

by TONY CARNES

A CHINESE CHRISTIAN refugee in New York, working with Christians in China, has compiled an extensive new archive documenting brutal religious persecution that has caused more than 100 deaths and thousands of injuries.

Activist Li Shi-xiong, head of the New York City-based Committee for Investigation on Persecution of Religion in China, believes these documents establish that communist rulers at the highest levels take an active role in persecuting house-church Christians. In the past, top leaders in China have blamed repression on overzealous local officials.

The New York committee timed its unveiling of the archive to influence President Bush during his February trip to China.

The archive is a 10-foot-high stack of 22,000 testimonies about persecution of Chinese Christians. It includes court transcripts, internal government documents, and photographs. Experts call it the largest collection ever assembled on the persecuted church in China.

"The secret documents alone are extremely rare and incredibly important," says Carol Hamrin, a star China analyst

who recently retired from the State Department. The mammoth collection, which Li calls a "truth bomb," includes 5,000 detailed testimonies of Chinese Christians describing their arrests, interrogations, and jailings. Many accounts include photographs of the persecuted believers, including injuries they suffered while in custody. Some case files include official arrest and court records. The largest number of testimonies comes from central Henan Province, where persecution has dramatically escalated since 1999. Li's group has also collected partial reports on 17,000 others, mostly Christians, persecuted for their religious beliefs.

Li is also documenting the cases of 117 religious people who have died while in official custody, 700 who have been put in labor camps, and 550 who are wanted by the police but are in hiding. He is also investigating 300 police officers accused of being especially abusive.

Freedom House's Nina Shea has written that Li's archive is a "tremendous work." Shea, a member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, marvels at Li's "dedication to the cause of religious freedom and his amazing work in the documentation of so many thousands of cases of the persecution of China's Christians." Freedom House, an advocacy organization founded in 1941 by Eleanor Roosevelt, plans to make extensive use of the archive.

China scholar Brent Fulton, head of China Source in Los Angeles, is aware of the archive but has not examined its contents. He says the documents indicate the "degree of seriousness" with which China approaches unregistered religious groups. "They see the unregistered groups as a national security threat."

Li and the New York committee believe that going public with the archive will build international political pressure on China's leaders to end their repression of religion. Fulton foresees the government searching for those who leaked the documents. He also expects more crackdowns. But, he says, "The long-term response to the release of these papers will be good."

Special Report

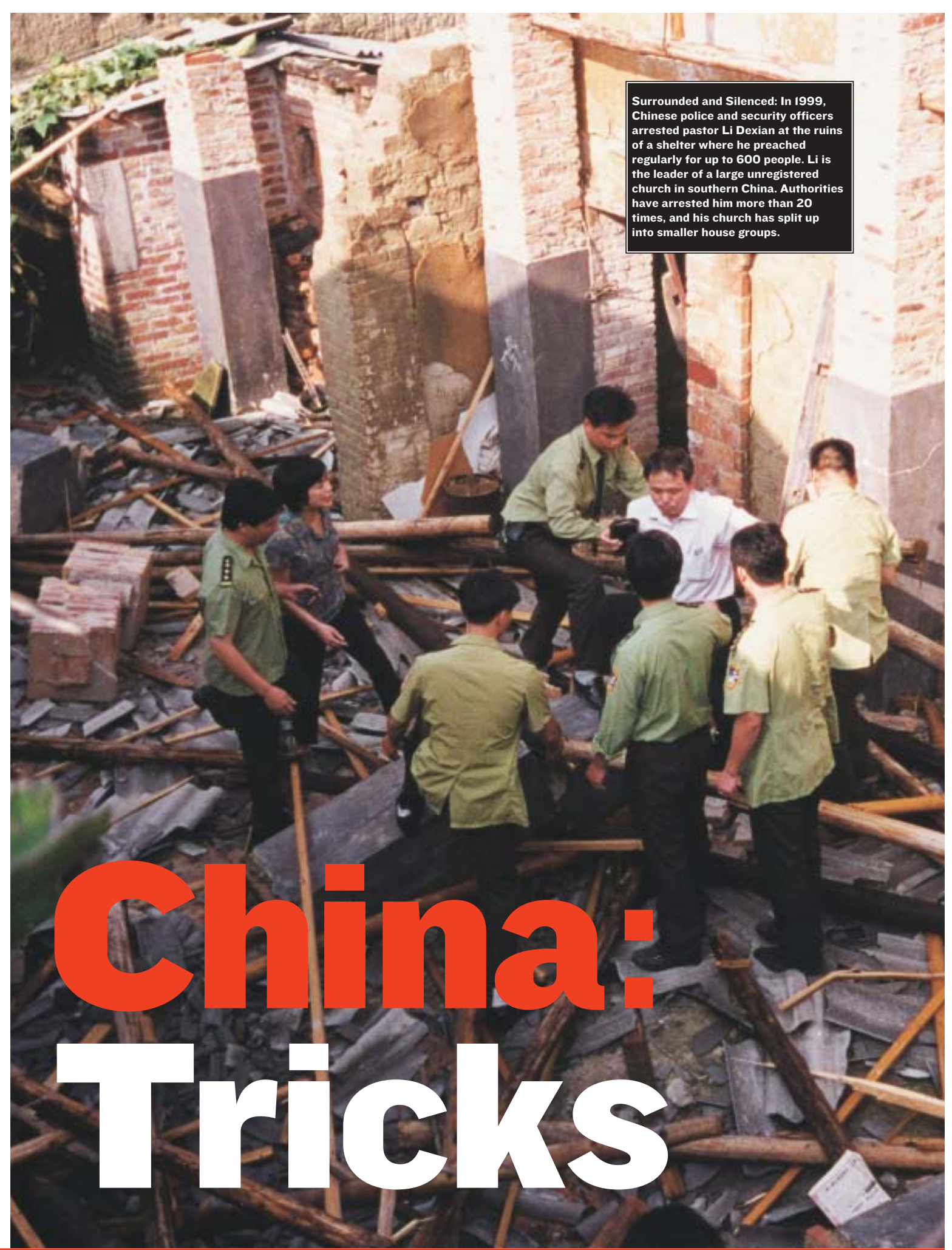
A SENSITIVE TIME

The revelation of the archive comes at a sensitive time for China. Political leaders say that the nation of 1.3 billion people faces wrenching changes related to its entrance into the World Trade Organization (WTO) last December. WTO membership will lower trade barriers, enabling China to compete for trade on a more level playing field. Certain parts of China's economy, such as high tech, are expected to do well. Others, such as the inefficient and subsidized industrial and agricultural sectors, may be pummeled. Millions of unskilled laborers could be thrown out of work.

Seeking to maintain its grip on society, the Chinese government since 1999 has been waging a campaign against "cults,"

PHOTO COURTESY THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS / WWW.PERSECUTION.COM

Surrounded and Silenced: In 1999, Chinese police and security officers arrested pastor Li Dexian at the ruins of a shelter where he preached regularly for up to 600 people. Li is the leader of a large unregistered church in southern China. Authorities have arrested him more than 20 times, and his church has split up into smaller house groups.



Top communists, despite their denials, endorse arrest and torture of Chinese Christians by the thousands.

'New'

China:

Same Old

Tricks

such as the Falun Gong movement. (Falun Gong adherents use physical exercise as a spiritual discipline.) China's officials are trying now to eliminate what they consider undesirable movements, because WTO membership will bring additional interna-

tional pressure on China to improve its poor record on human rights. "[China's] officials spell out that the anti-cult campaign is a preparation for the further opening of society because of China joining the World Trade Organization," Hamrin says.

But, Fulton adds, "There are in fact a lot of cult groups that are doing bad things."

Says Eric Burklin, president of Colorado-based China Partner, "China wants to have a positive image with the rest of the world. The government can't really discern the cults from the non-cults because [China's top leaders] are atheistic."

The archive makes it clear that repression of religion is official state policy at the highest levels—not merely a local and sporadic phenomenon, as China usually claims. In the documents, officials say the cults are "soaking into" and weakening the foundations of state authority. Officials link rising religious influence to the increased influence of Western cultural values of democracy and equality.

In public, Chinese leaders are vague on what actually constitutes a cult. "Cults are not religions," Premier Zhu Rong Ji said in a December meeting on religion. Critics say this approach allows authorities to crack down on any groups they do not like—including many house churches. These churches typically do not register with the government-sponsored Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

While there is no consensus on the number of Christians in China, *Operation World* estimates the presence of 45 million people in house churches and another 40 million members and adherents in the official church. There are about 12 million Catholics in China, in both state and unofficial groups.

Hamrin, who favors improving trade relations with China, says that this latest

government repression will worsen matters. "This massive campaign against millions of their people will exacerbate social tensions."

AGGRESSIVE ACTIONS

In a recent public pronouncement, China's government declared that religion has never fared better. Ye Xiaowen, the head of the Religious Affairs Bureau, toured the United States last year. Ye claimed that the government had initiated a "golden time" for religion. China's president, Jiang Zemin, recently told a U.S. congressional delegation in Beijing, "I am looking forward to seeing a church on one side of every village and a mosque on the other side."

During the second week of December, top communist leaders gathered in Beijing to discuss religion policy. Jiang led off with a speech declaring, "The influence of religion on political and social lives in today's world should never be underestimated."

In lower-profile gatherings, however, the talk tilts toward intensive surveillance of religion, according to Li's archival materials. In a speech, a local public security official in charge of religion quoted Hu Jintao, likely to be the next leader of China, on the proper approach to a "cult": "Watch and follow its direction and deal with it by law at the proper time." As the orders filter down, local leaders often act aggressively. A provincial security chief says, "Talk less and smash the cult quietly."

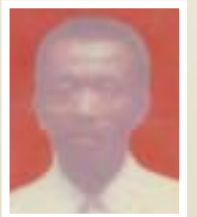
Li's archive documents how the anti-cult campaign was quickly broadened to include many well-known Protestant

Dossiers

Beaten for hosting Bible studies:

SHI YUN-CHAO

Shi Yun-chao (1941-96) lived in Five Mile Village of Henan Province. In April 1983, Shi was summoned by the local Public Security Bureau to attend a study group held by the Religion Bureau. There the official from the bureau stressed repeatedly, "You are not allowed to have Christian gatherings. You are not allowed to read a Bible sent from overseas. You are not allowed to have private gatherings. Any activity in violation of any part of the above regulation is illegal and counter-revolutionary."



Shi said, "We did not shout in our gatherings. Why do you identify us as part of the 'Shouter Sect' (branded as cult in China)?" The official of the Religion Bureau replied, "You are Shouter Sect if you shout loud; you are also Shouter Sect if you lower your voice shouting. We think you are still Shouter Sect even if you mumble words in your mouth! The Shouter Sect is counterrevolutionary."

On April 25, 1983, officers from the Public Security Bureau declared that Shi was arrested on the charge of illegal counterrevolutionary gatherings.

A few months later, he was sent to a labor camp. He was released in April 1987 after he had served a three-year sentence. On July 10, 1989, Shi held a gathering at a nearby home in Northern Heights Village. As the group was having lunch, Yang Shou-shan, Lao Yue, and others from the Public Security Bureau broke in with handcuffs and batons.

Yang Shou-shan cursed, "Old diehard! It is you again!" He handcuffed him, cursing, "You never repent, even when your death time comes!"

Then Shi Yun-chao was taken to the Qing Feng Jail. His howls and shrieks under torture rang out so far that those Christians locked in the jail could hear it clearly.

On July 10, 1993, he was released from prison. But he could no longer live a normal life as a healthy person.

His health failed to improve. He died on January 17, 1996. —Wan Xi-ying (the victim's wife)

Dossiers Tortured to the point of death:

ZHANG WU-JI

My elder brother's name is Zhang Wu-ji (a Christian evangelist), who lived in Bai Yu Village, Henan Province of south central China. In 1984 at age 49, the Public Security Bureau of Yuzhou City persecuted him to death because of his Christian belief.

My brother had been persecuted many times for his belief. The last one began at noon, May 12, 1983, when the officers from the Public Security Bureau called him out from his home to outside the village. He was brought on the charges of "being a counterrevolutionary, having illicit relation with foreign countries, possessing a transmitter-receiver, receiving salary from foreigners." In a fury, those officers used an electric baton to hit him until he was lying unconscious. He was in their hands for over one month.

Later . . . under the guise of medical treatment, they forced him to drink a kind of medicine. Knowing that it was white arsenic, a poison, my brother refused. Then several officers pressed him, forcibly prying open his mouth and pouring the poison down his throat. But seeing that he did not die, the officers said in surprise, "It is weird; this guy is still alive!" Again they pried open my brother's mouth, inserting the baton into it. A finger-sized hole was burned into his tongue.

After believing that my brother was on the verge of death, (police) gave us a notice to bring my brother home.

Following some treatments at home, we unexpectedly heard him speaking. At my request he then told me the details of his tortures. Sadly, medical treatment failed him. My brother died on August 10, 1984. —Zhang Rong-hua (the victim's sister)

What China's Secret Documents Reveal

The New York archive of religious persecution in China contains numerous government documents that show how the government controls religion.

Defining a cult China's Ministry of Public Security issued a document on identifying religious cults. "Any organization . . . shall be identified as a cult," the document says, if it:

- Sets up illegal organizations in the name of religion.
- Deifies its leaders.
- Manufactures and distributes superstitions and heresies.
- Instigates and deceives people and recruits and controls the members by means of manufactured superstitions and heresies.
- Is systematically involved in activities disturbing public order and endangering the security of citizens' lives and property.

The seven cults identified in the documents of the Central Committee Office and the State Council Office include three Christian groups: the Shouters, the Total Scope Church (Peter Xu's Born Again Movement), and New Testament Church, also called "Evangelical Group of the Spirit in Christ."

Smashing organizations Bi Rongsheng, deputy director of the Religion Section in the Public Security Department of Hebei Province, said in an October 2001 speech:

"The key to thoroughly containing the spread and development of a cult is to smash the core of the cult and to completely

destroy its organizational system. . . . All leaders in charge of the departments for domestic security and defense should put great emphases on the building up of secret forces."

Infiltrating religious groups Sun Jianxin, vice-director of the Anhui Public Security Department, said in a February 2001 speech:

"We should vigorously . . . conduct reconnaissance and investigation on those who come to China to perpetrate illegal religious activities.

"Secret forces are the heart and soul in covert struggles and

the crucial magic weapon in our battle. . . . The public security authorities should find and train a group of extraordinary special spies who . . . can keep cool in any unexpected situation and who can also penetrate into the inner circle of the suspects.

"We need to utilize the Internet for transmission . . . relying on the Golden Shield Net [China's national computer surveillance network].

"We should focus on building up . . . the intelligence management systems on . . . religious organizations abroad that infiltrate [China]."

groups. In just one example, on August 18, 2001, authorities raided three offices of the South China Church. They arrested 14 people, using fists and electric clubs to obtain accusations against the pastor.

"The central government is defining whole groups as targets of extreme measures," says Hamrin, who produced the U.S. State Department's first annual reports on religious freedom and persecution in China. For example, more than 300 Chinese associated with the Falun Gong movement have died while in China's custody.

Increasingly, groups are targeted not just for breaking civil laws on registration and holding unauthorized meetings, but for their beliefs and religious doctrine. The government, the archive shows, especially dislikes preaching about "the end of the world" or teaching that "the Lord can heal a person of disease."

According to the archive, the Ministry of Public Security spells out five characteristics of a cult, ranging from the clearly defined "deifying its top leader" to the grab bag of "stirring up and deceiving others." (See "What China's Secret Documents Reveal," p. 40)

The documents show that officials are especially wary of unregistered church groups that attempt to link with other unregistered groups. In such cases, the archive shows, officials are returning to the fierce battles from the era of Mao Zedong, China's first communist ruler, from 50 years ago. This has led to tremendous abuses. In April 2000, officials put Peter Xu's Born Again Movement on their cult list. Officials set quotas for arrests, putting pressure on local police to obtain confessions. Police often beat, slap, and use electric shocks to obtain those confessions.

Leaders of the large South China Church organization also have been hit hard by recent arrests. A document from a police official in the provincial religion office hints that poorly trained police in Hebei Province are resorting to abusive interrogation methods instead of quiet information-gathering. The archive reveals several recent cases of local police trying to bribe the families of people they had killed under interrogation. Leaders of the South China Church report, "On July 20, 2001, we heard the news that Yu Zongju was tortured to death. The police

Dossiers Surviving on 'tiger's diarrhea':

GU XIANGMEI

My name is Gu Xiangmei. I am a 32-year-old female. My home is at No. 18 of Hangyu Dongzhen in Xinye County, Nangyann, Henan. I was sentenced to two years in prison because I believe in God.

At about ten o'clock in the evening on March 22, 2001, I was getting ready to go to bed. Suddenly Li Bin, assistant director of Xinye police station, climbed over the wall surrounding my house and broke in.

Li Bin forced me to give him the key to my father-in-law's house. Li opened the door and searched that house also. The police did not find anything except a set of cassettes of praising songs and a hardcover, *God, You're Great*, in the back room.

In the end, Li Bin got me into their car and took me to the Hang Yun police station, Xinye County. During my jail time in Xinhang police station, Li Bin interrogated me five times. He used electric shock on me, and pinched my fingers and back with pliers. I lost consciousness several times because of the pain. Li Bin tried to force me to admit that I worshiped God. I kept silent all the time so they couldn't get anything from me. Then Li Bin sent me to Xinye County detention house.

In the detention house, I am exhausted every day, and I don't get enough to eat. In the morning we are given a small bowl of thin noodles and hard, steamed bread, and in the evening we only get a bowl of thin noodles, which we call "tiger's diarrhea."

On April 19, Xinye County police sentenced me to be in prison for two years for associating with cults and breaking the laws. Li Bin and Liyanpu handcuffed me and took me to Shibali Women's Labor-Education Center of Zhangzhou, where I have been ever since.



did not inform her family until her body started to smell. They asked her family to meet them in a restaurant. They paid them \$8,000 and warned them to keep quiet."

CHRISTIAN NETWORKS 'MUTATE'

Last year, the Bush administration sponsored a resolution for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights that condemned Beijing's human rights record. Amnesty International reported in 2001 that China's use of torture was widespread and systematic.

China analysts such as Hamrin say that the Chinese government, wishing to improve its image internationally, probably will respond favorably to pressure to improve human rights.

"China has really developed and they have tasted too much freedom to go back," says Eric Burkin of China Partner. "There would be major bloodshed if they tried to go back to Maoist times."

But Li's archive shows that China's emerging strategy for dealing with the house-church movement is comprehensive and difficult for outsiders to counter. Officials gain access through informants, harass leaders, block communication, and strip churches of financial assets, including church buildings and homes.

The government notes in the documents that house-church Christians already have a means to resist these new efforts at repression. House-church leaders reportedly are creating networks that constantly mutate. Leaders communicate with wireless phones and hard-to-trace Web sites. In response, the government has begun building a national computer network known as the "Golden Shield" in order to conduct Internet surveillance and information-gathering.

Meanwhile, the impact of Li's archives promises to be seismic. "It's a bombshell," Shea says.

by TONY CARNES

THE MAN behind the most damning archive on religious persecution in China escaped to the United States as a godless political refugee. Chinese police knocked on Li Shi-xiong's door in 1989, after the military massacred hundreds of pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. It was a knock the anti-communist dissident from the central Chinese city of Wuhan had heard before.

A half-dozen police stormed Li's home, demanding a confession. They confronted Li with photos and videotape of him giving food and money to the demonstrators.

"I supported people who are the flowers of China," he told them. "You guys should support this."

Li had not done anything illegal, and after a harsh exchange the authorities turned to leave. But Li's parting volley—"Don't cause me any trouble! Your IQ is too low!"—secured a promise from the police commander to arrest him someday.

"I'll be waiting!" Li shouted. "Come anytime!" He knew, though, that this bravado would quickly land him back in the kind of labor camps where he, the son of political opponents, had spent his early childhood.

How a bitter atheist helped besieged Christians—and became a believer himself.

It took him seven years to scrape together the funds—while the government forced his businesses into bankruptcy, he says—but by 1997 Li had completed a complicated odyssey to Flushing, New York.

Li applied for political asylum and helped others do so. Impressed, a lawyer asked Li to work for him. As Li began to notice religious persecution cases among the asylum applicants, he recalled a man he had known in a labor camp.

"One rainy day I was coming back to our living quarters after a day's work in the



Li Shi-xiong (center) with his brother and sister in 1955.

man's story," Li says. "He talked about being beaten and said, 'Everybody in our church was beaten.'"

Eventually Li helped the pastor obtain asylum, and his success in many other cases attracted the attention of a group of Chinese religious leaders. Warily, the leaders of an unlikely collection of orthodox and nominally Christian groups came together to meet with Li. Eventually representatives of more than 30 orthodox and heterodox Christian groups joined the work on the archive.

Li found it difficult to persuade them they needed to work harder at obtaining proof for their words. One told him, "What you want is hard and very dangerous to get."

Within three months, those applying for asylum agreed to get their house-church networks to gather testimonies about incidents of persecution. Sometimes the evidence came in recorded testimonies.

Listening to these disembodied voices talk about their sufferings," he says, "is like sitting in a dark jail hearing the screams and the nightmares."

While working with Li, Chinese church leaders helped him come to a saving relationship with Christ.

AN ACTIVIST IS BORN

By March 2001 Li was receiving 500 testimonies a month. He has collected 5,000 testimonies with pictures of the persecuted. In many cases, court documents and photos accompany them. He has also received less complete reports of another 17,000 cases of religious persecution.

The photos of the persecuted tell their

stories: Sister He, a handsome mother, stripped and beaten with an iron rod. Elder Brother Song, holding out his arms with fresh scars where the bones stuck out; his throat, partly cut, now presenting an ugly jagged scar. Pastor Chan, beaten 20 times, his face staring out kindly with pain discernible in the eyes.

Historically the government has been able to deflect accusations of religious persecution because credible information was so difficult to get out of China. Li's work signals a breakthrough on that front.

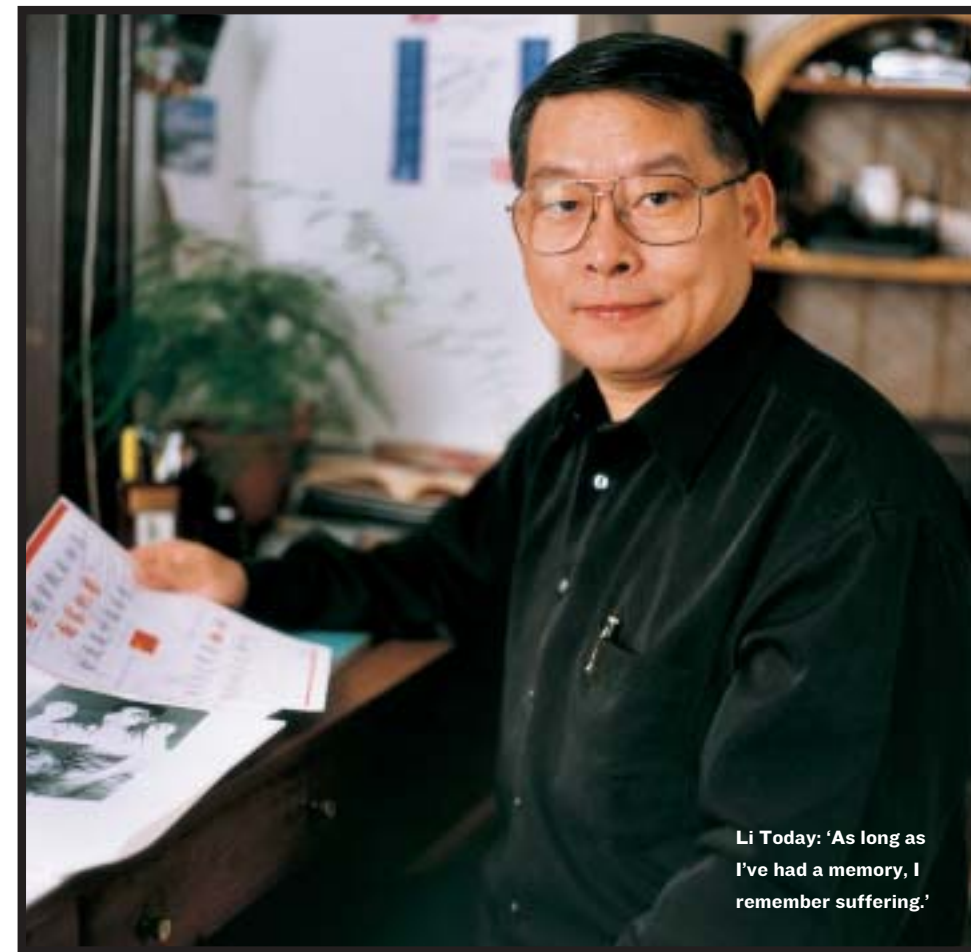
A tough childhood, more difficult than most of us can imagine, prepared him for this role. His native Wuhan is a drab, hard-edged, and sprawling industrial city in central China. Li was born in a back-alley room from which his parents were evicted six days after his birth. The Li family wandered from one begging spot to another.

"As long as I've had a memory, I remember suffering," he says.

His family had been on the losing side of China's civil war. His mother's father had been an anticommunist military leader, which doomed the Lis to a dire existence in a tough city.

He tells of once seeing a toy train through the window of another home. "I don't especially like trains, but I was amazed that this toy train could go round and seem to automatically, magically, come out of the mountain. I wondered if I could go somewhere and magically reappear in a new life."

In March 1960, labor camp seemed like such a new start to the 7-year-old Li. He got to see his father, attend the camp's school, and hold his first book. But he found there was a pecking order in prison,



Li Today: 'As long as I've had a memory, I remember suffering.'

too—labeled as counterrevolutionary, Li's family pined away at the bottom.

His father took out his bitterness on his young and loving son by beating him. At the urging of a teacher, the son of an official kept a list of young Li's counterrevolutionary deeds. Li recalls: "Complain about the weather? 'Counterrevolutionary!' Complain about the food? 'Treasonous son of a poisonous weed!'"


He was thrown out of school during the first grade. Li's father beat him again.

"I was dirty every day, and sometimes other kids would beat me up. My mother couldn't do anything. She only had the right to apologize to people who bullied me. She had to say, 'Oh, your children got

hurt.' They got hurt beating on me!"

A deep bitterness and a violent temper gripped him by the time he was released from labor camp after 20 years. He had almost no formal education and no money. He married, but prison life had not prepared him with much social grace. The marriage fell apart after a few years.

A Christian aunt from Taiwan wrote Li about Christ and her daily prayers for him. He paid little attention as he fought his way up the ladder of China's economic boom.

He never forgot, however, the aunt's encouraging words to him while he made red bricks in labor camp as a young boy: "Look at the stars above your bricks. Know that God is with you to the end." 

The Unlikely Activist