

Documentary shows world of cults

By YU NAN
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With thick bandages wrapped around her head, Chen Guo still lies in a bed at the Beijing Jishuitan Hospital. She is one of four survivors of a tragedy that happened on January 23 last year, when seven members of the *Falun Gong* cult set themselves on fire in the Chinese capital's Tian'anmen Square.

Doctors have announced that 19-year-old Chen can no longer play the *pipa*, an ancient Chinese plucked instrument, because her fingers have been too badly burned by the fire. Her aspiration to become a music teacher may remain merely a dream for years to come.

A camera crew visited Chen

early last year and the teenagers bears of regret and sorrow of the new documentary "Abyss — The Nature of Cults."

The film was made by the Beijing Science and Education Film Studio and will be released in cinematheaters nationwide.

At the film's premiere in Beijing last week, director Jiao said: "It is the first Chinese popular science documentary about cults and the longest of this type in the world."

The film selected about 10 notorious cults in the world, such as Japanese Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth) doomsday cult, the People's Temple cult of the United States preacher Jim Jones, and China's *Falun Gong* cult, to examine the origins and characteristics of cults and the harm they do to individuals and society as a whole.

"From a scientific angle, we try to explain why people join cults and how they are controlled mentally. The two questions

that people concern the most," Mo said.

Film critics have worried that the quality of Chinese science documentaries has been declining in recent years because of funding shortages and competition from Chinese and foreign commercial films.

But Mo said he believes that this film will be a big surprise and he also has confidence that it will make a profit.

With investment of more than 3 million yuan (US\$362,000), it took the crew about 15 months to gather research material, travel and interview victims and *Falun Gong* cult members in eight provinces or municipalities.

Mo said every member of his crew was shocked by the tragedies experienced by the cult practitioners and their victimized families.

Chinese government statistics show that more than 1,700 people have died because of the *Falun Gong*.

The film studio also invited

famous scientists to act as consultants, such as physicist He Zuoxiu from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Professor Pan Jiazheng from the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

Ding Jie, a film critic from China Art Weekly, said it was one of the best science documentaries she had ever watched.

"I am sure that, after you watch the film, your mind will become clearer about the reasons why people want to join cults and how they harm society and individuals," she said.

Physicist He Zuoxiu said the film does not merely repeat existing TV documentaries or old stories on the same subject but is a brand-new and vivid production.

He suggested at the premiere that English subtitles should be prepared for the film because the problem of cults is a world concern. He said he hoped the film could be shown outside China to let more people know the truth about the *Falun Gong* cult and the harm it does.

Jiangsu Province.

Sponsored by the Gulou district government and Nanjing University, the science park is open to colleges, scientific research institutes, financial institutions and large or medium-sized enterprises.

Designated as a State-level science park, it is aimed at promoting the application of advanced technology developed by colleges and universities around Nanjing as well as from the rest of the country.

ZHENGZHOU Shang ruins

Archaeologists have discovered what is believed to have been the largest palace of the ancient Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century to c. 11th century BC) at Anyang in Central China's Henan Province.

The ruins were found near the site of the Yin ruins.

The rectangular building is 173 metres long and 90 metres wide and is the biggest building found to date back to before the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC). The main hall's corridors and doorways indicate the building once housed royalty.

The burnt floors and walls and charcoal remains reveal that it was destroyed in a fierce fire.

GUANGZHOU Qilou protected

Guangzhou, the capital of South China's Guangdong Province, has drawn up plans to protect its *qilou* houses—multi-storey buildings that integrate Chinese and European architectural styles.

Qilou houses are popular in Fujian Province as well as Guangdong and were built by Chinese businessmen who had returned from Southeast Asia in the early 20th century.

According to local experts, the buildings are based on traditional houses in South China, with features added in Western architectural styles such as baroque and Gothic.

The first floor of a *qilou* house is used as a shop. Part of the second floor hangs over the first floor and is supported by columns, forming a shelter in front of the shop. People live on the upper floors.

The houses line up to form a shopping street, leaving overhangs on both sides of the street to shelter pedestrians.

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File photo

Cult viewing: Producers of the documentary "Abyss — The Nature of Cults" used animation to show the methods that cults use to control their followers' minds.