

18 detained in connection to cult activities

Police in east China's Zhejiang Province have detained 18 suspects in connection to activities of the "Almighty God" cult.

Police in Changxing County caught the suspected cult members following an investigation. Police also confiscated laptops and books used by the cult for dissemination of information.

"Almighty God," known in Chinese as Quannengshen, grabbed national headlines in 2014 with viral videos showing five of its members beating a woman to death at a McDonald's in the eastern city of Zhaoyuan, condemning her as an "evil spirit" after she refused to give them her mobile phone number for recruitment purposes.

First appearing in the 1990s in central China's Henan Province, Quannengshen claims that Jesus has been resurrected as Yang Xiangbin, who is the wife of the cult's founder Zhao Weishan, also known as Xu Wenshan. The couple fled to the United States in September 2000.

According to Dong Jianfeng, a police officer from Changxing County, most of the apprehended suspects showed signs of depression.

"Some of them are divorced and do not seem to know how to vent their suppressed emotions," Dong said. "Some of their families have experienced bad accidents and caused them to become depressed."

According to initial investigations, the cult's financial sources mainly came from "donations" from its members. The higher the donation, the more rights a member obtained. More donations allowed members access to higher positions within the cult, according to police.

"Every member was willing to donate their money, and the amounts ranged from 10,000 yuan (1,481 U.S. dollars) to tens of thousands of yuan," Dong said.

"The cult's 'leaders' imposed spiritual control over the members," Dong said. "They were told that as long as they gave donations, the Almighty God would keep their illness at bay."

Of the detained suspects, eight have been "re-educated" and denounced their cult beliefs, police said.