distributing 13,512 books and flyers.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

8 years imprisonment and a fine of 25,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

14

王苏斋

Wang Suzhai

Female

Was in charge of supervising and managing church funds in her CAG church.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

15

蔡金凤

Cai Jinfeng

Female

Was a CAG district leader, responsible for the organization of gatherings and missionary activities, and the distribution of large amounts of books and flyers.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

16

班芬

Ban Fen

Female

Was an assistant for CAG district logistic, responsible for copying and binding faith-related books.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

17

张平

Zhang Ping

Female

Served as a CAG district liaison, responsible for delivering faith-related information.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

18

赵立平

Zhao Liping

Female

Was responsible for delivering faith-related materials to fellow CAG members.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

19

曹俊丽

Cao Junli

Female

Participated in the production of 13,512 CAG brochures.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

3 years imprisonment plus 4 years of probation and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

20

张春妹

Zhang Chunmei

Female

Participated in both CAG worship meetings and the printing of faith-related materials. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

21

徐爱莲

Xu Ailian

Female

Hosted CAG members and gave faith-related materials to them.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

22

杨珍珠

Yang Zhenzhu

Female

Participated in the production of CAG-related materials.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

23

谷玉华

Gu Yuhua

Female

Preached and proselytized on behalf of the CAG and received, and forwarded to others, texts written by CAG members. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/01

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/vD23fH>

24

姜良娇

Jiang Liangjiao

Female

Served as a CAG liaison, responsible for delivering materials and memory cards containing faith-related information.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/09

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/MwmgYX>

25

丁云

Ding Yun

Female

Was responsible for delivering faith-related materials to fellow CAG members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/09

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 25,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/MwmgYX>

26

张清云

Zhang Qingyun

Female

When boarding a plane, was found out to carry with her 5 SD cards and 1 MP4 player containing CAG-related information.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/19

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Omtzat>

27

叶六和

Ye Liuhe

Male

Distributed to fellow CAG members faith-related books, video, and other materials, and tried to convert others.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/19

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/M7T2As> and <https://is.gd/YGsrIt>

28

徐光秀

Xu Guangxiu

Female

Helped transfer faith-related information to the SD cards of fellow CAG members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/26

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/RTsuhH>

29

孙美红

Sun Meihong

Female

Proselytized on behalf of the CAG and kept at home 283 faith-related booklets and 6 TF cards.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/03/29

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/zjy07S>

30

田桂云

Tian Guiyun

Female

Tried to convert to the CAG a person surnamed Sang and carried with her a tablet containing faith-related materials.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/04/03

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/wJMgJ8>

31

桑月霞

Sang Yuexia

Female

Tried to convert to the CAG, together with Tian Guiyun (see above), a person surnamed Sang and carried with her a tablet containing faith-related information. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/04/03

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/wJMgJ8>

32

屠秋红

Tu Qiuhong

Female

Was a CAG district leader in charge of 16 churches, and organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/04/12

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JlddmF>

33

陈来英

Chen Laiying

Female

Shared the CAG faith in her workplace and kept CAG materials in her home.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/04/17

5 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/VZaXoo>

34

陈小文

Chen Xiaowen

Female

Was in charge of the work of three video groups that produced CAG religious films.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/04/17

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/fNHmbm>

35

俞丽娟

Yu Lijuan

Female

Oversaw two video groups that produced CAG movies.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/04/17

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/fNHmbm>

36

王芳娥

Wang Fang'e

Female

Purchased and repaired memory cards and MP4 players for CAG members.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/04/27

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/eEk9Ar>

37

钟春梅

Zhong Chunmei

Female

Delivered repeatedly SD cards and notes containing faith-related information to a fellow CAG member.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/05/02

3 years and 3 months imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Qm66kf>

38

池增香

Chi Zengxiang

Female

Was a CAG church leader and organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/05/03

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/NHI8uA>

39

傅术玲

Fu Shuling

Female

Was responsible for distributing CAG books to other members and kept in her home a large number of CAG books.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/05/03

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/NHI8uA>

40

郭妍玲

Guo YanLing

Female

Proselytized and preached on behalf of the CAG.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/05/03

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/NHI8uA>

41

任凤云

Ren Fengyun

Female

Was a CAG church leader and organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/05/03

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/NHI8uA>

42

张之勤

Zhang Zhiqin

Female

Was a CAG church leader who supervised the organization of gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/05/08

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/BrWVKx>

43

马尚炳

Ma Shangbing

Male

Served as a CAG church leader and kept in his home 1 MP4 player and 1 TF card containing faith-related information.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/05/24

3 years and 3 months imprisonment

<https://is.gd/RmAcsE> and <https://is.gd/NSzdGI>

44

周志华

Zhou Zhihua

Female

Organized CAG missionary activities and kept at her home 1 MP4 player and 1 TF card containing faith-related information.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/05/24

3 years imprisonment

<https://is.gd/RmAcsE> and <https://is.gd/NSzdGI>

45

李国付

Li Guofu

Male

Was a CAG church leader who supervised the organization of gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/05/29

4 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/xoxzAo>

46

李凤英

Li Fengying

Female

Acted as a CAG leader, organized missionary activities and coordinated the writing of testimony articles.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/05/29

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/xoxzAo>

47

王金瑞

Wang Jinrui

Female

Was administratively detained for 15 days in 2016 and continued to practice her faith afterwards. In 2017, she organized CAG members to gather four times at her home, where she kept 184 brochures and 5 books.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/06/11

5 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/p1mpfP>

48

李刚

Li Gang

Male

Was sentenced to 3 years imprisonment in 2013 and continued to practice his faith after serving his term. In 2017, he participated in worship meetings with several other CAG members at a place where he kept 184 brochures and 5 faith-related books.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/06/11

5 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/p1mpfP>

49

刘某

Liu

Female

Together with fellow CAG members, copied faith-related materials with a large photocopier.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/06/25

5 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/xyffsU>

50

王某

Wang

Female

Together with other CAG members, photocopied CAG materials at home.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/06/25

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/xyffsU>

51

冯某 1

Feng 1

Male

Together with other CAG members, photocopied CAG materials at home.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/06/25

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/xyffsU>

52

冯某 2

Feng 2

Male

Repeatedly photocopied and distributed CAG-related material.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/06/25

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/xyffsU>

53

薛某

Xue

Male

Repeatedly photocopied and distributed CAG-related material.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/06/25

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/xyffsU>

54

李发梅

Li Famei

Female

Was a CAG church leader, who distributed 258 faith-related books and shared multiple CAG audio and video files with other CAG members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/06/27

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 40,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/nXUrm>

55

魏照清

Wei Zhaoqing

Female

Was a CAG church leader who supervised the organization of gatherings and missionary activities, including the distribution of books and materials.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/04

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 40,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Ztdybh>

56

于天侠

Yu Tianxia

Female

Served as a CAG liaison, responsible for delivering faith-related materials, and kept at her living place 10 faith-related books and 10 TF cards containing CAG information.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/04

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 40,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Ztdybh>

57

黄方荣

Huang Fangrong

Female

Received CAG books, CDs, and videos and distributed them to others. Confession and repentance mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/04

5 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Ztdybh>

58

韩毛沙

Han Maosha

Female

Was a CAG church leader and organized gatherings and missionary activities. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/04

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Ztdybh>

59

沈敏枝

Shen Minzhi

Female

Assisted CAG upper-level leaders with the management work of multiple churches.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/09

4 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/8wGCIn>

60

余代利

Yu Daili

Male

Was a CAG district leader and organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/09

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/8wGCIn>

61

周巧红

Zhou Qiaohong

Female

Was a CAG district leader and organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/09

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/8wGCIn>

62

肖永碧

Xiao Yongbi

Female

Hosted CAG worship meetings in her home and was responsible for receiving and distributing faith-related materials.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/09

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/8wGCIn>

63

张华丽

Zhang Huali

Female

Organized CAG gatherings at her home, tried to convert her relatives and friends, and kept at her home 102 CDs.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/13

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/buLgtl>

64

张荣翠

Zhang Rongcui

Female

Was a CAG district leader and organized gatherings and missionary activities; stored CAG books. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/16

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/nfP1n3> and <https://is.gd/8k3PFP>

65

马丽

Ma Li

Female

Served as a CAG church leader in charge of daily management work, including running a book storehouse and copying faith-related information. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/16

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 6,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/nfP1n3> and <https://is.gd/8k3PFP>

66

董正兰

Dong Zhenglan

Female

Worked with Ma Li (see above) as CAG co-leader, participating in the same tasks. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/16

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 6,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/nfP1n3> and <https://is.gd/8k3PFP>

67

张秀兰

Zhang Xiulan

Female

Stored CAG books and copied faith-related information to be distributed.

Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/16

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/nfP1n3> and <https://is.gd/8k3PFP>

68

尚战杰

Shang Zhanjie

Male

Stored CAG books. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/16

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/nfP1n3> and <https://is.gd/8k3PFP>

69

朱巧芳

Zhu Qiaofang

Female

Stored CAG books on behalf of the church. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/16

3 years imprisonment plus 3 years of probation and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/nfP1n3> and <https://is.gd/8k3PFP>

70

傅凤仙

Fu Fengxian

Female

Attended CAG gatherings and used her house for storing and distributing CAG materials.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/18

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/adoRc4>

71

涂玉荣

Tu Yurong

Female

Proselytized on behalf of the CAG, and stored faith-related books and other materials on behalf of the church.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/18

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/rdJkAl>

72

王凤珠

Wang Fengzhu

Female

Co-ordinated fellow CAG members who photocopied faith-related materials and distributed them to 13 churches.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/18

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/adoRc4>

73

钟

Zhong

Female

Was responsible for distributing religious books to CAG members, transferring faith-related information to them. Regularly attended gatherings.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/07/31

4 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/XLGnKa>

74

杨雪荣

Yang Xuerong

Female

Hosted CAG meetings in her home, preached the gospel of Almighty God, and kept at home 1,627 church-related books, 319 CDs, and 288 gospel booklets.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/08/02

4 years and 3 months imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/XLGnKa>

75

刘圣有

Liu Shengyou

Male

Preached and proselytized on behalf of the CAG. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/08/02

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/XLGnKa>

76

赵海滨

Zhao Haibin

Male

Was a CAG church leader, responsible for the organization of gatherings and missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/08/08

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/pgWxGr>

77

韩素娥

Han Su'e

Female

Hosted two CAG members and participated in worship meetings with them.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/08/29

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/339biW>

78

孟宪翠

Meng Xiancui

Female

Organized CAG gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/08/29

3 years and 3 months imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/fzJtsz>

79

魏彩英

Wei Caiying

Female

Organized CAG gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/08/29

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/fzJtsz>

80

姜英

Jiang Ying

Female

Participated in the screenwriting of CAG films. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/08/29

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 3,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/339biW>

81

王美青

Wang Meiqing

Female

Participated in the screenwriting of CAG films. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/08/29

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 3,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/339biW>

82

李玉华

Li Yuhua

Female

Organized CAG gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/08/29

3 years imprisonment plus 3 years of probation and a fine of 3,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/fzJtsz>

83

周某

Zhou

Female

Stored CAG books for the church and tried to convert her family. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/13

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/W4ejYs>

84

赵玉洁

Zhao Yujie

Female

Was arrested at a CAG gathering in a private home, where she carried with her 3 cell phones, 2 TF cards and 1 MP5 player containing faith-related information.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/19

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/EfEpBz>

85

王月亭

Wang Yueting

Female

Participated in a CAG gathering and was found in possession of 3 cell phones, 2 TF cards and 1 MP5 player containing faith-related information.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/19

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 6,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/EfEpBz>

86

王金芝

Wang Jinzhi

Female

Participated in the filming of CAG religious videos.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

5 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

87

王怀祥

Wang Huaixiang

Male

Participated in the filming of CAG religious videos.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

5 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

88

滕成勤

Teng Chengqin

Female

Hosted CAG members and delivered faith-related materials to them.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

89

王宗明

Wang Zongming

Male

Hosted CAG members and delivered faith-related materials to them.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

90

颜维华

Yan Weihua

Female

Hosted CAG members and delivered faith-related materials to them.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

91

岳玉梅

Yue Yumei

Female

Hosted CAG members and delivered faith-related materials to them.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

92

杜小芹

Du Xiaoqin

Female

Played a part in a CAG religious video and participated in its filming.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

93

郭二艳

Guo Eryan

Female

Participated in the filming of a CAG religious video and served as a make-up artist.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

94

计春雷

Ji Chunlei

Male

Performed in a CAG religious video.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

95

李梅

Li Mei

Female

Performed in a CAG religious video.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

96

李媛

Li Yuan

Female

Performed in a CAG religious video.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

97

陆美琴

Lu Meiqin

Female

Performed in a CAG religious video.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

98

邵雪梅

Shao Xuemei

Female

Performed in a CAG religious video.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

99

孙凤攀

Sun Fengpan

Male

Performed in a CAG religious video.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

100

王娟

Wang Juan

Female

Participated in the filming of a CAG religious video and served as a make-up artist. Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

101

杨金芳

Yang Jinfang

Female

Performed in a CAG religious video.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

102

杨立敏

Yang Limin

Female

Performed in a CAG religious video.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

103

雍华成

Yong Huacheng

Male

Performed in a CAG religious video.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

104

贾海成

Jia Haicheng

Male

Participated in the filming of a CAG religious video and acted as a camera operator. Confession and promise to renounce his faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years imprisonment plus 4 years of probation and a fine of 4,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

105

朱春艳

Zhu Chunyan

Female

Participated in the filming of CAG videos. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 4,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

106

安勤政

An Qinzheng

Male

Participated in the filming of CAG videos. Confession and promise to renounce his faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years imprisonment plus 4 years of probation and a fine of 4,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

107

李焕巧

Li Huanqiao

Female

Participated in the filming of CAG videos. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 4,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

108

王宗耀

Wang Zongyao

Male

Participated in the filming of CAG videos and acted as a camera operator. Confession and promise to renounce his faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years imprisonment plus 5 years of probation and a fine of 4,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

109

朱田田

Zhu Tiantian

Female

Participated in the filming of CAG videos and acted as a recording technician. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/20

3 years imprisonment plus 4 years of probation and a fine of 4,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JDfz3R>

110

朱广娟

Zhu Guangjuan

Female

Had contacts with CAG members overseas and sent to them a report about her experience of being arrested and interrogated.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/26

6 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/LCEVlq>

111

李石秀

Li Shixiu

Female

Supervised CAG missionary activities, and tried to convert her relatives and neighbors.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/26

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/LCEVlq>

112

李雁鸣

Li Yanming

Female

Tried to convert her relatives to the CAG. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/26

3 years imprisonment plus 4 years of probation and a fine of 3,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/LCEVlq>

113

陈彩华

Chen Caihua

Female

Was a CAG district leader in charge of the work of ten churches.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/09/29

5 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/LKmgWL>

114

刘俊华

Liu Junhua

Male

Was a screenwriter for CAG movies and copied CAG material for the couple who hosted him.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/09

10 years imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/ruoE8o>

115

吴保振

Wu Baozhen

Male

Was a screenwriter for the CAG movies and copied CAG material for the couple who hosted him.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/09

10 years imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/ruoE8o>

116

姚树智

Yao Shuzhi

Male

Was a screenwriter for the CAG movies and copied CAG material for the couple who hosted him.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/09

10 years imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/ruoE8o>

117

邵福健

Shao Fujian

Male

Hosted CAG members at his rented place and provided them with accommodations. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/09

3 years imprisonment plus 3 years of probation and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/ruoE8o>

118

刘照普

Liu Zhaopu

Male

Proselytized on behalf of the CAG, and kept at his living place 334 books, 1 laptop, 6 TF cards, and 72 CDs containing faith-related information.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/11

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/9v1SBP>

119

郝金莲

Hao Jinlian

Female

Acted as an upper-level leader, having overall responsibility for the CAG work in her area.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/12

5 years imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/4a5oa9>

120

赵微微

Zhao Weiwei

Female

Helped the district leader head-counting CAG members, supervised church money and assets, revised testimony articles and copied faith-related information for CAG members in the district.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/20

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/2jVx8T>

121

汪宝玉

Wang Baoyu

Female

Served as a CAG liaison, responsible for delivering messages among churches, and carried with her TF cards containing 4,466 videos and audios, and 399 electronic documents.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/20

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/2jVx8T>

122

李红

Li Hong

Female

Assisted her CAG district leader in church work, and supervised and managed church money.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/20

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/2jVx8T>

123

罗后芳

Luo Houfang

Female

Hosted CAG members, provided accommodation to them, and supervised the church money in her church.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/20

5 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/2jVx8T>

124

林伟萍

Lin Weiping

Female

Proselytized on behalf of the CAG, and transferred faith-related information to memory cards for missionary use.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/29

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/LXv0nV>

125

胡长红

Hu Changhong

Male

He and his wife He Qimei (see below) hosted CAG members and gatherings, kept at their living place a large number of books and other CAG materials, and wrote texts about their experiences.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/31

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/GSHgDH>

126

何七妹

He Qimei

Female

She and her husband Hu Changhong (see above) hosted CAG members and gatherings, kept at their living place a large number of books and other CAG materials, and wrote texts about their experiences.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/10/31

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/GSHgDH>

127

郑长云

Zheng Changyun

Female

Was a CAG church leader, who supervised the organization of gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/05

8 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/R4uIJr>

128

朱友娟

Zhu Youjuan

Female

Was a CAG church leader, who supervised the organization of gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/05

7 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 18,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/R4uIJr>

129

姚某甲

Yao A

Female

Was a CAG church leader, who supervised the organization of gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/05

5 years imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/R4uIJr>

130

魏某某

Wei

Female

Was in charge of CAG logistical work and distributed faith-related materials.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/05

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/R4uIJr>

131

姚某乙

Yao B

Female

Worked as a CAG liaison, responsible for delivering information to members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/05

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 4,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/R4uIJr>

132

陶旗冻

Tao Qidong

Male

Participated in the making of CAG religious videos and copied faith-related files for other CAG members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/08

8 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/a8xpMK>

133

尹仁荣

Yin Renrong

Male

Hosted CAG members in her home and was responsible for delivering church information to them. Confession and promise to renounce his faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/08

5 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/a8xpMK>

134

龚梓安

Gong Zi'an

Male

Participated in the making of CAG gospel videos. Confession and promise to renounce his faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/08

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/a8xpMK>

135

王月华

Wang Yuehua

Female

Was responsible for distributing faith-related books and materials to other CAG members, and organized them to gather at her home.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/12

5 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/w2S8Yb>

136

于海

Yu Hai

Male

Copied CAG videos, audios, and text materials to fellow CAG members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/26

7 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/bLfgFI> and <https://is.gd/bfdllj>

137

于建武

Yu Jianwu

Male

Copied CAG videos, audios, and text materials to fellow members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/11/26

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/bLfgFI> and <https://is.gd/bfdllj>

138

黄芳

Huang Fang

Female

Participated in copying and binding 460 CAG booklets and kept at her home 15 books, 206 brochures, and laptops containing faith-related information.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/04

5 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/BLXk5V>

139

关羽

Guan Yu

Male

Was arrested in December 2012 and admonished he should no longer participate in CAG activities; he did not comply and was arrested again in 2017.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/14

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/SXfe1x>

140

曹红梅

Cao Hongmei

Female

Was a CAG district leader, who organized CAG gatherings and arranged for CAG members to store church money and faith-related materials.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/14

4 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/XyJ4RW>

141

季一伶

Ji Yiling

Female

Participated in filming and photographing CAG gatherings, and kept at her living place 5 faith-related books as well as electronic devices containing a large number of CAG audio and video files.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/17

7 years and 6 months imprisonment

<https://is.gd/Gsi2UU>

142

熊群群

Xiong Qunqun

Female

Was a preacher in charge of the work of several CAG churches; kept in her living place several CAG books, 3 MP5 players containing faith-related information, and other material.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/17

7 years and 6 months imprisonment

<https://is.gd/Gsi2UU>

143

黄亚美

Huang Yamei

Female

Acted as a CAG church leader in charge of the overall work of the church; kept at her living place several CAG books and an unspecified number of other items such as MP5 players and TF cards containing faith-related information.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/17

7 years imprisonment

<https://is.gd/Gsi2UU>

144

吴友金

Wu Youjin

Female

Proselytized on behalf of the CAG, and kept at her living place an unspecified number of CAG books and MP5 players containing faith-related information.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/17

7 years imprisonment
<https://is.gd/Gsi2UU>

145

万玲霞

Wan Lingxia

Female

Provided fugitive CAG member Ji Yiling with a living place.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/17

3 years and 6 months imprisonment

<https://is.gd/Gsi2UU>

146

石敏

Shi Min

Female

Tried to convert to the CAG her neighbors, including two surnamed Wang and Liu.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/22

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

10,000

<https://is.gd/6wPbBQ>

147

刘锐

Liu Rui

Female

Organized several CAG gatherings in her living place, where she kept 490 faith-related books, 305 pieces of religious leaflets, and 139 CDs.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/24

3 years and 9 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/nbLJNb>

148

常秀平

Chang Xiuping

Female

Served as a CAG leader, organizing worship meetings and distributing faith-related books. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/25

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/6LjnpE>

149

吴书凤

Wu Shufeng

Female

Organized CAG gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/26

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/x26aig>

150

何文碧

He Wenbi

Female

Was a CAG preacher responsible for organizing members to gather and evangelize, and stored faith-related books for the church.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/29

4 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/LHLjMu>

151

秦兴珍

Qin Xingzhen

Female

Was a CAG church leader who supervised the organization of gatherings and missionary activities, and stored CAG books for the church.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/29

4 years and 3 months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/LHLjMu>

152

张恒明

Zhang Hengming

Male

Together with others, transported CAG books.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2018/12/29

4 years and 3 months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/LHLjMu>

153

孙某

Sun

Female

Kept at home 771 CAG books and 1,444 CDs.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/01/09

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/wm49gF>

154

宋兰英

Song Lanying

Female

Kept at home 1,938 CDs and 327 faith-related books, including copies of CAG's holy scripture *The Word Appears in the Flesh*.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/01/15

4 years imprisonment

<https://is.gd/dudboD>

155

刘艳

Liu Yan

Female

Organized CAG gatherings, distributed faith-related books to fellow CAG members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/01/24

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/BojEmm>

156

邹永霞

Zou Yongxia

Female

Organized CAG gatherings, distributed faith-related books to fellow CAG members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/01/24

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/BojEmm>

157

孙文莲

Sun Wenlian

Female

Organized CAG gatherings, distributed faith-related books to fellow CAG members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/01/28

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Ko05iq>

158

仁某

Ren

Female

Repeatedly delivered faith-related materials to fellow CAG members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/01/31

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/ALaX9J>

159

刘淑君

Liu Shujun

Female

Tried to convert to CAG members of her family and kept at her living place one Bible and one copy of the CAG's holy scripture *The Word Appears in the Flesh*.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/02/15

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/SVWI8o>

160

卫小泉

Wei Xiaoquan

Female

Attended CAG worship meetings, tried to convert others.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/02/28

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/ZpNh2x>

161

王春梅

Wang Chunmei

Female

Was a CAG church leader in charge of organizing gatherings and missionary activities. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/04

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 4,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/WVRBIF>

162

石栋方

Shi Dongfang

Female

Organized CAG members for gatherings, missionary activities, and distribution of books. Confession and declaration that she renounced her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/12

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 2,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/WVspgA>

163

龙翠萍

Long Cuiping

Female

Assisted CAG members in renting houses. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/12

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 2,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/WVspgA>

164

崔素英

Cui Suying

Female

Organized the storage of CAG books and CDs in the homes of several CAG members.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/14

3 years imprisonment plus 4 years of probation and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/I59qes>

165

刘须山

Liu Xushan

Male

Organized the storage of CAG books and CDs in the homes of several CAG members.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/14

3 years imprisonment plus 3 years of probation and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/I59qes>

166

李传友

Li Chuanyou

Male

Assisted CAG members in digging cellars in their homes for storing faith-related materials and CDs. Confession and promise to renounce his faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/14

3 years imprisonment plus 3 years of probation and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/I59qes>

167

姜春花

Jiang Chunhua

Female

Acted as a CAG church leader, attended worship meetings, and copied faith-related information to others. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/20

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/ZpjWgB>

168

王荣荣

Wang Rongrong

Female

Was a CAG church leader in charge of managing the church work, hosted CAG gatherings in her home, and shared faith-related information with others.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/29

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JZlg6E>

169

孙娟娟

Sun Juanjuan

Female

Was a CAG church leader in charge of managing the church work, hosted CAG gatherings in her home, and shared faith-related information with others.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/29

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JZlg6E>

170

夏涛

Xia Tao

Female

Was a CAG church leader in charge of managing the church work, hosted CAG gatherings in her home, and shared faith-related information with others.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/29

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JZlg6E>

171

秦晓娟

Qin Xiaojuan

Female

Was a CAG district preacher in charge of organizational and missionary activities.

Kept at her living place a large number of faith-related books and materials.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/29

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JZlg6E>

172

蒙玲利

Meng Lingli

Female

Hosted multiple CAG meetings in her home and stored CAG materials there.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/29

5 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JZlg6E>

173

邹淑梅

Zou Shumei

Female

Hosted multiple CAG meetings in her home and copied CAG materials for other CAG members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/29

5 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JZlg6E>

174

王金香

Wang Jinxiang

Female

Kept at home and delivered to others CAG books and materials. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/03/29

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/JZlg6E>

175

庞青

Pang Qing

Female

Before 2014, had been a CAG church leader who organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/hR6egJ>

176

郭玉娥

Guo Yu'e

Female

Before 2014, had been a CAG church leader and director of missionary activities in her area.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

6 years imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/hR6egJ>

177

肖国荣

Xiao Guorong

Female

Assisted CAG members in sharing videos, audios, and texts, and sent reports to CAG leaders.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

5 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/hR6egJ>

178

徐桂香

Xu Guixiang

Female

Shared CAG materials with others.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

5 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/hR6egJ>

179

米彩勤

Mi Caiqin

Female

Was a CAG church leader and delivered faith-related materials to fellow CAG members multiple times. Co-operated with the police in identifying other members, which was mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 6,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/hR6egJ>

180

冯钧兰

Feng Juulan

Female

Was a CAG district leader, who organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

4 years and 8 months imprisonment and a fine of 13,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/VKNkuE> and <https://is.gd/Cm8o07>

181

王菊英

Wang Juying

Female

Was a CAG district leader, who organized gatherings and missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

4 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 12,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/VKNkuE> and <https://is.gd/Cm8o07>

182

罗恢厚

Luo Huihou

Male

Was in charge of CAG logistical work, distributed to CAG fellow members faith-related materials.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/VKNkuE> and <https://is.gd/Cm8o07>

183

袁玉兰

Yuan Yulan

Female

Participated in editing and selecting for publication testimony articles written by CAG members.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/VKNkuE> and <https://is.gd/Cm8o07>

184

张英

Zhang Ying

Female

Coached CAG members in writing testimony articles, organized missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 8,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/VKNkuE> and <https://is.gd/Cm8o07>

185

陈兴明

Chen Xingming

Male

Kept CAG money and possessions, helped Luo Huihou (see no. 182) in copying faith-related materials.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/01

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 6,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/VKNkuE> and <https://is.gd/Cm8o07>

186

贾某某

Jia

Female

Was a CAG church leader, in charge of organizing gatherings and the storage of CAG books. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/03

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Z5ZkNB>

187

赵某某

Zhao

Male

Stored CAG books and other materials.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/03

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Z5ZkNB>

188

刘某某

Liu

Female

Stored CAG books and other materials.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/03

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Z5ZkNB>

189

王万田

Wang Wantian

Male

Was in charge of CAG logistical work and responsible for distributing faith-related materials to other members. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/04

3 years imprisonment and 6 months plus 4 years of probation and a fine of 3,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/3vZyR6>

190

雷桂荣

Lei Guirong

Female

Assisted the district leader in the CAG work, took charge of the missionary work and the storage of CAG books.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/12

3 years and 3 months imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/54gxHI>

191

牛月亭

Niu Yueting

Male

Proselytized on behalf of the CAG and kept at home over 400 faith-related books.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/17

3 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/YRe21B>

192

马春兰

Ma Chunlan

Female

Was in charge of the logistic group in her CAG district, i.e. was responsible for the correspondence between the district and the churches, and for transferring information to memory cards and distributing them to members.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/23

7 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/iLoztH>

193

王瑞玲

Wang Ruiling

Female

Assisted Ma Chunlan (see above) in dealing with the work of the district logistic group, performing bookkeeping and transferring files to memory cards.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/23

7 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/iLoztH>

194

何某某

He

Female

Oversaw CAG logistic work in her district, including transportation and distribution of materials. Confession mentioned as a mitigating circumstance.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/23

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/iLoztH>

195

赵建军

Zhao Jianjun

Male

Distributed faith-related materials and over 1,000 CDs to fellow CAG members, and kept at home 133 CDs.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/04/29

6 years and 6 months imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/WEquBt>

196

韩改娥

Han Gai'e

Female

Preached the doctrine of Almighty God to her daughter and hosted CAG gatherings in her home. Confession and promise to renounce her beliefs considered as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/05/06

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/0w03bm>

197

张中秀

Zhang Zhongxiu

Female

Organized CAG missionary activities.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/05/17

4 years imprisonment
<https://is.gd/ZyaB7i>

198

范桂花

Fan Guihua

Female

Was a church leader, who organized CAG gatherings and missionary activities.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/05/22

4 years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/Shb5Wl>

199

赵耀红

Zhao Yaohong

Male

Attended CAG worship meetings, tried to convert others, and repaired electronic products containing faith-related information.

Organizing and using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/05/29

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/pmDyZG>

200

段水仙

Duan Shuixian

Female

Attended worship meetings and tried to convert others. Confession and promise to renounce her faith mentioned as mitigating circumstances.

Using a *xie jiao* organization to undermine the enforcement of the law

2019/07/26

3 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 RMB

<https://is.gd/st8xWJ>

Conclusions

If it was not for the tragic consequences affecting those sentenced, the 200 decisions would look like fascinating ethnographic material on how the CAG members live in China, continuously struggling to hide themselves, their books, and their meetings, yet never renouncing to spread their faith and even shooting movies in their most difficult circumstances. What is of interest here is that their situation can be precisely described as one of constant “fear of persecution,” a fear not imaginary but very much real, as being caught, arrested, and sentenced is a daily, frightening possibility.

What the decisions summarized below confirm is that article 300 is applied to CAG members who perform the most normal religious activities, those typically protected by the international conventions on religious liberty: they print books and flyers, share their faith with relatives, neighbors, and co-workers, send faith-related files to their co-religionists via the Internet, attend worship gatherings, preach their religion. The claim, mentioned above, by Chinese Embassies that “the laws of China and their execution are not punishing the faith of *xie jiao* members, but rather the anti-society activities born out of their faiths,” is only true if “anti-society activities” is understood to include the most elementary and basic forms of religious life.

These CAG devotees in China are not sentenced for robbing shops to finance their religion, stealing money, abusing women or children, or assaulting and beating opponents. Would they do it, they would be punished by the harsher penalties of the second and third paragraph of article 300. But we did not find any such incident. In our 200 cases, article 300 was always enforced with reference to its first paragraph, dealing with “organizing” or, more often, “using” a *xie jiao* “to undermine the enforcement of the law,” i.e. to perform illegal activities. The cases demonstrated that attending worship meetings or keeping religious books of a group persecuted as a *xie jiao* at home, or sharing the faith with a neighbor, *are* illegal activities in China and are constructed as attempts “to undermine the enforcement of the law.”

Not considering how article 300 really operates in China, courts in democratic countries make tragic mistakes. We would like to conclude this long article with a sober meditation on one of our 200 cases. It concerns Ms. Wang Xiumei, who is precisely a victim of misinterpretation of Chinese law in

democratic countries. In 2017, Wang, a CAG asylum seeker in Switzerland, received a deportation order from the Swiss authorities, confirmed up to the Swiss Federal Court (Bundesverwaltungsgericht 2017). They did not believe she was at risk of being arrested in China.

Knowing that forcible deportation would mean that the Chinese police would wait for her at the airport, Wang accepted to return to China spontaneously on May 2, 2017. Once in China, she took the precaution of not returning to her home in Linshu County, Shandong, but instead rented a room in the housing facility of a construction company in the same county. However, in the night of June 27, 2017, the police knocked at her door and arrested her as a member of a *xie jiao*. On February 9, 2018, the Linshu County People's Court sentenced Wang to three and a half year in jail under article 300. The verdict made it clear that Wang had been wanted for the crime of "using a *xie jiao*" for having edited and passed to others material of the CAG. She also kept in her living place 3 laptops including CAG-related files and over 60 CAG books.

Although this goes beyond the matter of interpreting article 300, Swiss authorities also doubted that Wang was really a member of the CAG, as her answers to questions about CAG origins and theology failed to conform to what the Swiss refugee board members and judges had read in biased or outdated Internet sources. In fact, Wang's answers were correct, while the sources used by the Swiss authorities were wrong. The Chinese judges knew better, and sentenced Wang for being a member of an "editorial group" revising CAG texts for theological correctness. Obviously, she *did* know CAG theology.

We do not mention the Wang case to blame the Swiss officers and judges. Knowing what is really going on in China is difficult, and until a few years ago the CAG was a virtually unknown group even among scholars. This is precisely why we believe that studying CAG legal cases in China, as well as decisions concerning CAG refugees abroad, is a worthy task for scholars of new religious movements. And it may be one of the rare cases in which scholars would write not for the academia only, but to protect the innocent and save human lives.

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Channelling for Salvation: The History and Beliefs of the Dutch Spiritual Church-Society (NSK, 1945–1993)

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ABSTRACT: Based on previously inaccessible documents, the article traces the history and beliefs of 20th century Dutch Spiritualist medium Koenraad Hendrik Gerardus (K.H.G.) Spee and the secretive esoteric society he founded in 1945, the Nederlands Spiritueel Kerkgenootschap, “Dutch Spiritual Church-Society,” better known by its abbreviation NSK, up until its demise in 1993 and resurgence in 2013. The NSK is discussed within the larger context of Dutch Spiritualism/Spiritism. A contrast is noted between NSK’s theoretical “democratic” approach, proclaiming that each bona fide member can potentially communicate with the spirits, and archival documents evidencing that, at least within the Amsterdam chapter, Spee served as almost the sole medium, and the content of his channeled messages was regarded as normative.

KEYWORDS: Nederlands Spiritueel Kerkgenootschap, NSK, K.H.G. Spee, Spiritism, Spiritualism, Spiritualism in The Netherlands.

Introduction

Modern Spiritualism emerged in the 19th century as a movement in the United States, and spread over Europe within a decade. In general, it is assumed that its starting point was in Hydesville, New York, in the year 1848, when the Fox sisters, Leah (1814–1890), Maggie (1833–1893), and Kate (1837–1892), produced “rappings,” i.e. sounds that were believed to be communicative signals from spirits. Even though the question regarding whether the phenomena were genuine remains until today, there is little doubt that these events instigated a widespread movement that still exists in the present. In 1889, a world conference about Spiritualism was organized in Paris, and by that time, an estimated 15

million people around the world adhered to some form of Spiritualism—or Spiritism, as the French version was more often called (Sommer 1991, 53).

A well-known and popular branch of Spiritism was “Kardecist Spiritism,” named after Frenchman Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804–1869), better known under his pen name Allan Kardec, who defined Spiritism in his significant work, *The Book of the Spirits* (1857; it remains in print in Dutch, see Kardec 2006). In the introduction to his book, Kardec states that Spiritism is a new phenomenon and that this term needs to be distinguished from “Spiritualism,” which he defines as a broader anti-materialistic philosophy. Although Spiritism contains elements of this philosophy, adhering to Spiritualism, Kardec argued, does not mean that one is also adhering to the Spiritist belief in the existence of an invisible world of spirits and their communication with the physical world. Another important part of Kardec’s Spiritism is reincarnation. According to him, the purpose of reincarnation is the spiritual development of the soul throughout multiple lives (Kardec 2006, ix-xxviii).

Despite the widespread adherence to Kardec and his definition of Spiritism among Continental European Spiritualists/Spiritists, discussions about the exact meaning of the term and how it differs from Spiritualism continued for decades, and not all agreed with him. For example, in the Netherlands, the variable use within the same movement of the terms “Spiritists” and “Spiritualists” covered many internal differences on the subject, a fact that becomes very clear when reading the bi-weekly magazine on Spiritism *Het Toekomstig Leven*, also known by its abbreviation HTL. A section of the magazine was managed by the Dutch Association of Spiritualists “Harmonia,” which was founded on 27 December 1888 in an attempt to unite several independent Spiritualist groups on the basis of their shared beliefs (Fremery 1912, 300). Nonetheless, when reading the discussions in HTL, the impression remains that the existing differences were not solved by this union. An example is the discussion in the edition of August 1904, in which a section was dedicated to whether “Spiritism” or “Spiritualism” is the right term to use for the movement, and what exactly these terms should mean (Ortt 1904, 245).

One of the leading Dutch thinkers that was quoted in the discussion was Reformed pastor Martinus Beversluis (1856–1948). In his comments, he stated that he was “disappointed by how Kardec involves the aspect of reincarnation in Spiritualist thought.” Beversluis’ ideas were significantly influenced by Elise van Calcar (1822–1904), an author who later in life started to adhere to the

principles of “Christian Spiritualism,” a system that combined Spiritism with the Christian faith (Jansen 1994, 204). Her opinion was also quoted in HTL, stating that “there are the ‘Spiritualists,’ who reject the notion of reincarnation, and the ‘Spiritists’ who accept and embrace this idea” (“Hephata” 1904, 214).

Another matter that hints at an ongoing struggle is that the original subtitle of HTL since 1897, “The Study of Spiritualism and related phenomena,” was changed in 1903 by replacing the word “Spiritualism” with “Spiritism.” That struggle has played a role ever since, and almost a century later, in 1997, the Dutch Spiritist Association “Harmonia” changed its name back to the original “Dutch Association of Spiritualists ‘Harmonia.’”

By the end of the 1930s, a new dispute arose within Harmonia, started by the chairperson of its Amsterdam chapter, Koenraad Hendrik Gerardus (K.H.G.) Spee (1901–1972), who was a professional astrologist, clairvoyant and medium, and Harmonia’s Secretary, Gerard van El (1903–1989). On July 20, 2019, I and my colleague Wim Kramer from the Dutch Foundation Stichting Het Johan Borgman Fonds visited Spee’s oldest son, Arthur. According to him, Spee was a self-made man. Arthur told us that his father went to primary school until the age of twelve and after that, he self-educated himself. Spee and van El were both unemployed before World War II, like many others at that time, but Spee became a full-time medium after the war ended (A. Spee, pers. comm.). Spee’s son still kept significant material from his father, including the notes for several courses on astrology, esoteric philosophy and parapsychology, as well as many books on spiritual self-development. After our visit, Arthur donated the material to us.

The dispute arose because Spee and van El felt that Harmonia was not placing enough emphasis on the purely spiritual aspect of Christianity and the importance of good mediumship, and was too busy trying to convince the public with scientific proofs of Spiritism (Spee 1937, 160). They expressed their discontent by writing articles on the issue, which then appeared (although not always) on the *Spiritische Bladen*, another bi-weekly magazine published by Harmonia. The disagreement eventually led them to establish a new group in 1941, called the Nederlandse Stichting voor Buitenkerkelijke Religie (NSVBR), translated as the “Dutch Foundation for Religions Out of the Established Church.” The NSVBR started out with roughly 250 members, but they supposedly had to stop their activities during the war because it was too dangerous to continue. In fact, the Germans who occupied the Netherlands had

promulgated a ban against everything that they considered occult, including Spiritism and Spiritualism (NSVBR, letter to members, August 3, 1941). The Germans even confiscated books and pamphlets or other sources of information on these occult subjects.



Figure 1. Koenraad Hendrik Gerardus Spee (1901–1972).
Circa 1955. HJBF/ Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

Immediately after the World War II's armistice, Spee, his second wife, Fien Sporre (1902–?), and van El founded a new group called the Nederlands Spiritueel Kerkgenootschap, translated as the “Dutch Spiritual Church-Society,” also known by its abbreviation NSK. The founding happened on May 25, 1945. Spee was the spiritual leader of the church-society and van El was the administrator. The NSK was founded as a federation, with Amsterdam as its head chapter and other fairly independent groups joining this federation (some already existed, such as the chapter in Delft).

With the prohibition on Spiritism and Spiritualism of the war still fresh in mind, and also the relative infancy of their syncretic Christian-Spiritualist system, in a Dutch religious landscape consisting of mainly Christian denominations and old-fashioned Spiritualists, significant opposition arose when the NSK held its first few meetings. Despite this initial resistance, the NSK decided to keep organizing its gatherings.

An article about the national field day of the NSK in 1950, reported that around 1,200 members showed up that year, while the year before, in 1949, roughly 800 members were present. This indicates that the number of members throughout the Netherlands increased quickly over the first few years (van El 1950a, 5). In 1954, the magazine *Psychic News* mentioned that there were 1,500 members nationwide and around 250 in the Amsterdam chapter. The NSK was also a church-society recognized by the Dutch government, and one of the officially registered religions in the population register of Amsterdam.

The NSK organization had a hierarchical structure, consisting of regular members, members with a silver mark, with a silver star, and with a golden star. The latter group automatically became part of the church council. Before acquiring official membership, those who had expressed an interest had to nominate themselves as candidate-members. Curiously, in order to nominate themselves, candidate-members had to pass on personal information, such as the date and place of birth, so that K.H.G. Spee could then draw the candidate's horoscope.

As mentioned earlier, there were multiple chapters throughout the Netherlands and globally, they formed a federation. Besides Amsterdam, there were active groups in Delft, Dordrecht, Haarlem, Hilversum, Den Haag, Rotterdam, Rijswijk, and Zuilen, and beyond the Dutch border in Switzerland, Israel, and Belgium, but it is still unclear how many chapters and how many

practitioners there were exactly. The chapters operated in a situation of relative independence from each other.

The NSK was also a member of the International Spiritualist Federation (ISF). According to the website of this still existing federation (ISF 2019), member organizations are united around the principle that people survive their bodily death via their spirit, and that there is communication between this world and the spirit world. In 1954, they held their annual congress in Amsterdam, and Spee and van El were actively involved with its preparation.

Between September 2014 and August 2015, we paid four visits to the last living member of the NSK, Ms. Ida de Winter. During these visits, we gained a large amount of information on the NSK. One detail she shared with us was that, despite the fact that the NSK survived the initial resistance by the Dutch religious milieu, it kept facing opposition throughout the years. The friction with the outside world is one of the major reasons that led Spee to close the circle of NSK in the early 1960s. This, and the aging of the members, resulted in a decrease in membership throughout the years, until there were only a dozen members left by 1992. In early 1993, Amsterdam was the last chapter of the NSK that decided to close down.

It needs to be noted that we are not fully certain about this. The absence of material after that date indicates the shutting down of the last chapter in 1993, but in 2008 the Dutch historian E. Gerard Hoekstra (1931–2012) referred to a still existing chapter in The Hague (Hoekstra and Ipenburg 2008, 382). We don't know how active they were, nor if they are still continuing to meet, but apart from this reference we did not find any other trace of this or other chapters been active in the twenty years between 1993 and 2013. One chapter that has arisen from its ashes, in 2013, is the one in Delft, now led by André van der Helm (b. 1942: *Dienende Liefde* 2019). We spoke to him, and found out that he was somewhat unfamiliar with the history of the NSK and Spee's leadership (van der Helm, pers. comm.). On June 29, 2019, he paid a visit to us learn more about NSK history, and expressed his ambition to follow in the footsteps of Spee's religious ideas and leadership. The possible revival of the chapter in The Hague and the renewed activities of the one in Delft show that the religious worldview of the NSK has not ceased to exist completely, and still has a relevance in the present day.

But what exactly did the NSK stand for? In the following sections, the role of K.H.G. Spee, his visions, and the key-elements of NSK Christian and Spiritualist beliefs will be explored. In particular, we will attempt to summarize the belief system to give a general impression of the NSK faith.

Most findings of this article are based on material from the original NSK archive. It was preserved and catalogued by the Dutch Foundation Het Johan Borgman Fonds, which has been actively archiving materials relevant for the history of 20th century Dutch Spiritualism and parapsychology. The archive was handed over in 2018 to the City Archive of Amsterdam (Stadsarchief Amsterdam) and is publicly accessible.

The Religious and Cosmic Vision of the NSK and K.H.G. Spee

Hoekstra described the NSK in his book, and wrote that its members believed in an evolution of the soul, continuing after their death in the physical world. The soul lives on in the afterlife, where it will be reunited with its loved ones and will be received by “helping” spirits. The NSK also believes in ongoing communication between the earthly world and the spirit world, and that these spirits function as “protectors, helpers and mentors” during our lives. These spirits are described as belonging to “the (eternal) light and ultimate wisdom, guiding ‘lost’, ‘dark’, ‘suffering’ and ‘weak’ souls on earth” (Hoekstra and Ipenburg 2008, 382).

At the time of the founding of the NSK, the goal of the society was determined in the by-laws, in which it was stated that the foundation would represent the spiritual interest of all that recognize and adhere to Christian principles, but feel that the usual Christian framework lacks the knowledge needed for their Spiritualist quest. Furthermore, it states that the foundation will actively support the advancement of scientific knowledge concerning human religious principles.

In 1962, the magazine *Discours*, a publication of the NSK chapter of Amsterdam, summarized one of the core principles of the NSK by stating that Spiritualism is an essential element of the Christian doctrine and the early original tenets of Christianity, because the Bible supposedly makes clear that this should be the case (Spee 1962, 1). Hoekstra also mentions in his book that, “The teaching of Jesus Christ, as presented in the New Testament, is essential for the

salvation of humanity” (Hoekstra and Ipenburg 2008, 381). Clearly emphasized is the element of charity, and the love of one’s neighbour. This can be seen when looking at the name of the chapter of Amsterdam, “Dienende Liefde,” which translates into the willingness to devote oneself to the environment (humans, animals, nature, etc.). Also, once a year the different NSK chapters meet at the event that is called “Landdag,” and held on the Dutch countryside, where the members endorse the promise to eliminate hate, to “love thy neighbour,” and above all love God (van El 1950b, 7).

The above mentioned beliefs and core principles of the NSK are reflections of the religious visions of K.H.G. Spee, as elaborated in his written work, *Volg den Hiërarchieken weg: een Levensphilosophie voor den Modernen Mensch* (1938), translated as “Follow the Hierarchic Road: a Life Philosophy for the Modern Men.” In this publication, he explains his vision on the earthly and cosmic realm, and the place of God and human beings within these spheres. The publication was also translated into German by the NSK and published in Weinfelden, Switzerland.

Spee states that God is present in, and one with, the higher universe, which is also called “the Esoteric.” Typical synonyms used by Spee for this word are: “the source,” “the Perfect,” “the Absolute Truth,” “the Good,” “Love,” “the Purity,” “the All-encompassing wisdom,” “the Aesthetic,” and “the Universal.” Paradoxically, Spee’s universe is a “place” where time and space do not play a role. The spirits/souls of the deceased are present here too, and they are part of this world. Between the Esoteric and the earth there is a connection, especially between the Esoteric and human beings. Spirits can pass on messages from the Esoteric to humans, who are in turn capable of receiving these messages, because of their capability to think and reason, and because their bodies are inhabited by an individual soul. This is where humans differ from animals, which are driven by a “collective instinct” rather than from the will that comes from an individual soul.

About the human body (i.e the exoteric body), what Spee has to say is that it is a materialistic “form” without spiritual value in itself. It is capable of perceiving, through the senses, but it is also capable of thinking. Thinking is an important concept in the view of Spee, because thoughts are a powerful tool that can either disrupt the cosmic order, or keep it in balance. One could focus on earthly goals, like gaining materialistic profit, earning money and satisfying the tendencies of the ego, or on somewhat less egotistical concepts such as solidarity, brotherhood,

art, oneness, and hard work. These attributes translate into deeds that can ultimately contribute to either cosmic chaos or balance.

Thinking also has a significant influence on the human individual soul, because it can make the soul either receptive to the Esoteric (by focusing on the less egotistical pursuits, as mentioned above) or cause a blockage, so that the mind and the soul will be stuck in “Maya.” Maya is explained by Spee as an earthly illusion, the cause of evil and chaos, and the reason why human beings are facing the decomposition of the “higher” morality. This explanation corresponds somewhat with the concept of Maya in Hindu philosophy (the word Maya means “illusion” in Sanskrit), which refers to a force that “creates the cosmic illusion that the phenomenal world is real.” Maya causes people to suffer and to feel lost and clueless in this life on earth. Spee also notes that religious dogma and, in contrast, the adamant belief in the absolute truth of science, are products of this earthly illusion, implying that most religions are misguided in their truth claims, even when it comes to esoteric schools that have fallen into the trap of creating hierarchical structures and proclaiming they teach the only valid truth. This criticism is rather remarkable, since Spee followed courses between 1924–1930 of the International Association of Christian Mystics “Rosicrucian Fellowship,” that was based in Oceanside, California. We found these courses among the material that Arthur Spee donated to us. Spee might have found aspects of the dogma and organization of this esoteric group objectionable when he followed these courses.

Spee calls the opposite of Maya “het Zomerland,” which is translated as “the Summerland.” While researching this concept, it became clear that Summerland is described in many different ways, i.e. by Spiritualists, Theosophists, and Wiccans, but that there are some similarities in how the it is used. For example, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), the co-founder of the Theosophical Society, explains that Summerland is

a fancy name given by the Spiritualists to the abode of their disembodied “Spirits,” which they locate somewhere in the Milky Way. It is described on the authority of returning “Spirits” as a lovely land, having beautiful cities and buildings, a Congress Hall, Museums, etc. (Blavatsky 1892, 312).

The idea of a blissful realm where the human soul reaches after death, is something that is widely recognized by religious and esoteric groups. Yet, Blavatsky’s personal attitude towards the concept was rather negative, stating that

to believe that a pure spirit would be finding happiness in a “Summerland” while witnessing the misery of all on earth, was regarded by her as nothing less than an insult (Blavatsky 1889, 149).

The way Spee uses the concept, is that the Summerland is reached when the soul sees through Maya and reaches a “God-like” state where there is no suffering or chaos. Here, the soul arrives in a higher sphere, which is either the Esoteric, or some sphere between the Esoteric and the earth. This could be a possibility for every human soul, when one frees the thinking from the ego and makes oneself receptive to the Esoteric.

The lack of ego, and the inability to reason, also implies that animals are considered to stand closer to God than human beings. Although the Esoteric is described as “the Perfect,” Maya maintains a presence in this sphere too, but the difference with us humans is that God and the spirits see right through this force, which makes Maya powerless. Once the soul is attuned to the Esoteric, it can bi-locate, and the body will experience trance-like states and be inhabited by spirits, so that knowledge from the Esoteric can be transferred to the human sphere. When this happens to human beings, they function as “mediums.” According to Spee’s theory, every human being should be able to reach this state, but in reality, most people never achieve the goal, and his writings do not make clear what conditions are exactly necessary.

The body, the individual soul, and God, together are forming the holy trinity and one should focus on this inseparable unit, if one wants to take part in God’s “plan.” But what happens to the soul when we die? There is no such thing as Hell, Spee declares, but the presence of Maya in the mind does cause the soul to be captured in some kind of cosmic purgatory after the bodily death. In this case, the soul struggles to make the transition from the earthly sphere to the Esoteric, where the great wisdom and the ultimate love await. Spee states that, for the trapped soul to transcend into the next stage, it is necessary that it frees itself from Maya. Just like the spirits, the human soul has to see through Maya and realize that, as well as having a non-egotistical focus, the soul just has to “be,” which for example happens when we devote ourselves to creating art or perceiving aesthetics. Besides describing ways in which human beings can free themselves from Maya, Spee elaborates a complete theodicy, by stating that human suffering is not created or permitted by God, because even though God is all-wise, he is certainly not omnipotent. The use of Spiritualist concepts like Maya and the

Summerland, and a visual scheme we found in the archive seemingly portraying a cycle, indicates that reincarnation was also part of the cosmic vision of the NSK.

Many of NSK's activities hint towards Spee's personal beliefs. This can be seen when one studies the original NSK archive, where transcriptions and material of the services and activities are being preserved. A major part of the material that is left contains transcribed words or content relating to Spee and his visions. His sermons and lectures were all written down in shorthand and then typed out. The chapter in Switzerland even used the German translations of these transcriptions during their gatherings and services. These German translations are also part of the NSK archive. The unique and extensive collection of these transcriptions show that the role of Spee within the NSK was decisive.

One of the reasons for Spee's position in the NSK might be that members recognized him as a medium. Even before he founded the NSK, Spee had his own practice, where he offered mediumistic and astrological advice. One clue to his early mediumship was found in the autobiography of Dutch musician Eddy Christiani (1918–2016). In this book, Christiani mentions that at the age of twelve (which in that case should have been around 1930), his mom made him visit Spee, who predicted his career as a famous guitarist.

Paradoxically, despite Spee's mediumship and the central position that he gained, he always preached that this did not position him "above others" and that people should not worship him. As can be read in his "Hierarchical Road," he states that hierarchical structures are false, because no human has more true wisdom than any other human (Spee 1938, 15). Everyone with the right use and state of mind should have the ability to develop the same spiritual level. To corroborate this statement, Spee quotes the New Testament, where Jesus says something similar.

As mentioned earlier, almost all sermons and materials that are found in the NSK archive consist of Spee's words and no new material was produced after he died. The NSK continued to use and repeat the transcriptions of the words of Spee after his death during the services (de Winter, pers. comm.). Whether he wanted it or not, the NSK members attributed key significance to the literal words of Spee, giving him a spiritual authority that had the effect of creating a hierarchical structure.

Spiritualist Christianity in the Activities and Religious Practice of the NSK

The by-laws of the NSK stated that to reach the goal of the foundation, several activities would be organized, i.e. church gatherings, healing services, readings, etc. Also, the creation of a spiritualist knowledge collection and the spreading of this knowledge was mentioned.

These objectives resulted in a variety of activities, including the founding of the “Free Esoteric School,” where Spee taught courses in esotericism and astrology, while parapsychology courses were given by Dr. Karel Hendrik Eduard de Jong (1872–1960), a well-known and respected teacher in the Netherlands in those days. The other activities were organized in a rented building called “La Paix” in Amsterdam, and in a rented congress room the NSK called “Rita,” located in Amsterdam’s Albertcuypstraat.



Figure 2. Shrine at the Amsterdam chapter of the NSK, circa 1970s.
HJBF/ Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

On Tuesdays and Fridays, members gathered for “saving séances” or “ethical nights,” which means that they would organize gatherings to “save” the spirits of people who had died all too sudden and had not yet understood that they were deceased. The confused spirit would be guided by the members into the hand of the “helpers” of the world beyond the veil. The medium, presumably Spee, would go into a state of trance and transfer messages to these helpers. These messages would help calming the confused and anxious spirits, leading them to surrender to their fate, also described as “the next step.”

Translating it into the cosmic vision of the NSK, these souls seem to be trapped in what Spee calls “cosmic purgatory,” the state where Maya still dominates the mind and where one has to clear the mind from Maya in order to blend into the Esoteric. Remarkably, members of the NSK ceased to hold these gatherings after Spee died, because without his guidance, the saving séances were considered too risky. This is another sign that Spee’s mediumship was seen to be of utmost importance to the NSK members.

Another gathering held on Tuesdays and Fridays was the “healing service,” where people would hold hands to combine their healing powers and sing religious hymns for sick relatives. In order to properly focus on these relatives, members would bring photos of them so they could channel their healing energy to them through these pictures (de Winter, pers. comm.) The singing would be guided by an organist, and the songs were commonly based on the hymnal by Johannes de Heer (1866–1961), a book traditionally used in Dutch Protestant circles. Another important aspect of the service would be the reading and singing of poetry, especially the ones “transferred” by “Sister Rita.”

Sister Rita supposedly was a 17th century nun, who had been accused of witchcraft and burned at the stake, and was now channelled by Spee. She was referred to as “a helper” of the German Jesuit priest Friedrich Spee (1591–1635) by Ms. de Winter. As far as we know, Friedrich Spee was a distant relative of K.H.G. Spee, and was famous as an opponent of the witch trials that took place during his lifetime (Hellyer, vii–xv). However, when we did some research on the possible identity of Sister Rita, we did not find any Rita in the circle of Friedrich Spee, nor a nun burned at stake. One possibility is that the NSK was alluding to the well-known Italian Saint Rita of Cascia (1381–1457), perhaps because there was indeed a link between this Catholic saint and Friedrich Spee. Friedrich-Spee-Straße in Würzburg was where the Kongregation der Ritaschwestern, i.e. the

female monastic order of the Sisters of Saint Rita, had its convent. Of course, this is a rather tenuous connection.

Two volumes of “Sister Rita’s” poetry were published by the NSK, which were called *Licht: Een bundel gedichten door Rita*, translated as “Light: a Bundle of Poems by Rita.” When one reads the poetry that was passed on by Rita, it’s noticeable that the messages implied in the words are corresponding with the cosmic vision explained in Spee’s “Hierarchical Road.” A similar use of concepts can be found when Rita speaks about notions such as eternal life; the lack of space and time; “the light” being the absolute Truth on the “other side”; the lack of knowledge within humans; the absence of Hell; the all-encompassing power of God as “love”; Jesus as a guide for the human spirit; and even the use of the concept “Summerland.”

Another key figure among the spirits who came through in the séances was “Dr. van Deurne.” Ms. de Winter spoke to us about Dr. van Deurne in such a way as if he was a living human instead of a spiritual being. This shows how deeply and seriously the members believed that Spee would “become” those teachers when he was in a state of trance. Interestingly, she also mentioned to us that one could barely notice when Spee was in a state of trance, which she considered as a sign of extremely skilled mediumship.

During his lifetime, Dr. van Deurne was supposedly a medical doctor in The Hague, and through Spee he passed on medical knowledge, gave advice about health issues, delivered recipes for medicine and even gave his advice on the products of Zonnegoud, translated as “Gold-from-the-sun,” a Dutch herbal medicine brand. It is unclear whether these spirits, also called “teachers,” came through at specific moments, or whether they randomly showed up as advisors during any given activity.

In his “Hierarchical Road,” Spee states that the idea of the absolute truth of science is a delusion (a form of Maya), because science has been invented by humans, who inherently lack knowledge compared to the absolute Truth that reigns in the Esoteric. In his vision, this also applies to medical science, and if one wishes to be truly healed, or cannot be cured by human doctors, one should turn to the “Grote Geneesheer,” freely translated as “the Grand Healing Master.”

In one of the transcriptions of his healing services, Spee refers to a completely spiritual town in Brazil, called “Palemo,” where doctors have to possess the

power of magnetism next to their academic background, otherwise they are not permitted to treat patients. He speaks about this town as a sort of utopia, and wishes for the medical world in the Netherlands to take an example from it. He also refers to Jesus and his spiritual healing powers (Spee 1954a).

Sometimes, healing services would be performed directly on sick patients in the homes of NSK members, outside of official NSK gatherings. During these services, patients would sit in the middle of the room while the members would form two lines on each side, ready to perform the service on them directly. The laying of hands was also mentioned as a healing method. As we were told, healing services organized by the NSK attracted approximately 80 people each week (de Winter, pers. comm.). In one transcript of a healing service, it becomes clear that the service starts with a sermon, after which a “ritual” is held. In this specific transcript, Spee calls for a meditation on his words about “spirituality” and “love thy neighbour” at the end of the sermon, so that people can “enable themselves for a few minutes to experience what we really are, spirits of God, children of the light, and eternal followers of the delightful path of God” (Spee 1950).

On the first Friday of the month (and sometimes on the first Tuesday), an esoteric course would be conducted by Spee, where he would transmit esoteric knowledge from teachers of the spiritual world. During these sessions, Spee would basically pass on the NSK philosophy (according to Spee’s “Hierarchical Road”), and teach the participants all the details of his, and the NSK’s, cosmic vision. Finally, on Sunday morning, consecration services were held that attracted an average of 125–150 people (*The National Spiritualist* 1950, 7). The remaining time of the week was, as we were told by Ms. de Winter, used to visit several places throughout the Netherlands to propagate Spiritism and give public psychometric demonstrations.

It is remarkable that the transcriptions of the different services resemble one another significantly, differing on only a few minor points. As for the healing services, Spee would reflect on the subject of disease and medical sciences from a spiritual point of view, whereas during the consecration services, Spee reflected on current events and how to deal with them according to the religious vision of the NSK. As can be seen from the examples given, Jesus’ statements were broadly used by Spee as a tool to confirm his visions and to show to his followers that Spiritualism and Christianity were undeniably connected with each other. We even found a typed note in the NSK archive, where Bible verses are listed under

various Spiritualist subjects like healings, materialization, trance, etc. This could mean that they were actively looking for proof of Spiritualist theories in the New Testament.

The research from the NSK archive provides a glimpse at just how central Spee's position was to the religious group, and the teachings and rituals were mainly centered around his visions and mediumship.

Mediumship is a major theme in the vision of Spee. Hoekstra mentions the condemnation by the NSK of a so-called "lower mediumship," as denounced in *Deuteronomy* 18:10-11; *1 Samuel* 28:3-20; and *Isaiah* 8:19 (Hoekstra and Ipenburg 2008, 382). These verses all emphasise that the Bible forbids to turn to a wonder-worker, fortune teller, or a medium asking questions to the spirits of the dead. This is a somewhat contradictory information pointed out by Hoekstra, as consulting the wisdom of spirits and fortune telling (at least, in the case of Eddy Christiani) was exactly what Spee did. Although, it is correct to say that Spee did condemn a certain type of mediumship, he also emphasized in one of his sermons,

And you would ask me: is there a difference? There is my friends, maybe not factually, but certainly ideologically. [...] Reverend Buskens could have a point when he says that Spiritism carried out by the unqualified could lead to all kinds of excesses and to things that daylight couldn't bear and would be a curse for this world, rather than beneficial (Spee 1954b).

The emphasis on ideology, also called "the intention," seems to be an important aspect for Spee. In one of his lectures, Spee argues that mediumship is one of the most important tools to lead people and their souls to the salvation from Maya. He states that mediumship without the right intentions (i.e. mediumship that is meant to entertain people) is dangerous, because it is not spiritually helpful. In his vision, mediumship is supposed to contribute to spiritual development. Mediumship that does not meet this standard is considered "lower mediumship" (Spee 1951). Jesus is mentioned as an example of a "higher" medium, because after all he stated that "the Father" spoke through him.

There is, however, a paradox. Spee states that everyone is potentially a medium; that he does not want to be seen as a chosen person; and that good intentions are what makes for a good medium. Then, why is he practically the only medium in the NSK (or at least in NSK's Amsterdam chapter), and his messages are regarded as normative by all other members? His mediumship seems to be the

one feature that actually gives him a special position and spiritual authority. It is also interesting to note that, before he died, Spee signed a statement, declaring that he was not going to be available as a “helper” for mediums after his death, and that whoever would claim that he was receiving messages from Spee, would be a deceiver (Spee 1969). The exact reason for this statement is unknown, but it might have been an attempt to prevent any other medium from using his name falsely and gaining the kind of authority that Spee achieved during his lifetime.

The apparent paradox of Spee’s mediumship and authority are not the only inconsistencies that can be found in his teachings. Ms. de Winter felt initially reluctant to tell us about the NSK and its beliefs, because Spee did not want “outsiders” to know too much about their special knowledge and group. The reason was that outsiders, he believed, would not understand the NSK and could potentially respond in a negative way. A confirmation is that she told us that the NSK closed its circle to new members after Spee decided that influence from the outside world was unwanted or even a threat to the group. This decision had the effect of turning the NSK into a secretive esoteric group, which is at odds with the NSK’s initial goal of spreading its Spiritism. One could think that such a closed circle was even contrary to the notions of brotherhood and “loving thy neighbour,” because closing the circle means depriving other people of the spiritual knowledge that was so valued by the NSK, eventually excluding outsiders from spiritual salvation.

An explanation for the closing up of the NSK circle could be that the group experienced significant opposition from outsiders, mainly coming from people opposing the Spiritualist part of the NSK doctrine and the activities that came with it (séances, magnetism, etc.). Among the opponents were members of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as of other Spiritualist groups that disagreed with the main tenets of their beliefs. One of those groups was the Dutch Association of Spiritualists “*Harmonia*,” of which Spee had once been a board member together with his NSK companion Gerard van El. During the NSK’s peak years, when it had its highest number of members, there was a rivalry between the two groups. It is not surprising that NSK chose to protect itself from negative influences, holding firmly on the beliefs and practices it considered to be true. In one of his sermons, Spee elaborated on the struggle with a Roman Catholic priest, implying that a lot of energy was spent on trying to defend the

NSK from this opposition, which accordingly to Spee was “entangled in Maya” (Spee 1951).

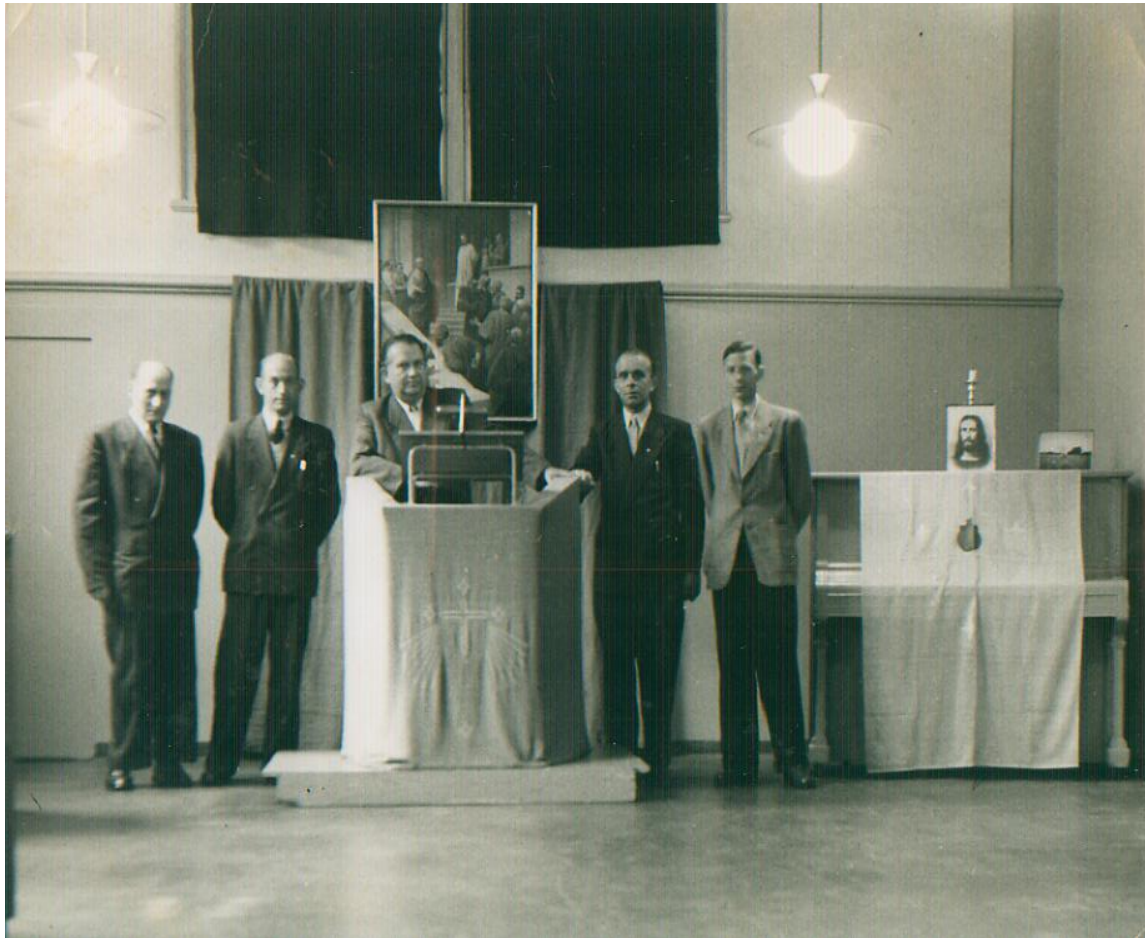


Figure 3. Presidency of the Amsterdam chapter of the NSK. Circa 1960.
HJBF/ Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

Conclusion

Based on our research in its archive, we noticed some remarkable features of the NSK. The NSK regards itself as a liberal and free-thinking Christian Spiritualist group (de Winter, pers. comm.). Our findings confirm this to a certain extent. It seems that Spee intended to avoid a hierarchical structure in the group, and tried to spread Spiritualist knowledge via an almost evangelical-fundamentalist, but certainly unorthodox, approach to the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. The philosophy and sermons of Spee, including the list of New Testament verses that he tried to use as proof-texts for his theories, show

that the NSK sought to support its Spiritualist vision with the Christian teachings of Jesus.

A sign that the NSK could be considered progressive is the way in which they were virtually “cherry-picking” elements from a variety of global religions and movements (i.e. “Maya” from Hindu philosophy, “Summerland” from the Theosophists, notions from Spiritualism/Spiritism) and integrating them into their own belief system. This phenomenon was not uncommon in the Netherlands during the mid-twentieth century due to an ongoing secularization process that drastically changed the religious landscape of the country. During this phase, the number of adherents to traditional, institutionalized religion declined, paving the way for an increase in atheism and agnosticism, as well as non-traditional religions and alternative belief systems. The NSK is a perfect example of a religious group experimenting with new religious forms and knowledge, at the same time trying to remain within the existing theological framework that stemmed from traditional (Protestant) Christianity.

That said, Spee encouraged his followers to let go of traditional dogma provided by Christian church fathers and theologians, and instead focus on what he believed to be the Christian (Spiritualist) core values provided by the New Testament, regardless of what particular denominations believe (Spee 1952). According to him, true knowledge and wisdom belongs to the Esoteric sphere (and God). With this, he positioned God far away from the earthly, materialistic sphere, i.e. from life on earth. However, it seems that with the right focus and state of mind, human souls can ascend to a higher level of spirituality during their earthly life. Quoting the New Testament sentence “The kingdom of heaven is within you,” Spee tried to emphasize that it is indeed possible for human beings to reach a kind of Platonic state, reflecting Summerland on earth.

Spee is mainly referring to core Christian values like “loving thy neighbour,” but also to critical attitudes towards materialism, where the fleshy and earthly materialistic goals are regarded as secondary. To reach a higher level of spirituality, one needs to refrain from the lesser materialistic and egoistic goals. Spee even stated that it is wise to emotionally detach from our own children (Spee 1952). Matter is only temporary and subject to time and space, making it inferior to the Eternal. The human body, or “the flesh,” is part of this material “inferior” world, as can be seen by the negative way human beings are described. Humans are seen as lost, dark, and suffering, while every word that is used to describe the

higher spheres is strictly positive. When it comes to Christian practices, there is no sign that Christian rituals were practiced, although feasts like All Saints, Easter, and Christmas were celebrated. The structure of the NSK also seems to strongly resemble a traditional Protestant organization regarding their services, sermons, the use of a hymnal book for singing, and the existence of a church council.

One of the major elements of the NSK that most Protestants would describe as unorthodox is the emphasis placed on mediumship, which is believed to enable contacts between the earthly and Esoteric sphere, under the guidance of spirits, or so-called “helpers.” It is a part of the cosmic vision that most resembles classic Spiritualism, while also being one of the most controversial aspects of the group. So controversial in fact that, under its influence, the original evangelical and liberal character of NSK evolved into something more sectarian. Spee became a leader that exercised his spiritual authority by making the NSK a closed, secretive circle, in an attempt to keep the faith pure from negative outside influences.

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Experiences of Affiliation to the Italian Soka Gakkai: An Analysis According to the Rambo et al. Integrated Model

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ABSTRACT: This paper deals with the Rambo, Farhadian, and Haar Farris multidisciplinary theoretical framework of conversion. It studies religious change by using a heuristic model of conversion consisting of seven stages: context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences. The Rambo et al. model serves as a framework for integrating research based on different approaches, and providing a fuller understanding of the multilayered processes involved in conversion. Applying this model to qualitative interviews to people affiliated to the IBISG (the Italian branch of Soka Gakkai), I concluded that data confirm the Rambo et al. theoretical framework. In particular, the decision to join the IBISG is an active, complex, and dynamic process. It depends either on intrapsychic or interpersonal and social factors. Moreover, the conversion is characterized by the peculiar aspects of the movement and the strategies used in order to recruit followers. In conclusion, my underlying assumption is that conversion is a process of religious change that takes place within a dynamic field, involving people, institutions, events, ideas, and experiences. The study of conversion must take into account not only the personal dimension, but also the social, cultural, and religious dynamics in which the convert is embedded.

KEYWORDS: Soka Gakkai, Religious Conversion, Psychology of Religion, Religious Transformation, Religious Crisis, Lewis Rambo, Lewis Rambo's Seven Stages of Conversion.

Introduction

Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a community-based Nichiren Buddhist organization that promotes its goals of “peace, culture and education,” which are centered on the respect for the dignity of life. Its core daily practices involve chanting the phrase “Nam Myoho Renge Kyo” (“I devote my life to the law itself”) and reciting excerpts of the *Lotus Sutra*. SGI members reside in 192 countries

and territories around the world, with about 90,000 members in Italy alone (Introvigne and Zoccatelli 2019). IBISG (Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai) is the Italian branch of SGI.

I interviewed thirteen people who had joined and left the following groups: IBISG, Damanhur, the Church of Scientology, and ISKCON. I then extrapolated the data from these interviews by using the multidisciplinary theoretical framework on conversion elaborated by Lewis R. Rambo, Charles E. Farhadian, and Matthew S. Haar Farris (Rambo 1993; Rambo and Bauman 2012; Rambo and Haar Farris 2012; Rambo and Farhadian 2014). This paper takes in consideration only five interviews: the affiliation experiences of five current and former members of the IBISG. They appear to partially confirm the theoretical framework of Rambo, Farhadian and Haar Farris.

Stage Model Conversion

I used the Rambo et al. model as it integrates the psychoanalytic, behaviorist, experimental, humanistic and transpersonal, and social-holistic research methods. The model also provides for a more complete understanding of a person's conversion process by utilizing a heuristic model consisting of seven stages: context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences (Rambo 1993, 16–9).

It is important to note that the stages do not always follow each other sequentially, and can even interact reciprocally. For instance, I observed the simultaneous presence of concepts and factors of different stages upon examination of the subjects' answers. Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity, my paper follows the model's order.

Methodological Choice: The Interviews

I used structured interviews with the five informants as the primary survey tool. Each structured interview, which lasted from 20-25 minutes and contained fifteen questions, was recorded and transcribed. These questions primarily dealt with the phase of affiliation and permanence, falling within one of seven categories:

1. First meeting with the movement
2. Reasons that led them to adhere permanently
3. Initial expectations
4. Evaluation of the relationship between expectations and results obtained
5. Degree of importance of the movement in each individual's life
6. Negative aspects found in the movement
7. How social groups of reference (such as family and friends) reacted to the affiliation of the individuals to the group.

The interview's questions and their order were chosen as they allowed for a better qualitative understanding of the causes of a certain behavior, as well as the connections between individual behavior and beliefs. The overarching objective of these interviews was to determine the meaning that each subject attributed to their experience of affiliation with Soka Gakkai, as well as to ascertain the replicability of the model by Rambo et al.

Comparing the Interviews

Upon comparing the interviews, I tried to verify whether one could find there some of the elements described in Rambo's studies and, if present, whether these could help to understand the choice of affiliating with a new religious movement. The analysis of the results is preceded by a summary description of each stage.

Context, Crisis, and Quest Stages

The examination of the subjects' answers highlighted the various factors and elements present respectively in Rambo's first three model stages.

Context: One cannot talk about a person's psyche adequately without first contextualizing it. The matrix in which a religious and spiritual transformation takes place includes four dimensions: personal, social, cultural, and the religious environment (Rambo 1993, 20–43; Rambo and Bauman 2012, 882–83).

Crisis: Conversion scholars generally agree that a crisis precedes conversion. Such crises can create disorientation, but may also create opportunities for

personal transformation, energy mobilization, and revitalization of myths, rituals, and symbols (Rambo 1993, 44–55; Rambo and Bauman 2012, 883–84).

Quest: A process in which we seek to create meaning and purpose in our lives. Classic psychology of religion literature portrays converts as passive, given that any number of factors may motivate them. Modern psychologists and social scientists, however, recognize that just as these factors may change over time, so too do their motivations, suggesting that converts actively create personal meaning, and choose their religion from any number of options (Rambo 1993, 56–65; Rambo and Bauman 2012, 884–85).

Answers that appeared in more than one of these three stages simultaneously were categorized into one of three dimensions:

— *Personal (Tendencies):* By “tendencies,” I mean the personal dispositions, preferences, desires and conditions of discomfort that the five subjects attributed to themselves in their autobiographical reconstructions at the time when religious affiliation occurred. Three groups of tendencies were identified as “Self-improvement,” “Disorders, physical and/or psychological,” and “Desire for independence and alternative interests.”

Four of the subjects linked their affiliation to a period of personal difficulties due to health problems, psychological distress, tragic events, and dissatisfaction. Two reported having undergone psychotherapy and psychoanalysis immediately preceding affiliation. Only one subject credited the affiliation with the desire to become independent from a Catholic, conservative, politically right-leaning father.

— *Socio-cultural (Society):* What Rambo calls a “macro context” (Rambo 1993, 21–2) is the larger environment generally designated as “society.” These are influences coming from the social and cultural environment that, according to the subjects, influenced their choice to become affiliated.

Since a society is a dynamic entity, when a crisis begins in a macrocontext, a process that Anthony Wallace (1923–2015) calls “revitalization” takes place (Wallace 1956, 265–66). The crisis occurs largely because the myths, rituals, symbols, goals, and standards for the individual or society cease to function well, and eventually are destroyed. These are then reconstructed, and at this time the personal conversion and transformation process of an individual, when shared by the devotee with others, can spread and give rise to a transformational movement

of the culture.

Regarding the reconstructions of my five subjects' experiences, and how they described the contexts in which their conversions took place, Wallace's idea seems to be confirmed at least to some extent. Two of them made their choices in a militantly anti-Catholic environment, one was involved in politics, and the other two did not provide relevant information on this aspect. All five unanimously attributed their motivation to affiliate with the group to the leader's innovative ideas they perceived as revitalizing, which then extended to the whole movement (Wallace 1956, 266–68). This is the case for Daisaku Ikeda in relation to the Soka Gakkai, for Oberto Airaudi (1950–2013) in relation to Damanhur, for L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) when it comes to the Church of Scientology, and for Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977) for the ISKCON (Hare Krishna). Moreover, although all the subjects described the leader very positively and expressed profound admiration for his teachings, contrary to popular ideas none considered their relationship with the leader as a decisive factor in their affiliation or conversion.

— *Family*: The environment closest to the subject, such as family, friends, ethnic group, religious community, neighborhood, etc. that can powerfully influence the conversion process is what Rambo calls the “micro-context” or what I call, in the broader sense, “family.”

In each subject's history, only the personal family was mentioned as the environment. Four subjects affiliated with the Soka Gakkai reconstructed their times of crisis by remembering the difficulties they experienced due to physical and/or psychological disorders occurring within their family relationships. According to Rambo's model, their conditions during the affiliation period correspond to what Robert Jay Lifton calls the “protean” personality (Lifton 1968, 17). The protean personality is “a self that is malleable by its sociocultural situation. Because our cultural context fosters a great deal of change, he suggests, people within this context experience much fluctuation of identity and self-definition. The fragility of the self that Lifton describes can be a powerful motivation for conversion” (Rambo 1993, 31).

In my case, they joined Soka Gakkai because it represented a sure point of reference with defined and stimulating values, helping the individuals to emerge from the moment of difficulty while also giving a proactive direction to their existence, thus strengthening their basic trust in the group with a consequent

reduction of personal discomfort. Furthermore, subjects who had attempted psychological therapies unsuccessfully stated that the doctrine and practice of Soka Gakkai satisfied the deeper need of realizing their “spirituality.”

Encounter Stage

The encounter stage involves contact between the potential convert and the “advocate,” or missionary for the movement. Just as followers need leaders, leaders need followers. Rambo identifies four main components in the missionary’s strategy: the level of emphasis placed on proselytizing (*degree of proselytizing*), the strategic style (*strategic style*), the method of contact (*mode of contact*), and the possible benefits for the convert (*potential benefits*) (Rambo 1993, 66–101; Rambo and Bauman 2012, 885–87).

In the Soka Gakkai, the *degree of proselytizing* is understood as a practice done in the service of others and as an active exercise of compassion; practicing only for oneself, even if the simplest choice, is not the true way to enlightenment, as one needs to share the truth. The Buddhist texts, from which the Soka Gakkai derives its doctrine, describe two main methods of exposing the truth: *shoji*, which consists of sharing the Buddhist vision of life without directly questioning the beliefs of others, and *shakubuku*, which consists of a more resolute affirmation of the truth and challenges visions that “do not respect life.” This data is consistent with the characteristics of this movement, in which great importance is given to the work of convincing non-practitioners who are motivated to know the teaching of the fundamental truths of Buddhism, i.e. that anyone can obtain Buddhahood and has the right to be happy.

A *strategic style* may influence the outcome of the encounter, one such style being charisma. Like conversion, charisma is an interactional phenomenon involving not only the affective, intellectual, and cognitive needs, expectations, and hopes of the potential convert, but also those of the advocate. Whatever the strategy, however, the encounter occurs within a dynamic field, in which both advocate and convert should be understood as active agents (Rambo and Bauman 2012, 886).

Regarding the *mode of contact*, in the experiences of all of the subjects interviewed by me (thirteen people who had joined the following groups: IBISG,

Damanhur, the Church of Scientology, ISKCON) there was indeed a consistent differentiation with respect to how each of them came into contact with the movement. All five Soka Gakkai members traced their first approach back to an already affiliated person, who spoke about the movement enthusiastically and encouraged them to attend a first meeting. It is also interesting to mention the case of Antonella, who declined the invitation to participate in an introductory meeting despite having received it from a relative who was already a member of the Soka Gakkai, but later agreed to do so after she was invited by a friend. Her testimony confirms what Rambo, based on the studies of David A. Snow and others, points out in his model: conversion also depends on how the missionary presents himself, as well as the situation in which the prospect is approached at the moment of contact (Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson 1980, 798).

Rambo also distinguished the *potential benefits* of joining the group into several fundamental categories. Two are found in the subjects' answers:

(1) The system of meaning, which includes benefits at the cognitive level. The possibility of understanding the human enigma, the origin, and the destiny of the world are all strong incentives to conversion. This is found in the narratives of all the subjects interviewed, although in a different way, illustrating the "tendencies" dimension.

(2) The emotional gratifications that the religious group can offer, such as a sense of belonging, relief from guilt, the development of new relationships, the enthusiasm of the discovery, and the novelty of the journey undertaken. This element is clearly present in the interviews of the affiliates of the Soka Gakkai, a movement able to offer strong emotional gratifications to its members through personal meetings and moments of spiritual sharing.

Interaction Stage

If people continue with the group after the encounter, the interaction intensifies. In this stage, the potential convert learns more about the teachings, lifestyle, and expectations of the group. The group provides various opportunities, both formal and informal, for people to become more fully incorporated (Rambo 1993, 102; Rambo and Bauman 2012, 887).

At this stage, Rambo identifies some factors that are found in the converts'

experiences. One such factor, studied by Arthur L. Greil and David R. Rudy, is called “encapsulation,” which typically takes place inside new religious movements (they labeled these as “Identity Transformation Organizations”) (Greil and Rudy 1984, 260). At this stage, the group, through particular strategies, acts to modify the ideas and behaviors of the members in order to ease them into the movement. The three forms of encapsulation—*physical*, *social* and *ideological* (Greil and Rudy 1984, 264–68)—were only partially detected in the description of my subjects’ experiences. These were sometimes present simultaneously and with different degrees of intensity.

No subjects felt “isolated” from society in a *physical* sense because of their affiliation with the group; in fairness, the Soka Gakkai and the other movements taken into consideration do not have the peculiar characteristics of closed groups. They operate to rigorously pursue their own objectives, and their strategies include encouraging members to align their identities with the choice they made and not to confuse them with the outside world, with which they however should still interact.

Regarding *social* encapsulation, the subjects reported that, because they dedicated much of their free time to carry out activities in the movement, the consequences included reducing their relationships with non-affiliated people. However, none of them perceived this partial “deprivation” of social relations as an imposition from the movement, or as a negative element of their experience. On the contrary, it was evaluated as a direct consequence of the choice made, consistent with their objectives.

The subjects revealed *ideological* encapsulation when they remembered having been strongly encouraged by the leaders and other members to commit themselves to perfecting their knowledge, in order to achieve spiritual growth while also ensuring that they are fully aware of making this choice. Rambo calls this element “rhetoric,” in that it provides an interpretive system that guides the potential converts to attribute new meanings to their existence, and create new forms of coexistence for the common good (Rambo 1993, 108).

Beyond these forms, encapsulation also has four components, two of which clearly emerged in the subjects’ answers: *relationships* and *rituals*.

Relationships

Three Soka Gakkai subjects reported very similar experiences and emotions, emphasizing the human and relational component experienced in the movement, using expressions such as, “feeling at home with fellow companions who share the same values and with whom it is possible to achieve values,” and “believing in the same thing and be motivated.” The other two interviewees did not place a particular emphasis on the importance of personal relationships regarding their decision to join. The nature and intensity of the relationships developed in the movement. The degree of encapsulation was identified primarily through the responses that focused on the reactions of the family and friends after the affiliation, and included how the potential convert had faced, solved, or had been unable to solve the conflict between antagonistic social groups.

Regarding the reactions of family and friends to their affiliation, it is clear that, while conflict certainly occurred, it was also resolved quickly. In most cases, the conflict resolved after the parents agreed to visit the movement attended by their sons and daughters, and found positive elements in that environment. Afterward, some parents and friends even joined the group.

Rituals

Members of the Soka Gakkai attribute great importance to rituality as a factor that has influenced their choice to adhere to the group. All highlighted the importance of Buddhist practice and participation in meetings as a determining element of being a member, even though each gave their own personal interpretations of codified ritual experiences. For Antonella, “the practice does not end with the prayer, the true practice is the action ...”; for Davide, “the most important thing is the quality and value of that practice ... the work you do every day is stratified, you don’t lose it even if, when you work, you do so reluctantly”. Elisabetta said, “The fact is that if you recite Nam-myoho-renge-kyo you move in an energy that also goes to highlight the problems that are there, stale inside your heart and your soul ...” Michela stated, “At the beginning I thought they were coincidences, then I said: it doesn’t hurt me anyways, so let’s see if it works, and I have found some benefits”. Flavia said, “The practice is something that goes beyond what is rational, and therefore is not analyzed but is lived in the moment.” Their testimonies highlight the fact that, although a given religious practice can

be codified, every individual will experience it differently and receive different benefits by internalizing it in a creative and original way.

Rambo extends the Greil and Rudy model (Greil and Rudy 1984), and specifies that the degree of pressure exerted by groups on new members depends on three factors: the *status of the movement* in the society, its *doctrine*, and the *motivations* it can satisfy (Rambo 1993, 104–5).

The interviewees are all aware of the “deviant” *status* of the movement to which they have adhered, in that it is “different” from the broader social context, but this is considered an element of enrichment and creativity, not a “negative” aspect.

The degree of encapsulation is also influenced by the *doctrine* of the group. Because Soka Gakkai doesn’t see the world as the “domain of evil,” the movement doesn’t seek to isolate and separate members and potential converts from the world.

Regarding the *motivations*, taking as a reference the Lofland and Skonovd model (Lofland and Skonovd 1981), Rambo affirms that in intellectual and experimental conversions, such as those of my subjects, the encapsulation takes place in a non-coercive way. My examination of the subjects’ “tendencies” show that they already favored affiliation before joining.

Rituals may also be a part of the later commitment stage, because they are powerful methods by which new learning takes place. Requirements to modify one’s clothing, diet, or other patterns of behavior can also serve this same function of reinforcing the rejection of old patterns and behaviors and incorporating new behaviors into a person’s life. Thus, this stage of interaction culminates in the next stage of commitment. Here converts clearly, and often solemnly and publicly, declare their choice to become affiliated and become involved, more or less actively, in the activities of a specific new religious movement.

Commitment Stage

In the earlier encounter stage, the converts adopt the story of the new group as their own, whereas in the commitment stage the story is more fully appropriated, so that a convert undergoes an experience of biographical reconstruction. Although attribution theory (Spilka, Shaver and Kirkpatrick 1985) may explain

the journey, all of ordinary human life can be seen as a subtle process of reorganizing one's biography. In religious conversion and spiritual transformations there is often a requirement, implicit or explicit, to interpret life through new metaphors, images, and stories (Rambo 1993, 124; Rambo and Bauman 2012, 888–89).

In the commitment stage Rambo lists three factors, two of which are found in all five of our subjects' answers: *decision making* and *motivational reformulation*.

Decision making does not represent a point of arrival for the subjects. The reasons that have favored the decision, already indicated in the context phase, are still subject to continuous revisions, confirmations, or transformations. This is an aspect that Rambo emphasizes, as a “change is the essence of conversion” (Rambo 1993, 2–3). All affiliated subjects described the decision as definitive even if it was not intended as a completed goal. Here are some examples of answers: “The more I move forward, the more I improve this thing ...” (Antonella); “The more you do, the more you realize that there is stuff to do” (Elisabetta).

The decision to affiliate is also linked to *motivational reformulation*, in that it can be perceived as a benefit for society. It is useful to mention that highlighted in the responses of the subjects is a greater emphasis on the decision to adhere to the spiritual philosophy of Soka Gakkai than in other groups. The organization acted as an intermediary and a vehicle, while interpersonal relationships, although important, were less relevant in the decision-making process that led to the affiliation.

Consequences Stage

The consequences of conversion are determined, in part, by the nature, intensity, and duration of the conversion process. Many contemporary scholars believe that authentic conversion is an ongoing process of transformation. The initial change, while important, is only but the first step in a long process. An examination of the answers of my subjects appears to confirm this idea. Some questions still remain, however, such as: how many aspects of life are affected by the conversion? How extensive are these changes? To what extent are converts alienated from or reconciled to the wider world? (Rambo and Bauman 2012,

889). Though beyond the scope of this paper, these are worthwhile questions for future researchers of psychology and religion.

Importance of the Movement

To encourage insights on the importance of the movement in the convert's life, a question asked the currently affiliated members, "What would happen if Soka Gakkai disappeared tomorrow?"

Of the fifteen questions, this is the only one to which all the subjects still affiliated answered in the same way. They agreed that if the movement to which they adhere disappeared, then they would suffer. They would immediately try to "rebuild" or "continue" it, so as to continue living the initial experience in the movement.

For all, the commitment undertaken is seen as a final decision no longer linked to the organization, but now firmly embedded in their life. Should the movement cease to exist, the meaning, values, and purpose of the experience can still be "recreated," "rebuilt," and "re-founded" in other experiences. What matters most is the "content" of values and the "meaning" lived in the movement rather than the organizational structure.

Therefore, the "inside-out" dichotomy or the opposition to the external world as if it was an "enemy" does not emerge. Instead the propositions of an "idea," "dream," "project," "value," and/or "philosophy" appear to those committed to persevere in that life choice, despite its perception as a "deviance" by those who do not share it.

Conclusion

Conversion is a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic field involving several persons, institutions, events, ideas, and experiences. In particular, the decision to join the IBISG is an active, complex and dynamic process, which depends on both intrapsychic and interpersonal or social factors. Moreover, the conversion process is characterized by the peculiar aspects and strategies the movement uses to recruit followers.

From the point of view of the psychology of religion, conversion and spiritual transformation are viable and valuable subjects. However, to fully grasp them, psychologists must join with researchers in other fields to develop methods and theories worthy of these complex subjects. Any study of conversion must account not only for the converts' personal dimensions, but also their social, cultural, and religious features, as seen through these seven stages.

APPENDIX: STRUCTURE OF THE INTERVIEW

1. For how long have you been part of Soka Gakkai?
2. How did you meet Soka Gakkai?
3. Why did you decide to attend your first meeting?
4. Why did you decide to attend the following meetings?
5. What did you expect from Soka Gakkai?
6. What did it give you?
7. What it *did not* give you?
8. If you were asked, what *did not* work for you in Soka Gakkai, what would you answer?
9. What you believe you may do to remedy what is not working, if anything?
10. What do you think Soka Gakkai could give you in the future?
11. What would be your reaction if tomorrow Soka Gakkai would disappear?
12. Were there any moments when you thought about leaving the group?
13. What reaction did your family have when you joined Soka Gakkai?
14. And right now, what is your family's reaction about it?
15. And your friends' reaction, both when you joined and now?

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