

KIDNAPPED BY A CULT

SHEN XIAOMING WITH EUGENE BACH



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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KIDNAPPED BY A CULT: A PASTOR'S STAND AGAINST A MURDEROUS SECT

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Contents

Foreword.....	7
Preface.....	9
Part I: My Story.....	11
Part II: The Church in China	239
About the Authors	285

Foreword by Brother Yun

Hallelujah, I am Brother Yun, and I would like to sincerely introduce this book to the churches in the East and West.

Pastor Shen Xiaoming is a true witness of the glory of God. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he continued standing with God in the midst of the trying fires of tribulation. Even though the devil attacked him, he just refused to deny his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As one of the former house church leaders in China's Sinim fellowship, I am familiar with Pastor Shen's amazing testimony. Not only that, I was in prison for more than ten years for the sake of Jesus Christ, and I can closely identify with the hardship and experience of Pastor Shen, who was not just thrown into prison several times, but also kidnapped and tortured for the sake of the gospel.

There are few stories, however, like Pastor Shen's. In this book, he explains how the Christians in China have suffered from the evil cult known as the Eastern Lightning. The methods the cult used were harsh and brutal. They meant to destroy the growing church in China, but their persecution of believers, including of Pastor Shen, was instead used to further purify the bride of Christ in China.

Pastor Shen is a strong Christian warrior of Jesus Christ, and in his darkest moments, he experienced the amazing grace of God. The way that he persevered is truly an example for all of us to follow. Even though the enemy threw everything at Pastor Shen, he continued to stand for Jesus Christ.

What an honor for me, today, to recommend his book to readers around the world, because I know his experiences will help us all to see the continual witness of the Chinese underground church.

—*Brother Yun*
Author, *The Heavenly Man*

Preface

April 16, 2002, is a day that I will never forget. Although it began just like any other, it lead me down a road that would forever change my life and the lives of thirty-four of my closest coworkers.

On that day, I foolishly walked into a carefully laid trap that had taken years to plan and hundreds of thousands of dollars to implement by one of the craftiest and most evil “Christian” cults in the world. I gave myself into the hands of a terrorist organization that kidnaps, tortures, blackmails, and maims Christians in an attempt to convert them. And if their conversion efforts fail, they can kill their victims in cold blood.

I should have anticipated the trap because I am the pastor of one of the most well-known underground house churches in China, comprised of several million believers. Some estimate my house church network, China Gospel Fellowship, to be more than ten million strong. I do not know the exact number, but on that April morning I did know that many people wanted to harm me in order to gain control of, destroy, or at least halt the rapid growth of the Fellowship.

I was a number-one target and I knew they were after me, so you’d think I would have seen it coming.

I didn’t.

Even my wildest imagination could not have constructed the events that were about to unfold. I was like a mouse trapped in a large maze. I thought I was choosing the route before me: where to teach, where to travel, who to speak to. I wasn’t. The route was choosing me. I thought I stopped when I felt like stopping and turned when I felt like turning, but little did I know that my moves had already been anticipated and planned for.

I was running along the walls of the maze, watched at every turn, and didn’t even know it.

Part I: My Story

CHAPTER ONE

2002

I sat alone with my thoughts on a plane headed to Shanghai from the central Chinese city of Zhengzhou. The capitol of China's most populated province, Zhengzhou is a sprawling city in the heart of China. The infamous Yellow River cuts through the middle of the province, and it is along this river that the entire history of the Chinese people can be mapped out. Though the mighty Yellow River has carried life and sustenance to the Chinese people since the beginning of civilization, its often-bipolar moods of destructive flash floods or drought-prone seasons have also been the cause of famine, tribal war, and destruction. Flowing alongside the country's sorrowful history, the Yellow River is often called the "River of Sorrows" because of the heartbreak and devastation it has brought time after time after time.

I had just gotten comfortable on the flight when the intercom came on and announced that our plane was about to descend into Shanghai. We dropped below the clouds, and as my stomach lifted I could see the sprawling "new world" city of Shanghai below.

Shanghai couldn't be more different from Zhengzhou. Zhengzhou has the fighting spirit of the Han Chinese people from Henan Province. Though Zhengzhou is a big city that continues to develop at a breakneck speed, there still remains a comfortable feeling of a homogenous community. Steam from Chinese noodle shops, the staple of the Henan people, can be found on every corner. *Putonghua*, the common Chinese language better known to Westerners as Mandarin, is spoken by virtually every person you meet.

But Shanghai is metropolitan mixing pot. It was built as a trading port by the British Empire during the colonial occupation when opium was the main import and silk and tea the major exports. Of the hundreds of Chinese minorities in China, almost all of them can be found in modern-day Shanghai.

I was born and raised in the countryside. Nothing about my appearance fit in with the urbanites of Shanghai, so I knew it would be easy enough for our driver to spot me and Brother Shen in the crowd of arriving passengers at the airport.

Our small team was travelling to attend a secret underground Bible school training seminar, but for the purpose of security, the other team members from our church would not attend with me at the same location there in Shanghai. Instead, they flew to five other locations, in Qingdao, Harbin, Hebei, Xi'an, and Hubei, to attend the same seminar at different venues. Only Brother Shen Yiping, a fellow pastor and one of my right-hand men whom I have been closely working with for years, was at my side in Shanghai.

The security measures were necessary because the activities of our Fellowship were outlawed by the government. We would never have received official authorization for the Bible training seminar, so we attended in secret. By splitting up our group into six separate training centers, including Shanghai, we lessened our chances that the police would find all of them before the training was complete. Even if one of the schools were compromised, the others could continue.

It was a common practice that we often used to conceal our training centers. But, as it happened, it was also an excellent opportunity for anyone to take advantage of us.

Just as we agreed, the driver was at the airport waiting for us when we arrived. He helped with our luggage and promptly returned to the steering wheel. He did not say much as he drove us to the place that would be our home for the next three weeks, but this was not a surprise. We didn't know each other and, when working in a world of illegal activities like underground house church training, it was always good not to share too much information with people you don't know.

When we arrived, I could see that it was a typical Shanghai city apartment—a towering structure that stood beside several other skyline buildings choking the view of the horizon. The building's once brilliant, shiny tiles, now dulled grey by Shanghai's pollution, were spotted with rows of loud and leaky air-conditioning units and makeshift clotheslines.

Our driver motioned to one of the doors on a lower floor. Brother Shen Yiping got out, handed me my crutches, and helped me out of the

car. We both moved briskly to the door, keeping our heads down so as to not draw too much attention.

We often hold our Bible training programs in residential homes like this one in Shanghai. Since I am not recognized by the government as a pastor, I am not allowed to register a church or host religious training classes. Any Bible study that we have in China, even if it is a small, simple study with family members, is considered illegal.

As we entered, I looked around the room and noticed that there were a few other attendees I had never met before. I sat on the couch and tried to relax. Through the living room window, a movement outside caught the corner of my eye. The view through the smog-stained window was partially blocked by iron bars, a typical safety solution for anyone living on lower floors in Shanghai, but I could see an elderly man peering in at me.

"Oh, don't mind him," said one of the ladies from across the room when she noticed what I was looking at. "He is a member of the residents' committee and is just a busybody. Nothing to worry about!"

I looked away, but still felt his intrusive stare. Then I noticed a man running up behind him and heard footsteps enter our building and come up the stairwell. The man burst into our apartment.

"You have been tracked," he said rapidly.

Everyone flushed with surprise at the sudden entrance. The man explained that he was one of the leaders of the underground training program. I had never met him before. He was slim, middle-aged, and wearing a black suit that hung loosely on his thin shoulders.

He looked straight at me and Pastor Shen. "You need to take the SIM cards out of your mobile phones and hand them over," he said, half out of breath. "I am sorry, but it seems that you have been tracked here by the police. Our informants just told us that the police have been monitoring your phones, and they know that you are here."

He scanned the room and skipped the niceties of welcoming all of the new students. "We are going to need to separate all of you into smaller groups and send you to another location that is safer than here."

I opened up the back of my phone and pulled out my SIM card. The man walked around and collected all of them. "Thank you, thank you,"

he said without looking at us as we dropped the cards into his hands. "Of course we will hand these back to you when the training is over."

This might have raised suspicion with some people, but not me. I knew that mobile phones, while convenient for travel and communication, were a curse for security. The Chinese secret police, also known as the Public Security Bureau (PSB), could listen in on phone calls made with mobile phones and track our movements. By monitoring the mobile phone signals, they could tell how many people were attending a secret meeting and identify who they were by the registration of the phone number.

The PSB were also capable of eavesdropping on a conversation by remotely tapping into the microphone function on a mobile phone, even if the phone was turned off. Once they had control over the microphone, they could listen in on every conversation that you had with your colleagues and record the information. The only way to prevent this was to completely remove the SIM card from the phone.

Before we left for the next safe house, we were asked to give up not just our SIM cards, but also our phones. The leaders obviously did not want to take any chances.

As I handed it over, I knew I was handing over all of my power. I had friends and church members all over China; in Shanghai alone, I had several thousand friends who would help me at the drop of a hat. But without any way to connect with them, I might as well have had no friends, no acquaintances, no church of several million believers.

I didn't know anything about these people, but I was so eager to receive Bible training, I didn't hesitate. I was willing to put my life in the hands of complete strangers if it meant that I could have any chance to get closer to God by better understanding His Word.

I had no idea how much I would regret it.