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Quiet Confrontations: Transnational Advocacy Networks, Local Churches, and the Pursuit of Religious Freedoms in China

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Quiet Confrontations: Transnational Advocacy Networks, Local Churches, and the Pursuit of Religious Freedoms in China

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in

Political Science

by

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June 2013

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DEDICATION

For my friends and people who fight for their beliefs and freedoms in the United States, Taiwan, China and everywhere.

For my families, my mom and my love who supported me all these years.
My dissertation project explores the question of how activist networks operate in a highly repressive country when outside intervention is restrained. People have seen how effectively the Chinese Communist Party has cracked down on transnational religious activisms sponsored by Falun Gong, the exiled Tibetan government, and the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, Protestant advocacy groups from the United States and elsewhere enter China each year, despite the fact that the Party has stated that no Chinese church is allowed to receive any form of foreign support. I argue that understanding this variation in the success of transnational religious networks sheds light on the significance of an approach to transnational collaboration that is quite different from the “naming and shaming” strategy that dominates the literature on advocacy networks. I tested this strategic alliance argument with a mixed-methods research design, including face-to-face interviews, participant observations in four major cities, and a cross-provincial phone survey in randomly selected prefectures.
This project makes notable corrections to previous understanding about protecting minority groups in authoritarian states. First, it addresses the neglect of religion and religious activists in the scholarship on transnational social movements and activism. Second, the strategic collaboration that is demonstrated by religious activists and advocates provides an alternative to the "naming and shaming" strategy of conventional transnational activism that more or less relies on powerful Western states and the United Nations. Third, the project identifies two commonly overlooked causal mechanisms between effective activism and its networks: the alliance strategy of foreign advocates and the leverage provided by government-sponsored social entities. The role of government-sponsored social organizations has been largely ignored in the existing literature. Members from legal entities often help fragile advocacy networks by providing information, legal protection, and connections, while brokering acquiescence from pragmatic local officials. In return, the advocacy networks provide funding, services and, most importantly, necessary legitimacy from globally recognized norms and standards. This unique benefit makes local leaders who ally with the advocacy networks seem more legitimate in the eyes of their own constituency.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In a rainy afternoon, I met Mr. Chen Yuan-Zhang in a rural town of Sichuan Province. I was attending a wedding ministered by a foreign missionary and organized by an underground congregation supported by registered churches from other Chinese provinces. It was a very unusual combination of people with a chaotic situation from the weather and the sensitivity of the gathering, especially when I realized that the bride and groom had to go to a registered church to attend a “pretend” ceremony and then came back to the “real” ceremony. Mr. Chen was introduced by the family as a local charity activist. Chen was well-known in the cycle of aid workers after 2008 earthquakes because his unique background distinguished him from other activists. He was a Communist party member and well-respected local official in the financial sector. People saw him as the “go-to” guy for advice about surviving in this chaotic and repressive environment.

After two visits and a long interview, I got a story of activism that would repeatedly be told by others throughout my fieldwork in China. The story departs from the patterns and theories of success among transnational activist networks that are prominent in the mainstream Western scholarly literature. Mr. Chen was baptized as a Protestant Christian after his business trip to the U.S., and his grassroots organization shelters underground religious activity. He talked about human rights and activism in a pragmatic way. “You have to fight for the rights carefully and never cross the ‘red line’ of the Party,” he said. Mr. Chen was frustrated with my questions regarding to the

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1 For protecting the safety of my interviewees, all the names in this dissertation are aliases.
progress of human rights lawmaking in recent years. “The Communist Party owns the
court and the police,” he emphasized, “[human rights] lawmaking is for show; we cannot
be protected by passing new laws and those laws are designed to control us.” I mentioned
the campaigns from overseas human rights groups that aim at helping Chinese activists.
“I understand their concerns,” he insisted, “but their involvement would complicate
things here.”²

The story of transnational activism being told here is different from those of
prominent human rights and transnational activism paradigms that describe local activists
as either passively empowered by outside advocates or aggressively "marketing" their
grievances to Western media and organizations for intervention (Bob 2005). Clifford Bob
defines transnational activism as “sustained and substantial transfers of money, materiel,
and knowledge by a foreign NGO or NGO network to challenger, as well as provision of
publicity, advocacy, and lobbying on its behalf.”³ In contrast to this view, I saw an
alternative approach to transnational activism that involved the role of innovative local
"challengers" helping to market/work their foreign NGO sponsors to people in power.
Local activists help the fragile advocacy network by providing information and
connections, while brokering acquiescence from pragmatic local officials. In return, the
advocacy network provides funding, services. Most importantly, the advocacy network
provides globally recognized knowledge and norms, which make local leaders allying
with them seem legitimate to their own constituency. Several months after the interview,
Mr. Chen’s charity organization got official approval and registered, despite the fact that

² Interview No.44.
he and his followers have had clashed with riot police and religious officials for many times. His low profile, “respecting-the-redline” strategy paid off.

The work of Chen Yuan-Zhang and other activists and organizations examined in this project sheds light on the unique conundrum that is confronted by activists in an authoritarian state. Transnational networks provide assistance to local activists, but their appearance and efforts also increase the risk of local collaborators to become victims of political repression. This dilemma is especially exacerbated in places like China, where foreign interventionism is easily stigmatized, for various ideological and political reasons. In many of the cases, activists who have affiliated themselves with the political institutions know the best. The red line Chen referred to usually includes the “No Foreigners Allowed” rule.\(^4\) Mr. Chen knows the Party worries about foreign intervention, but his organization openly receives donations from overseas charity organizations. He knows foreign missionaries are forbidden to work in this nation; yet he maintains contact with them and assists them in their work. The red line seems to vary from case to case, but it is clear for Mr. Chen that there are ways to overcome it without sacrificing the key principles of religious freedom. He is friendly to the establishment but disobeys the leadership and evades the rules when he sees his principles and beliefs may be at risk.

Although his facilities have been surrounded and attacked by riot police a couple of

\(^4\) “No Foreigners allowed” is one of the unspoken but well-known rules set by Chinese Communist Party. The formal reason behind the rule is to “hide the shame” from bystanders and “protect” foreigners from violating Chinese laws, but the real world implication is the prevention of possible foreign intervention and criticism. The rule transfers into almost every social aspect, from Taxi drivers are asked to report foreign customers to police when the destination is outside metropolitan areas, to foreigners cannot preach in any Chinese church. For Protestant Christians, the policy is indicated in the founding principles of “Three Self Patriotic Movement” (TSPM) Church, the only legal Protestant organization in China. More details of this policy and the organization are in Chapter 3.
times, he would not call attention to such repression by calling on foreign media and rights advocates. Individuals like Mr. Chen are part of a locally based, transnational activism that practices a deliberate, but nonconfrontational form of disobedience in response to state sponsored repression of religious and other social freedoms.

The critical difference that distinguishes the approach of activists like Mr. Chen from that outlined in accounts by scholars such as Sikkink, is that Chinese “challengers” are facing a geopolitically strong, repressive, and resolved state and this environment demands an alternative advocacy strategy. They need the money, materiel, and knowledge provided by foreign NGOs or NGO networks. However, activists in strong authoritarian states are often aware that publicity, advocacy, the lobbying work of foreigners can do tremendous damage to their cause. The unwanted publicity and pressure may undermine the work of activists work because the repressive state can and will punish locals for bringing criticism. Furthermore, the uninvited criticism may alienate their constituencies because years of patriotic and anti-imperialist education have made people suspicious about the motives of foreign intervention. However, the social space for this different kind of activism: more local-based, focusing on behind the scene negotiation rather than direct confrontation, favoring a slower, yet perhaps more realistic activism is something both foreigners and locals can fight for: local activists can provide

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5 The champions of human rights advocacy theory, Keck and Sikkink (1998) admit that conventional human rights method cannot work on strong violators like China because it has no vulnerability to be leveraged by activists. However, international human rights watch groups still keep their pressure on Chinese government despite the fact that their actions have very little positive effect. In some cases, people got detention and monitoring because of foreign groups’ constant intervention and questioning. One famous example is the second time arrest of political dissident Wei Jingsheng in April, 1994. It is widely believed that his arrest is related the growing human right critics from the United States (Clinton won the presidential election in 1993 and the Congress was debating China’s Most Favored Nation status in 1994). Hari M. Osofsky. 1998. “Understanding ‘Hostage-Diplomacy’: The Release of Wei Jingsheng and Wang Dan.” Yale Human Rights & Development Law Journal 143: 143-147.
service to transnational network; they can lobby, advocate, and win the trust for the new comers in the local community. Understanding this alternative form of transnational activism brings insights and challenges to existing literature of political opposition and activism.

1.1 Argument: The “Inside Out” Approach of Transnational Activism

Not all illegal Christian churches or uninvited missionaries are repressed in China and some improve their freedom despite past grievances with the government. What contributes to this variation in the responses of an authoritarian state to transnational religious activism? This project locates a response to this question in the stories of those, such as Chen Yuan-Zhang and other Chinese and overseas activists for religious freedom. Transnational activists have been involved in many political transformations in former socialist nations (Leitzel 2003), military juntas in Latin America (Risse et al. 1999), and dictatorships in countries like South Korea and Kenya (Press 2006), but scholars often see transnational activism in strong authoritarian environments like China’s as ineffective due to nuclear power status, strong economic performance, non-liberal culture, isolation from international society, and/or “authoritarian resilience” (Wright 2010; Shambaugh 2008; Dickson 2003, 2007; Yang 2004; Nathan 2003). Transnational activism is not so effective in issues not involving bodily harm to individuals and equal opportunity of legal rights (Keck and Sikkink 1999); its effectiveness is greatly limited by the threat it posing to national cohesion and integrity, and societal openness to outside criticism (Risse and Ropp 1999). In this project I present evidence to support a different, more optimistic
assessment of transnational activism in the context of strong authoritarian states. I argue that by building a local network including government-sponsored social groups, transnational activists can push a strong authoritarian regime to incorporate basic freedoms and build a space for their activism, even if the society is closed to outside criticism and the state ridicule the advocacy with anti-imperialist accusations.

Chinese authoritarianism provides a strong test for this thesis because it has been referred as the glass ceiling of what transnational activists can accomplish (Keck & Sinkkik 1998). Charles Tilly cites China and Iran as examples of “high-capacity undemocratic regimes” due to their strong institutions for monitoring dissidents and using violence against them, which result in very small civic spaces of contention. Understanding how some transnational religious activists have won concessions from Chinese officials and toleration for their obvious rule-breaking, sheds light on how activists can promote a broader contentious space in China and perhaps in other authoritarian states as well.

This observation echoes the classic theory of political opposition developed by political scientist Robert Dahl: in democracies, opposition is more likely to be tolerated when the cost and difficulty of repression is high (Dahl 1971). This project tests Dahl’s logic in a strong non-democratic setting. Promoting public opposition or organized activism is possible in this environment, it argues, when disobedience to an official rule is performed in such a way that activists can reshape the cost-benefit calculation of parties involved and make self-restraint a better option than repression for officials. In other

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words, a sustainable network of opposition is possible even in an authoritarian state when activists can increase the benefit of toleration or costs of crackdown successfully.

This project provides a novel explanation for why some efforts to promote transnational religious activism fail and others succeed. Beyond the major theories of activism that suggest strengthening activism depends on rousing the spirit, awareness, and solidarity of opposition through direct confrontation with repressed regimes (Press 2006), the explanations provided here focus on how transnational religious activists can build a transnational network of disobedience that can survive in the environment where there is no visible political opposition available for activists to ally or consolidate with and promoting public awareness of injustice is almost impossible due to the lack of freedom of expression and association. Disobedience in a high-capacity authoritarian state is dangerous and difficult; the first priority for activists is to make sure the network of transferring money, materiel, and knowledge in and out of the country, obtains basic tolerance of operation and will not be crushed before it can develop.

Two strategies contribute to this result. The first is to seek collaboration or at least recognition from a government-sponsored social group. The second is to ally with the strongest group in a target location in order to gain access to local officials. The major weapon for these activists in defending their transnational network is not law suits, street protests, media exposures, or the “naming and shaming” approaches commonly used by Western social activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs; Lake and Wong
2009). These strategies have proved to be difficult when basic freedoms of expression, movement, and association are extremely limited (Cai 2010).7

The alternative strategy demonstrated by Chinese religious activists is to work from the inside of the system by knowing who is able and willing to recognize the basic freedom of association of the network when it is vulnerable, because no activism can survive if the authoritarian regime means to stop the information, funding, and personnel. Therefore, their success in promoting activism depends on how practitioners make strategic alliances in two key relationships: (1) the relationship between foreign advocacy groups and the local officials, and (2) the relationship between two key local groups, registered and unregistered churches.

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7 For example, empirical evidence show that activists adopt the “naming and shaming” strategy would provide excuses for some worse form of repressive regimes to produce more terror and violence. Hafner-Burton 2008.
“Marketing” a Transnational Advocacy Network?

In the first relationship, this “inside-out” perspective sees transnational activism as a process of well-connected local activists helping outsiders to adapt and survive in harsh authoritarian environment. This analysis contrasts not only with the “boomerang” model articulated by Keck and Sikkink, but also with Clifford Bob’s characterization of transnational activism as marked by a dynamic in which needy locals compete with each other for attention and funding from wealthy foreign NGOs (Bob 2005). Locals are selective about their foreign donors because only few such donors have the chance to win the acquiescence of local officials. In order for local activists to "market" a foreign-sponsored program, an aid worker, or a missionary, to a domestic constituency, the foreign group behind a given proposal must present a cooperative image to local officials who are directly responsible for the decision of using repressive forces. Local officials often have preexisting hostility and prejudice toward foreigners with certain national and denominational backgrounds because people with these backgrounds have been described as “helpers of imperialism” in patriotic education.

Nevertheless, the attitude is not predetermined because there is no document from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) signifying preferences on foreign religious sects and

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8 Although the official policy of CCP is atheism and it claims impartiality toward all religions and all sects, but preferences are evident. Some background of foreign groups, such as Catholic charities or missionary groups sent by Vatican will be never accepted in current political atmosphere because the diplomatic feud between Beijing and Vatican on church leadership. Protestants, especially American Protestant denominations like Angelica, Methodist and Baptist Church are not seen as sensitive as Catholic Church.

9 For example, “Budui Minzu Xongjiao Zhishi Duben” (Army’s Reader of Ethnical and Religious Knowledge) tells its readers that Chinese Catholics began their “anti-imperial movement and its purpose is to make Catholicism in China transfer from the tool of imperial invasion to independent enterprise of Chinese Catholics.” People’s Relations Office, People's Liberation Army General Political Department, 2004: 65
denominations; rather, it is a changeable personal interpretation of dogmatic policy guidelines from years of career experience.\textsuperscript{10} There are hardliner officials who are consistently hostile toward foreigners, especially those who had a previous career in military or security services and had been reassigned to the position from outside of the administration ranking system. On the other hand, there are officials that have been locally promoted and stayed in administration system for their entire career. My fieldwork suggests that locally promoted officials are more likely to be approachable and more open to certain proposals of change. They are not like promotion-minded officials transferring from other places who are extra cautious about taking risk. Locally promoted officials also stay at their hometown long enough to know who might oppose or support the proposals; this kind of know-how is critical when the proposals are political sensitive.

Therefore, what local activists have done to build a transnational activist network is to provide alternative information to these pragmatic officials and try to convince them of the potential benefits of tolerating a new, pre-selected foreign donor. Brokering a certain form of aid to a government-sponsored group is often seen as an attitude changing gesture.\textsuperscript{11} The track record of the foreign group operation in other nations could be part of the evaluation, too. For example, the label of Presbyterian Church is very sensitive for many Chinese officials because the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) was deeply involved in the anti-authoritarian and independent movements in the 1970s to 1990s.

\textsuperscript{10} One distinct feature of Chinese political system is the mass political education and re-education program, which is designed to make sure everyone understand the fundamental policies of the Party and support them. R. H. Solomon, 1971, \textit{Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture}.

\textsuperscript{11} The main introducer of this research, Pastor Lee from Taiwan told me he has the relationship with registered churches because the three decades of constants, and a donation from his denomination to a local school when it was in desperate need of funding and the government won’t approve the budget.
Rubinstein 1999, 2001; Lin 1999). Frontline officials know very little about the nuances among individual Presbyterian missionaries, PCT and global Presbyterian churches. For their own career security, officials have a strong incentive to either block funding and personnel sponsored by all Presbyterians or simply evict all missionaries from Taiwan. However, I have learned that many individual Presbyterian missionaries are working in China, and missionaries from Taiwan along with missionary groups from other countries, have become the backbone of the transnational Protestant activism. Their continued work in China shows that establishing spaces for religious freedom has become possible, despite the fact that official attitudes and policy remain repressive. Activists cannot choose who will be in charge of civil and religious affairs, but they can set up tacit alliances with these pragmatic officials. I have witnessed activists holding their meetings in a location 10 hours away from their hometown because “it is safer in that place.”

The Latent Source of Advocacy Promotion: Tacit Consent from the Establishment

The second key source of "help" activists might get is the latent relationship between two kinds of local groups; one that has received sponsorship and legal

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12 In fact, more than once the officials I interview express their concern about my denominational background and show relief when they realize I am not from some specific denominations.

13 A clear indication of the unspoken restraint is the open “partner” relationship claimed by Presbyterian World Mission (USA) and the unregistered congregation ministered by Rev. Ho Ban and Min Young Ban who work in Shenyang, China in the fundraising document. The information is retrieved in April 21, 2012 in Presbyterian Church USA website. http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/worldmission/pdfs/missionfundingcatalog.pdf

14 It is no secret that some provinces are more open and friendly to social groups than others. For example, many grassroots NGOs would choose Guangdong Province, especially the municipal area of Shenzhen. Anecdotal evidences are plenty. Please see G. Huang, 2003, “Pearl River Delta: Ten New NGOs Emerged in 2003”, China Business, 12-12-2003. D. Kelly, 2006, “Citizen Movement and China’s Public Intellectuals in the Hu-Wen Era”, Pacific Affairs, 79(2); Alex He Jingwei, “South China’s Emerging Grassroots NGOs in Migrant Labor Rights: A Preliminary Investigation in Pearl River Delta,” National University of Singapore.
recognition from the regime and another that is independent but “illegal” in the sense of operating without official permission. People in power choose an existing social group to support or establish a new one for expanding the social base, promoting certain political agenda, and influencing or controlling a target community.

Sponsored groups cannot affect the policy of government officials directly since they are not autonomous interest groups tied into a strong states described by corporatism (Wiarda 1997), but their influence in the target Protestant community, the largely "untamed," uncontrolled population may affect how officials respond to them in a profound way. Since the very reason for granting sponsorship is to influence and control an untamed community, the rise of independent, unsponsored groups becomes a serious problem to the sponsored groups and therefore the regime. It is reasonable to expect that the regime would try to, or be invited to, repress these potential competitors in order to maintain the status of the sponsored groups. The repression of the competitors' foreign sponsors would also increase. In other words, we should expect higher levels of repression when the relative size of sponsored groups is smaller than unsponsored groups and the unsponsored groups receive significant amount of foreign support. Following the same logic, we should expect to see that officials may be more willing to show tolerance where government-sponsored groups develop well and even obtain some foreign support.

Many authoritarian and post-authoritarian societies have this kind of latent competition between sponsored and non-sponsored social groups in various issue areas. In the 1980s, there was a political rivalry between the LTDH, the internationally well-respected human rights organization and key representative of the opposition movement
in Tunisia and the ADDHLP, the association founded by President Ben Ali in order to counterbalance the growing influence of LTDH. In the post-Soviet Russia, there are All-Russian National Scouting Organization (ARNSO), coming back from its exile in the 1920s and supported by the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) from the West, and the Nashi, a nationalist, pro-Putin youth organization in the competition to fill the void left by the dismantling of Pioneers in the 1990s. In the post-Reform China, cooperation and competition between government-sponsored associations and independent NGOs happen in almost every issue areas. For example, there are Friends of Nature (FON), the first and the biggest green NGO in Mainland China that has attracted many foreign donors and All-China Environment Federation (ACEF), a “non-governmental” association that established by the Chinese government and claim to represent "all" Chinese environmental NGOs of China.

Critics from the West often view these government-sponsored groups with skepticism and have created a special term to describe them: the GONGOs, government-organized non-governmental organizations. Moisés Naím, the director of Foreign Affairs and former director of National Endowment of Democracy (NED) warns about “the dangerous impostors” to NGO practitioners. Nevertheless, GONGOs are important players in terms of government’s attitude toward foreign NGOs for two reasons: Their acceptance or vouching for a foreign connection is seen as a heuristic and signals that the government does not need to worry about outside intervention and criticism. Second,

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GONGOs’ noncooperation and rejection may result in spoiling behavior against transnational collaboration. They may report foreign NGOs and their local collaborators to authorities. Eventually, officials will demand foreigners to choose between leaving or transferring their resources to GONGOs. In 2008, millions of disaster victims were waiting humanitarian reliefs when earthquakes struck China and Cyclone Nargis (hurricane) attacked Myanmar. Both governments delayed relief efforts by asking donation and materials to be processed by government-approved agencies. Those GONGO-like humanitarian organization such as Chinese and Myanmar Red Cross Societies were highly criticized for their lack of transparency, low efficiency and alleged corruption. Nevertheless, impostors or not, resources cannot reach victims without the acceptance or vouching from GONGOs. They are institutionalized "veto groups" in the bargaining process involved international and domestic players (Mo 1994). The difference of these veto groups from their counterparts in democracies is that they are politically powerful because they are backed by not unsure electoral competition but the decisive regimes.

17 The earthquake hit Sichuan province of China on Monday, May 12 and it had been identified as the most devastated earthquake in Chinese history; however, Chinese government refused to receive outside help until May 15, while hundreds of rescuers and hundreds ton of relief materials were waiting in nearby airports in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan. Initially, the Red Cross Society of China refused to receive help other than financial support due to the problem of transportation. People’s Daily, May 13, 2008. Relief efforts were delayed for weeks in Myanmar case. NGOs like Philanthropy Action called Myanmar government’s action “genocide” after relief efforts had been delayed for weeks. “When Do We Start Calling It Genocide,” Philanthropy Action, 26 May 2008.

18 Although the research is about trade negotiation, but the logic holds when foreign aid can be seen a form of trade. A word of caution is that the nature of aid under review is not governmental. Nevertheless, the special political power of GONGOs give governmental features to the transnational aid negotiation. The definition of veto groups can see J. Mo, 1994, “The Logic of Two-level Games with Endogenous Domestic Coalitions,” Journal of Conflict Resolution, 38 (3): 402-422.
The distinction between the “real” NGOs and GONGOs creates a unique challenge for transnational activism in an authoritarian state. Not every group from the "sending-end" world would agree with this form of censorship that requires registration and formal permission. It is natural for a foreign organization want to choose local partners on their own terms and to select those that clearly hold similar values. In previous three cases, TLDH, ARSO, and FON, not the other government-sponsored organizations, receive funding and moral support from their transnational counterparts in the UK and the United States. Religious freedom hardliners such as mainline Protestant advocates from the United States would also tend to think aiding government-sponsored churches, for example, is a betrayal of their beliefs and would be willing to help the unsponsored, underground congregations. Since aid and services are often sent to non-sponsored local groups, the relationship between rival local groups can trigger jealousy, competition, and even sabotage. When outside aid and personnel (do not need to be a foreign one) arrive in a non-sponsored facility, discontented leaders of a sponsored group may threaten those who affiliate with the non-sponsored group. The pastor of the registered church, introduced in the introduction, threatened a pair of newlyweds in this manner, “You better come to my place first,” he told them, “or else.”

19 Cliff Bob has pointed out that foreign NGOs often choose their local beneficiaries based on institutional fit. “...given their organizational imperatives, NGOs have strong incentives to devote themselves to the challenger whose profile most closely matches their own requirements—not necessarily to the neediest group.” Bob 2005: 5.

20 In fact, the view is very common among overseas Christian communities. From my visits in four Chinese provinces, very few registered churches have received outside aid. It is partly because registered churches have to respect the leadership of the Party and follow the “No Foreigners” policy more closely, and partly because their religious label, Three-Self Patriotic Movement Church has been seen as pawn of the government by majority of Western Christian communities.

21 The newlywed couple is lay workers of an unregistered congregation, therefore holding their wedding in the registered church is seen as a “respectful” gesture to the pastor of the registered church. Almost all my
The threat is very real when registered organizations can claim their monopoly of certain practices assigned formally or informally by governmental agencies. Successful activism in opposition to this monopoly is unlikely, but not impossible. Officials do not want to take full responsibility for tolerating a new practice, but cracking down on it is also politically risky. Activists need to demonstrate the resilience of their advocacy to risk-averse officials in order to show that repression will be too costly or eventually prove ineffective. Borrowing Mr. Chen's words "they have to know we will never give up." His peaceful resilience against riot police demonstrated his determination and also potential costs of crackdown without humiliating or overtly confronting the authorities. Overseas advocates cannot show this kind of resilience to the authorities because they will be deported before they have a chance to make a scene. In a strong authoritarian

interviewees express that their major troubles in recent years are not from the authorities. The “church vs. state” clash becomes rare in recent decades. Many arrest and harassment are in fact from the community: neighbors or landlords report noise or other residential disturbance; religious officials come and question the violation of codes and registration-related issues; and harassment or report from registered churches against unregistered churches’ “illegal operation,” such as shelter foreign missionaries. The monopoly is not just in religious affairs. Chinese government has assigned legal duties to government-sponsored non-governmental organizations from professional associations such as All China Lawyers Association (ACLA) to human rights advocacy groups such as All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF) and China Society for Human Rights Studies (CSHRS). About Chinese corporatism can see Bruce J Dickson 2000 "Cooption and Corporatism in China: the Logic of Party Adaptation," Political Science Quarterly, 115 (4): 517-540; and Tony Saich 2000 "Negotiating the State: The Development of Social Organizations in China," The China Quarterly, (2000), 161: 124-141.


This is a very long-term and common practice in Chinese politics since the 1950s. Party officials will allow certain creativity and entrepreneurship in the local level to deal with social crisis, but they will not openly endorse it until the new practice is proved to be effective. It is called “wade across the stream by feeling the way” or “groping the bottom stones when crossing the stream,” which has been seen as the trade mark principle of the Reform and Opening in the Post Mao era. The middleman is for the safety of officials’ career. If an official directly endorses an operation that violates or potentially violate the religious policy, the operation may become the liability of the official when the superior decides the new practice is a threat. In addition, local officials have very little resources to constantly monitor all kinds of religious and social activities. Although the popular assumption is everything is controlled and the Party knows everything in China because of the strong state capacity. The survival and thrive of underground Protestant missions and congregations show that the information gap is obvious.
environment, the center of transnational activism has to be on the local level because it is the place where impossible can become possible.

Religious NGOs: Registered and Unregistered Churches

Consequently, the collaboration between registered and unregistered churches, or at least certain level of acquiescence from the leaders of registered churches is critical for transnational religious network to survive. Whether the proposed aid will be shared by the majority of the community is a critical test of this collaboration because sharing forbidden aid is a strong sign of disobedience to the “No Foreigners” red line. I find that in places where foreign advocates aid an unregistered group, commonly called House Church (HC), the chances of this support being shared by local community is slim. The key reason is that the leaders of registered, “legal” churches, under the label of Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Church, have stronger incentives to report the illegal activities of the House Church because the TSPM Church often worries about the strong presence of their counterparts. In a nation where conversion of nonbelievers (i.e. public propagation and Evangelism) is seen as illegal by the authorities, congregations have to compete with each other for believers within the Christian community. TSPM congregations are especially limited because their recruiting operation is bounded by government approval. Cannot propagating their faith freely has been one of the key reasons for congregations to refuse joining TSPM.25 When TSPM clergymen see the

25 Although it is never expressed in official documents, the policy of “no-outside-church propagation” is clear and known by every Christian leader. The unspoken rule is as long as propagation happens within government-approved facilities, often church buildings already exist before 1949 or gained approval from the ARA (one town can only has one church), then the action is acceptable. For example, once I walked
unregistered congregations grow unrestricted and even funded by foreigners, hard feelings are unavoidable.

In addition, TSPM clergymen are equipped with some institutional advantages to protect themselves from the consequence of government crackdown. They may inform the authorities of ongoing collaboration even if they also benefit from the aid. If the police come and questions them, government-certified clergy have credentials to show and strings to pull and, therefore, they suffer relatively less than the unregistered when punishment is doled out.

Specifically, in a city in which the House Church has more members than the TSPM Church, an advocacy group that aids only the larger unsponsored group may invite severe persecution not only because of the legal churches’ sense of relative deprivation, but also because the authorities are patrons of the registered groups. On many occasions, registered groups call in the police to arrest those who are participating in “illicit religious activities,” while police officers have little incentive to intervene in such small-scale transnational collaborations.26

In contrast, foreign advocates who have skillfully allied themselves with registered facilities have expanded their freedom faster than other groups because they do not provoke a sense of competition. Most important of all, the clergy of registered

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26 Both religious affairs officials in Province A and B told me that they have little motives to investigate “illicit” religious activities unless someone reports or gets calls from superiors and order them to act. They believe most religious activities propose little threat to the stability but they have the duty to respond to formal requests. Interview No. 60 Feb. 2010.
churches can help to ease the tension and suspicion from the authorities and promote tolerance of officials on the “illicit” collaboration between groups. The collaboration of the TSPM Church in sheltering foreign aid is a direct form of disobedience to the official Three Self policy. If empowering Christian activism to challenge the official policy of repressing religious freedom is the common goal of foreign advocacy groups, then aiding a registered group like TSPM congregations is a logical choice and increases the chance that aid will be shared by both registered and unregistered congregations.

From the foregoing discussion, we can derive a counterintuitive finding regarding transnational activism. Directly helping the weak and the needy is not always the best strategy in an strong authoritarian environment because the target populations are vulnerable, not only to political repression, but also to the influence of social competition. Chinese Christian activists know this fact too well and therefore they are selective about accepting foreign “empowerment.” This dissertation finds that transnational religious activism has established unexpected spaces of religious freedom in a repressive environment, but that the role of such activism is not as straightforward as it may at first seen. In some cases the aid of foreign donors is valued by local participants but unspeakable. Foreign support is not universally welcomed by locals because the physical presence of outsiders may provoke suspicion from officials and discontent from rival local groups. Leaders of registered churches do not like outsiders to work inside the parish without acquiescence; when they sense competition, they will call in police. Unregistered churches do not have this kind of institutional backup, but they can
publicize the rivalry in Chinese and overseas Christian communities. An inexperienced foreign advocate may become trapped in this kind of feud and pay high price for offending one side or the other. As one interviewee told me, “we [foreign advocates] all have to pay the ‘tuition’ of this game for many years to know the rules.”

In all these complex interactions, it is evident that relationship to political institutions is the most critical to any effort to limit state sponsored repression. Although Christians cannot join the CCP, many registered church leaders have become the members of various levels of Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the political participation platform under the supervision of the United Front Department of the CCP. Some unregistered church leaders have been appointed, or are in the process of being recruited by officials into local Christian association or related organizations into these organizations. CCPCC or the associational positions give church leaders a channel to understand the “red line” of the Party and chance to exploit it.

In Mr. Chen’s case, his relationship to the establishment is clearly more important than his connection to outside advocates, although the latter are his major source of funding. The differentiation has to do with his awareness of the risks he takes in

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27 In fact, according to many of my interviews, some “religious repression” cases reported to foreign human rights groups are nothing about government persecution or purposeful interference. For example, China Aid recently published five new cases of harassment on the House Church in different provinces and claimed there is a national trend of persecution on the House Church. However, I have visited one of the reported cities and learned that the church is a registered TSPM congregation, not House Church. The “local government persecution” is from a financial dispute between church elders on a remodeling project. The discontent contractor called local authorities and tried to collect the money through the help of higher ranking TSPM clergy. China Aid News Briefs: “House Churches in Multiple Provinces Attacked by Local Government,” retrieved in May 23, 2012; cited in http://www.chinaaid.org/2012/04/chinaaid-news-briefs-house-churches-in.html


29 One open church leader (not registered but has a close relationship to Three-Self Patriotic Movement Church) once showed me dozens “titles” he has. He said all the titles give him nothing but obligations to attend many meetings with officials and other church leaders.
collaborating with foreigners. For activists in a strong authoritarian state, challenging repressive practices means risking their lives. The risk is much higher for local participants than foreign advocates. Therefore the initiation of any kind of transnational collaboration whether it entails a lump sum donation or a short visit, involves a careful assessment of the potential risks of the collaboration. Will befriending this person bring trouble to my organization? Will accepting aid from this organization further the goals of the local constituency? Will this collaboration jeopardize the trust of my superior or damage my career? From participant observation conducted over the past two years, I learned that participants routinely express these kinds of concerns. Both officials and activists are troubled when they cannot establish the authenticity of potential collaborators or when they remain uncertain about the consequences of the collaboration. A functional network of activists can only be built after these trust issues are solved; otherwise officials may decide to strike out at any foreigner-involved program on sight.

Robert Dahl has reminded us that promoting opposition is possible when dissidents succeed in altering the cost-benefit calculations of the government and show officials that self-restraint is less costly than repression. Although foreign missionaries and funding from outside religious groups are still illegal in China, some Protestant activists have successfully recruited foreign missionaries and receive funding without being punished. The mechanisms of this success deserve attention.

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1.2 Exploring the Mechanisms

I inductively derived two mechanisms for increasing the costs and difficulties of repression from records of two Chinese provinces, one with harsh religious repression and the other with greater tolerance to transnational religious activism. The first mechanism of costly repression is backdoor listing. The original concept of backdoor listing is used to describe the strategy of transnational corporations to enter a market by buying a legally registered local company to work as a front because applying a license for the foreign corporation is temporary impossible (Blayney 2001). In the context of Protestantism, backdoor listing happens when foreign advocacy groups provide aid to TSPM facilities, when the ultimate goal is to help the overall Christian communities. Currently many foreign religious advocacy and humanitarian groups have borrowed this strategy and registered as corporations or under government-sponsored facilities to avoid possible harassment. For example, Transparency International (TI) established its China branch through operating under the “franchise” of government-sponsored academia. Transnational activism that is built on or working with a legitimate entity is less likely to be repressed because its legal front, no matter how nominal, makes it difficult for authorities to discover the violation and provides an excuse for open-minded officials to avoid possible harassment.

31 The head of China Division of TI, Liao Ran 廖燃 was interviewed by the most liberal Chinese newspaper and revealed the secret of how TI finds the “easy way.” He says, “[in order to build a relationship with the Chinese government], TI dramatically changes its critical attitude toward China in the 2004 Annual Global Corruption Report; TI praises China for its anti-corruption efforts by ‘depending on international cooperation to find external mechanisms of anti-corruption; this is the new trend of the Chinese anti-corruption campaign.’” Liao Ran has a very close working relationship with the Chinese Supervisory Association and Anti-Corruption and Governance Research Centre (ACGRC) at Tsinghua University, two front organizations of the Chinese Communist Party’s anti-corruption branch since 2001.” He believes that the new wave of anti-bribery campaign in 2006 is the direct result of this more practical, less critical attitude of IT. Original interview is published at Southern Weekly (Chinese) http://www.infzm.com/content/61346; 2004 TI Global Corruption report is cited in http://www.transparency.org/publications/gcr/gcr_2004.
give a green light to the transnational activism without admitting the official rule has been broken.

The second mechanism is *majority alliance*. It is better for foreign advocates to work with a local group that is relatively strong and popular in a location. The sheer number of its members increases the potential cost of a crackdown. In addition, a strong and more dominant group is more likely to share its aid to others and therefore decrease the possibility that some dissatisfied “spoilers” may call in police, which is one of the common sources of repression in the recent decade. Every Chinese city and town has different level of tension between registered and unregistered group due to the long history of religious repression and competition. Foreign advocates cannot alter this relationship but can try to adapt to this environment by firstly not escalating the competition and hostility between two groups. Aiding an unregistered group in a highly confrontational and divided Protestant community, for example, will increase the sense of competition between registered and unregistered groups. Foreign donors can pick the location where existing level of collaboration is higher or at least not confrontational; this choice may make the aid less likely to be reported to authorities and the chance of sharing between groups become higher.

If my alternative theory transnational activism is correct, we should observe that backdoor listing and majority alliance happened in successful cases of aid collaboration where advocates and activists can "freely" deliver and share the aid with fellow churches.

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32 This observation is confirmed by almost every interviewee. The direct confrontation between religious officials and churches is rare. The most common “cause” of crackdown is report of violation by regular citizens, usually the members of rival churches.
to promote evangelical and other religious agendas. Backdoor listing and majority alliance should lower the chance of government repression on a transnational religious network, but the effectiveness depends on existing relationship between the registered group and the unregistered group in a local Protestant community. Not every Protestant community possesses the preconditions to allow backdoor listing and majority alliance to work; therefore, the level of success in promoting transnational activism from low to high is:

(1) Type 1: The aid collaboration sponsored by transnational advocates is very likely to face government repression if the aid is received by unregistered churches and there is no sharing and collaboration between two groups; crackdown might happen when backdoor listing fails and the registered group reports the collaboration to authorities.

(2) Type 2: The chance of the transnational aid collaboration tolerated by the government is low if the aid is received by unregistered churches but majority alliance is formed through aid sharing between the registered group and the unregistered group.

(3) Type 3: The chance of the transnational aid collaboration tolerated by the government is moderate if the aid is received by a registered church but aid collaboration between registered and unregistered groups does not happen and no majority alliance is formed.

(4) Type 4: The chance of the transnational aid collaboration tolerated by the government is high if the foreign aid is given to registered churches through backdoor listing strategy and the aided group is willing to share its aid with the unregistered group and form an alliance against possible government interference.

Four baseline scenarios are identified by these interplays of "backdoor listing" and "majority alliance" mechanisms. These scenarios are shaped by the two distinctive
mechanisms. The first involves the strategic choice made by a foreign aid group as to whether they ought to provide aid primarily to a church in an unregistered coalition (HC) or a registered coalition (TSPM), the "backdoor listing" strategy. The second mechanism involves the effectiveness of the local collaborators to organize an alliance to advocate and protect the illegal and fragile aid collaboration. Type 1 is the worst-case scenario and also the most common one in which a foreign aid provider decides to help unregistered churches and the level of collaboration between registered and unregistered is very low. Alliance between Protestant groups does not exist and the change of someone to become a "spoiler" to report the foreign aid to authorities is very high. Type 2 is a situation that even if foreigners choose to aid TSPMs, a weak TSPM still feels threatened by the existing status of HC and refuse to form an alliance and share the aid with HCs. In Type 1 and Type 3 situations, aid to unregistered churches is a severe problem for authorities, especially when unregistered churches are on the rise and taking believers away from the TSPM. The competition between churches may increase the chance for spoiling collaboration among church groups and induce more repression. The problem is less severe if the aided HC does not worry about spoiling and is willing to share the aid with registered groups. In contrast, the least repression should happen in Type 4 in which TSPM and HC forms close alliance and under the condition that the TSPM is receiving aid from the foreign group.

Four cities were selected to demonstrate four basic scenarios of the two mechanisms: the local alliance strategy of a foreign aid group (backdoor listing) and the level of collaboration on sharing aid (majority alliance). I assess alternative explanations
by tracing the processes of receiving or rejecting aid in these four cities, each with either high or low local collaboration and one kind of alliance strategy. Socioeconomic conditions were controlled by selecting cities from the same geographic region. Based on the idea that actors decide to receive and share aid in response to the cost-benefit calculations and the probability of political punishment, the actions of potential “spoilers,” who insecure about the relationship between local churches and might benefit from reporting others to the authorities, can affect the chance of political crackdown, and therefore alter the willingness of local Christian communities in accepting and sharing aid.

Table 1: Mechanisms and Observable Implications: Four Basic Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Majority Alliance: Aid Sharing betw. Registered/Unregistered</th>
<th>Backdoor Listing Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Type 1 “Highest Repression”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City H</td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Type 2 “Moderate Repression”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>City W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backdoor Listing (Aid unregistered)</td>
<td>Backdoor Listing (Aid Registered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3 “Low Repression”</td>
<td>Type 4 “Lowest Repression”</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>City T</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1.3 Implications

The findings from this project are relevant to three groups of literature and question conventional wisdom regarding transnational activism. The foregoing arguments reject the view that local activists are passively aided by foreign advocacy groups and that foreigners can simply choose their local partners according to institutional fit. In an authoritarian environment, the choice has significant consequences and will affect the very chance of entry. Therefore, advocates who pick the government-sponsored partner
can have better chance of survival. Government-sponsored group can provide insight about the possible reaction of the government and even market the proposal to open-minded officials; and the group is strong enough and well-respected in the location, which is confident enough to open it door and share its aid to other Christians without the worry of possible “spoiler.”

First, the political implications of transnational activism in the forms of NGOs and INGOs are well documented and theorized in the literature (Risse et al. 1998; Keck and Sinkink 1998; Ignatieff 2000; Poe et al. 2001; Hawkins 2002; Cardenas 2007; Okafor 2007). The literature of NGOs has portrayed non-state social groups as one of the principled forces in the post-Cold War international relations. Theoretical frameworks like “transnational advocacy network” (TANs; Keck and Sikkink 1998), “global civil society” (Florini 2000), “cosmopolitan solidarity” (Florini 2000), and “merchants of morality” (Bob 2002), more or less position the international NGOs from advanced industrial nations as the center of the growing transnational enterprise. However, faith-based NGOs are rarely discussed by mainstream NGO literature except for terrorist groups and religious extremists.

In addition, current understanding of NGO activism is based on the theories and practices of NGOs and INGOs mainly from the West and their performance in the developing world. Since the late 1980s, people have witnessed the “crisis of authoritarianism” and rapid democratization of former socialist nations and military dictatorships, while few determined hardliners tried to resist the transformation by propagating a siege mentality and increasing repression (Pye 1990). Twenty more years
later, these determined hardliners still stand and many post-authoritarian nations step into crises. The causes of these setbacks may be locally rooted, but the failed strategies of Western advocacy networks are to blame as well. In the edited volume of Mendelson and Glenn (2002), INGOs and transnational networks in post-communist nations show that practitioners often ignore local entrepreneurs and well-established customs from political and organizational cultures:

*Western groups tended to rely on practitioners with little knowledge of the region, such as political activists from U.S communities or British civic organizers, to implement strategies for building democratic institutions that were developed in Western capitals.* (Mendelson and Glenn, 2002: 3)

This kind of introspection regarding the imposition of Western ideas and practices on the developing nations is often heard, and the phrases of “inside-out” and “bottom-up” are regularly emphasized by practitioners, scholars and policy makers. Nevertheless, without careful comparison between failed and working models in the field, respecting local cultures and entrepreneurship is a vague principle; respecting established customs and failed activism may be two sides of one coin. Studying transnational religious networks provides stories of both success and failure that are critical to differentiate the mechanisms of sustaining an effective transnational activism.

Second, the implications of studying Chinese Protestant activism go beyond Christianity or religion; censorship of transnational collaboration is an example of a general obstacle that missionary, educational, humanitarian, human rights, and many global civil society groups (Kaldor et al. 2003) must overcome before they start to work in target nations. A cautious authoritarian government can simply outlaw all foreign-
based programs on local groups, as it has been done in China, and it is reasonable to believe the law should be effective if the repressive state really put effort on it. How, under such circumstances, have some networks been able to establish spaces of freedom?

One explanation, highlighted by the project, is that religious activism is not an unintentional civil disobedience (Thoreau 1992[1849]:233). It is a purposeful, deliberate project in which participants carefully evaluate the risks and costs of disobedience and exercise their plans accordingly. Their action is not a reluctant response to state repression or a cry for help when it is already too late. On the contrary, it is a planned campaign where participants are united under similar ideas and norms, not some organizations because forming visible organizations with foreigners’ money is still too risky. Like advocates in the civil right movement, those who engage in purposeful disobedience know that their moral principles are their strength and its repressor’s weakness (Morris 1986); in contrast with their counterparts in democratic societies, practitioners in China realize that moral principles cannot be defended by calling for justice, legal protection, or outside help. They call for basic human dignity and use Communist Party’s own rules to against it. They keep their heads down when the Party is using laws to push for obedience because “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar;” but they fight when government’s action violates its own promises on basic freedom and dignity.  

Like Western human rights activists, transnational religious activists aim to leverage the distance between words and deeds. The difference is that they do not

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33 Mark 12:17. One the most quoted phrases when Chinese church leaders talk about state-church relations.
publicize this distance to the public. They use the distance as a bargaining chip to threat and “persuade” officials to not choose repressive means because repression may hurt the reputation of officials and produce difficulties in their future work; next time activists will go underground and evade the rules directly. Furthermore, the distance means officials violate the religious freedom promises made by Chinese constitution and international human rights treaties signed by Chinese government; although going public is not what activists desire, but it is always a option and local officials should worry about the possibility that these principles would be taken seriously under certain circumstances; for example, the circumstances demonstrated by political dissidents like Liu Xiaobo, Fang Lizhi, Chen Guangcheng where blowout events humiliated the authority of Chinese government openly. If the unexpected happens, local officials will be punished as well as the exiles.

The current literature on transnational activism puts too much emphasis on the secular features of activism and overlooks the strength of religiosity in supporting a globalized norm of freedom when facing strong oppression. Almost all of my interviewees see this struggle between church and the state as a “battle,” and hold the same optimistic attitude about the future of this battle. “We cannot lose;” one leader of an unregistered congregation told me, “they don’t want us to have organizations; that’s fine.

34 People may be surprised that officials in authoritarian nations care about their own reputation and consequences of following order. It is because certain forms of accountability still exist in an authoritarian state (Lily 2007).
35 Local officials will have to pay for the prices when the situation escalates because the public and central elites will point their figures on them for different reasons. Studies on public protests in China show that protestors usually blame local officials, not Chinese government or the Party, for their grievances (Chen 2012). Central elites can divert the attention to local officials to release the pressure; the victims question the local government not the central government so their demands have a better chance to be fulfilled.
We don’t need to have a church building like the Westerners do. But government knows they cannot stop us because our faith is even stronger when our buildings are taken away.”36 If the discourse of freedoms and rights is a public religion (Ignatieff 2002), then transnational religious groups may be the strongest believers of this religion. They believe in the power of morality and the normative principles following it. Their strong determination reminds repressors that the costs of tyranny could be higher than they used to believe. The findings of this project put religious activism back to the academic studies and debates of global norms that it deserves.

This work also contributes to the theory of spiral model, which is prominent in human rights literature (Risse et al. 1999). The spiral model indicates that transnational advocacy networks facilitate rights-related progress and further specifies the impacts of local collaboration in five stages of progress: repression, denial, tactical concession, prescriptive status, and rule-consistent behavior. However, the theory provides little detail on the entry stage, how foreigners and locals can break through the obstacles of censorship and build a reliable network on the ground in the first place. Western advocates can open the press conference in a safe place in Washington D.C., but activists in Beijing may have to pay the price and face the repressors in their daily life. This project emphasizes this missing link and specifies the requirements of facilitating the construction of transnational collaboration; the specific conditions of foreign aid can be received and shared by local groups in order to sustain a transnational network.

36 Interview 12: September 2009.
In addition, the human rights literature is pessimistic about promoting freedoms in the worst-case countries where the freedoms needed the most (Hafner-Burton 2007). Freedom of association, movement, and speech have been theorized as the preconditions of human rights progress when they are actually the goals the enterprise supposedly to deliver. Although a systematic change is unseen in the short-run, this project discovers an innovative model of activism that can operate under the absence of these basic freedoms. The key strategy identified by this project is a careful choice of local collaborator that is based on respecting the solution provided by the local community. The result is noteworthy: it advances the schedule of tactical concessions and forces local officials to recognize the change even before real concessions are made by the central government. This model of transnational activism challenges the liberal paradigm of activism through empowering a confrontational opposition and outlines an alternative path to success based on empowering government-censored groups. The project also helps to build a better understanding of how to advance the rights of social groups in authoritarian states.

Recent literature has found similar conclusions in other issue areas (Hertel 2006; Mertha 2004; Tsai 2007; and Shieh 2009). Fragmentation of the authoritarianism has been identified as the source of political opportunity in authoritarian states, where locals can manipulate and leverage it with the central authorities. However, these new studies do not address the complicated dynamics between registered and unregistered social groups, which have been shown by my research to be essential to the success of transnational Protestant activism in China.
1.4 Approach to the Topic

The project explores the intriguing puzzle of transnational religious activism in China: What explains the tolerance at the beginning of transnational religious activism when they are supposedly to be repressed by the authoritarian state? Under what conditions can foreign advocacy groups deliver money and services to local Chinese churches when they know the authorities have the capacity and interest to stop them at a very early stage? The existing literature points to international pressure groups and their interaction with local determinants (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Tarrow 2005). While these theories can plausibly explain why Protestant groups have become more transnationally connected and empowered, they cannot account for why some groups enjoy more freedom than others. Existing studies also have failed to explain why the same foreign group in one province is successful in delivering aid, performing services, and inviting local clergy to go abroad, while finding those same activities impossible in another province. In addition, existing theories are unable to explain the temporal variation in the tolerance of activism. While leadership went unchanged and religious regulation was tightened up over the last decade, the levels of political tolerance to religious activism changed significantly in the cities in which I conducted fieldwork.

By employing the logics of backdoor listing and majority alliance (Chapter 2), historical analysis (Chapter 3), and case studies in four major Chinese cities (Chapters 4 and 5), this study exposes the limitations of existing theories regarding the development of transnational Protestant collaboration and sheds light on an alternative theory. My theory indicates that if transnational linkage (aid providing) is made to government-
sponsored groups (TSPM) before unsponsored groups (House Church), then the linkage is generally permitted; however, if the aid is given to unsponsored groups, the linkage usually leads to repression. It is because TPSM’s acceptance or vouching for a foreign activist/connection is seen as a signal that the government does not need to worry about outside intervention and criticism; and sharing aid with TSPM minimizes spoiling.

Chapter 2 details the mechanisms for facilitating transnational activism. This chapter explores the ways in which differences in advocates’ strategies and degrees of collaboration among local practitioners influence the chances of acceptance and sharing, which are essential to the occurrence of the boomerang effect (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse and Sikkink 1999). The results produce the four testable hypotheses and they indicate that aiding repressed groups directly will result in more repression from authorities. By aiding government-sponsored groups first the chances of repressed groups also being allowed to receive aid become higher. This alternative model of transnational interaction explains the unexpected success of transnational collaboration and disobedience of government policies by religious groups.

To examine which transnational changes could cause an increase in political tolerance toward religious activism at the local level, I conducted data collection in cities in China, Taiwan, and the United States. Chapter 3 introduces the historical analysis of transnational Protestant activism from the 1950s through the present. The purpose is to provide a comprehensive view of transnational and international factors in Protestant activism. My readers will be surprised to find that even though China has gone through impressive economic and social transformation, the state’s control system (not policies)
remains not very different from Mao’s, and the basic rights of social groups are the targets of great repression. This control system creates the sectarian division and it becomes the obstacle of religious freedom but sometimes opportunity for some creative advocacy groups.

So, how do government officials respond to this rapidly changing world when their tool boxes remain largely unchanged? A short answer is that they do not change if external pressure is weak. Chapters 4 and 5 trace the triangular relationship among local officials, local believers, and foreign advocacies in four major Chinese cities. Two groups of questions are answered here: What makes officials restrain themselves on cracking down "illegal" transnational religious activism? How do activists deliver those aid and services and how do they make officials off their back? Do alliance strategy (which group receive aid) and level of collaboration (aid sharing) matter and to what degree? Second groups of question concerned the environmental issues related to the key enquiry: Why they want those aid and services? Do the present of foreign advocacy help their causes or induce more troubles? Do the types of foreign advocates, their nationality, theological standpoints, and “strategies,” matter to their success in engaging local activists? Rich findings were found in interviews and close participant observation in two provinces. Chapter 5 especially emphasizes the changing strategies of outside advocates, from cash-giving donors to more egalitarian, mutually beneficial partners, and playing an intermediary role in local conflict.

Chapter 6 explores the theory in a larger context. It discusses a phone survey project planned to conduct in seven provinces (Guangdong, Henan, Shandong, Jiangsu,
Anhui, Zhejiang, and Fujian) and two metropolitan areas (Beijing and Shanghai), and lessons learned from this experience. This chapter also examines the theory of transnational religious networks in Catholic Church in China and Christian activism in Vietnam based on recent literature. This review demonstrates the strength and limitation of my theory and shed light on the future direction of this inquiry. This cross-religion and cross-national comparison helps to answer the important remaining questions: how prevailing is this mode of transnational activism in other locations? Can it be used in understanding other forms of activism, outside Protestantism or outside China?
CHAPTER TWO
Facilitating Activism in a Strong Authoritarian State:
A Transnational Framework

2.1 The “Secret Handshake” in a High-Capacity Authoritarian State
2.2 Network Spiral and Opportunity Spiral: The Debates
2.3 Internal Spiral: Mechanisms of Marketing Transnational Religious Activism
2.4 Competing Explanations

Observers have seen the Chinese Communist government consistently intervene and brutally crackdown on individuals and groups with foreign connections, but progress occurs and varies amongst groups and locations. Why is the increased foreign involvement met with serious crackdowns and repression in some place, but tolerated in others? This project looks at one of the most sensitive forms of foreign involvement, which is the money and services provided by foreign religious groups to local Chinese churches, and explores the reasons why some aid groups have been allowed to work in certain locations, although conventional wisdom would predict otherwise. The findings help to expand our knowledge of not only about the possibility of religious freedom in China but also regarding strategies of transnational activism.

Transnational religious activism is a kind of transnational advocacy networks (TANs), which means that it includes "actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services."37 The network includes individual missionaries and aid

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workers, missionary agencies, charity organizations, religious freedom watch groups, and religious media, which share common values, discourse and collaboration based on evangelism. My explanation of religious advocacy network emphasizes an overlooked dimension in the prominent theories of transnational activism: local activists can act both as spoilers and advocates for their foreign sponsors. One of the key determinants of their role is the biased governmental sponsorship and repression of social groups unique to authoritarian and post-authoritarian societies. My theory explains variation in the treatment of transnational collaboration across provinces and sectarian lines. Aiding a non-sponsored group first increases the chance of repression on the participants because foreign aid makes the government expect the non-sponsored group to be more difficult to co-opt, and the loyalty toward the government-built corporative system might become weaker. In addition, aiding a non-sponsored group makes sponsored groups feel threatened, and therefore more likely to report the collaboration to authorities, who may be unaware of the collaboration or did not think it a serious threat in the beginning but having to respond.

Following the same logic, transnational activism can survive and grow in this environment when a transnational player befriends a government-sponsored group. When

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Sikkink’s network theory includes members of government and international organizations. Members of transnational religious networks are often invited by Western governments or the United Nations to testify the violations of religious freedom in their resident nations. However, the critical strategic difference between conventional TAN and religious TAN highlighted in this project is the advocacy approach explicitly exclude state-based agencies from their networks. The key reason is that activists in this kind of networks try to avoid the “naming and shaming” tendency in state-based reporting and monitoring processes. They believe this kind of strategy would increase the difficulty of their work because the repressive states could mobilize nationalism and anti-imperialist discourse to weaken the legitimacy of their demands. For repressive countries like China, the addition reason is the nuclear power and Security Council permanent member status; there is little IOs and sympathetic state governments can do to a regime like this.
this happens, the chance of both repressed and sponsored group being allowed to receive aid rises because: (1) the vouching and recognition from sponsored group may convince officials that the ongoing collaboration is not a threat to the corporate system; and, (2) the sponsored group would feel less threatened and have less incentive to spoil the collaboration. This model of transnational interaction helps explain the puzzling variation in government response to treat transnational Protestant activist networks in China. It also provides counterintuitive insights into how foreign advocacy works with government-sponsored social groups in ways that can induce local officials to make concessions to allow religious practices and public space for their social activism that would otherwise be repressed.

I propose an “internal” spiral model to understand this unexpected development of transnational activism in a strong authoritarian setting. The space or opportunity for activism is created by networking among different "sites" of activists, and their choice of strategies affect how they will be treated in a target state. As distinguished from mainstream approaches to human rights advocacy, such as “naming and shaming” through international networks, Protestant advocacy networks choose to find opportunities for cooperation with various local groups and sometimes even choose to work with state-sponsored groups in order to prevent or mitigate government interference. In front of hostile regime and closed society, foreigners need the right local partners to market their advocacy.

This chapter outlines four dimensions of this alternative theory of transnational activism. First, case studies in authoritarian states echo with the puzzle rose by the
literature of transnational advocacy that the absence of basic freedoms of association and speech does not stop all forms of activism. Anecdotal evidence suggests an alternative mode of activism built on certain "secret handshakes" between activists and frontline officials and the phenomenon awaits systematic examination. Second, this chapter would explain how my work is built on the literatures and addresses the limitations. Two prominent theories of transnational activism provide partial answers to this puzzle: Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) and Transnational Social Movement (TSM) help to develop a relation-based framework on understanding the strategy, agency, and organizational features of transnational activism that goes beyond liberal institutionalism and structuralism. TAN stresses the importance of solidarity among concerning states, IOs, and INGOs and particularly the normative power of INGOs, while TSPM highlights the preconditions for these groups to work together and the organizational strength of transnational activists and entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the neglect of religious activism in both groups of literature is evident, and the main mechanisms of TAN and TSM, network spiral and opportunity spiral, are limited in explaining growing transnational activism in a strong non-democratic setting. The problem for TAN paradigm is particularly salient because its research premise specifically targets authoritarian, norm-violated states, but the involvement of TAN players (e.g. religious freedom watch groups) relies on the mercy of strong state governments. The mechanisms of how this "mercy" or openness work is rarely discussed in existing studies.

The third section of this chapter provides a revised theory of transnational activism by specifying two mechanisms, “backdoor listing” and “majority alliance.” Transnational
activism does not always require "internationalism" - the contentious space provided by international organizations (IOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) are often rejected by religious advocacy groups as the focal point or a base of their campaign because first; the space of internationalism has been occupied by state actors that maintain strong secular ideology and rarely show persistent interests in pressuring authoritarian regimes to improve their records of religious freedom. Second; more practically speaking, internationalism brings unnecessary tension, interference and suspicion, which may be fatal for the weakly supported transnational religious movement. Instead, carefully crafted inter-group strategies play more important role than external strategies such as international shaming or spiral campaign in facilitating transnational activism. The final section of the chapter compares several possible alternative explanations and discusses how this project tries to control these factors and why they are less relevant to the variation of political repression to transnational religious activism in China.

2.1 The "Secret Handshake” in a High-Capacity Authoritarian State

Advocacy and activism in an authoritarian state are thought to be difficult because terror against citizens has been seen as the very nature of authoritarianism (Arendt 1956). Society-based attempts to challenge an authoritarian state like China are particularly difficult because the corporatist, Lenin-Maoist style political system has shown zero tolerance for independent social forces and tries to co-opt all social organizations into its
management framework. Chinese administrators even refuse to use non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to categorize civic groups because the concept assumes that the separation of social organizations from the state and the idea implies an anti-governmental propensity. The regime prefers "people-run non-enterprise units." (PRNEU; Min Ban Fei Qi) to categorize the independent social groups that exist in the gray area between the Western sense of society-based NGOs/Non-profit organizations (NPOs) and government-co-opted groups. PRNEU are financially independent from the state but not fully autonomous because the government mandates a corporatist, anti-advocacy policy:

"Article 4: People-run non-enterprise units..., shall not oppose the fundamental principles enunciated in the Constitution, shall not endanger the unification, security and national solidarity of the state, shall not harm state interests, public interest of society as well as the legitimate rights and interests of other social organizations and citizens and shall not violate social ethics and custom." 

Article 4 in the Provisional Regulations of PRNEU makes it clear that independent social groups in China can be tolerated, but the tolerance is under highly restricted conditions. The rule of no harm to public interests is understandable, but no violation of

41 The formal definition of PRNEU is “The people-run non-enterprise units referred to in these Regulations mean enterprise institutions, societies and other social forces as well as social organizations established with non-state-owned assets by individual citizens for non-profit social services.” The highest level law regarding NGO-related organizations is the "Provisional Regulations for the Registration Administration of People-Run non-Enterprise Units" in the Decree No. 251 of the State Council of the People's Republic of China on October 25, 1998. Retrieved in the website of Ministry of Commerce, People's Republic of China (MOFCOM). http://tradeinservices.mofcom.gov.cn/en/b/1998-10-25/44329.shtml
42 Ibid.
the "legitimate rights and interests of other social organizations" is open to selective interpretation when all “others,” legally existing organizations in China are, in fact, co-opted or sponsored by the government.

Western scholars often assume that economic and institutional reforms compel the political system to welcome the growing appearance of foreign NGOs and local PRNEUs for purposes related to socioeconomic development. Case studies suggest the strength of old Lenin-Mao-style corporatism in China is declining, although the concept of fully autonomous social organizations is not yet recognized by the regime. From only 15 in the 1980s, the number of foreign NGOs increases to around 2000, and many high-profiled, apolitical INGOs such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have received a warm welcome in China. Unlike their counterparts in African and Latin American countries, social organizations in China are highly regulated; national and foreign partners are experiencing “parallel growth” and kept largely separate. For example, Hsia and White (2002) find that recognition is only granted to foreign NGOs with specific attitudes: NGOs who are willing to "understand and respect the Chinese political climate, regulatory structure, and available options of collaboration" can be allowed to establish long-term presence in China and affect lasting change. Thirty years after the reform process began, Chinese government’s policy toward transnational social groups

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45 Meng Jing "Changing Role" China Daily (USA), May 11, 2012.
47 Hsia and White, 2002: 329.
have changed very little. Reportedly, there are 1000 U.S.-based NGOs operating in China but only 3% obtain official permission. The number implies that at least 97% of foreign NGOs are working illegally but are somehow tolerated by the regime.

Although the systematic understanding of this subject is still in its early stage, there is a clear consensus in the field that various forms of transnational activism are on the rise in China. Since 1979, numerous foreign advocacy groups have begun to enter China with mixed purposes and varying levels of success. Now China has more than 350,000 registered local social organizations, or "PRNEUs," with strong financial and project connections to foreign NGOs and INGOs. It might be overstated to suggest that foreign sponsorship has facilitated the booming scene of Chinese PRNEU market, but local social groups do heavily rely on overseas support while the Chinese state and the public have little interest in investing in such projects. This West-to-East mode of transnational activism has been threatened by the Chinese state, which is strengthened by continued economic growth but alarmed by the growing demands for civil society and democracy accompanying the growth.

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48 Ibid. The original source is China Charity & Donation Information Center, a platform sponsored by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) of PRC in order to increase of transparency of Chinese charity sector.

49 The situation is going to change since the Hu Jingtao government has announced the new "eight principles of social management" in February 2011. The full picture of this new policy is still unclear but the MCA has published a new regulation of NPO organizations in 2012 and promised national funding will go into registered social organizations to "buy" their services. Reports have said provincial MAC officials have been called to participate in national conferences to learn about the new policy of contracting welfare, charity and health-related services to approved social organizations. If the "new policy" is truly exited, this is the first time in the CCP history that non-GONGO social organizations, which are not established by the Party or controlled directly by the Party, can receive government funding and therefore signify a fully recognized legal status. The fulltext of Hu's speech is retrieved on May 27, 2012 in http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/detail_2011_02/19/4757092_0.shtml

50 E.g. awarding Nobel Peace Prize to Chinese dissident and the ripple effects of Arab Spring uprising.
A distinction between policy and practice is evident in the Chinese state's response to religion. The Chinese government chooses to grant limited freedom of worship, recruitment, and evangelism in certain places and to certain groups and it is a more common occurrence than most media and human rights watch groups have recognized. There are an estimated 100,000 missionaries entering China every year, and few have reported serious persecution. Registered Protestant congregations enjoy more freedom than the unregistered counterparties in terms of worship. Despite the criticism from overseas Christian communities, Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Church, the registered body of Chinese Protestants, is working with local administrators, especially with the officials of the Administration of Religious Affairs (ARA), rather than a lower level clerical body directly subject to the government. My fieldwork also found some TSPM clergy are conducting “illicit” transnational activities without interference from the ARA. Evidence indicates that ARA officials do show flexibility on executing regulatory policies and exercising their unquestionable power with caution. When interference is expected, it is evident that officials make efforts to avoid criticism about religious freedom violations of religious freedom by keeping their directives informal.

What makes this "self-restraint" happen is puzzling, given that regulations clearly

51 Before Communist China, there were about 4478 foreign full-time missionaries in China according to 1936 Handbook of Christian Movement in China, p.vi. No official record or reliable academic number of today missionaries in China later exists because missionary work is seen as illegal under Chinese law. Most of them are short-term visits from two weeks to few months in the forms of tourists, businessmen, students or teachers. The 10,0000 number is from Jason Mandryk, Operation World (Biblica Publishing, 2010): 214-6. The China Aid Association (CAA) notes that the mass deportation of foreign missionaries in the post-Mao period was/is not common and usually happens before a big political event such as the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008. Cited in Aaron Smith, "Over 100 Foreign Missionaries Expelled in China," Christianity Today, Wednesday, July 11, 2007 http://au.christiantoday.com/article/over-100-foreign-missionaries-expelled-in-china/2934.htm

52 Vala 2009: 106.

indicate absolute subordination of churches to the state and no foreigners should be allowed to participate in Chinese religious affairs.

The explanation cannot lie in the role of civil society since China does not have liberal civic traditions and constitutional democracy. One possible alternative explanation for this progress is the time-honored relational perspective made by Robert A. Dahl 40 years ago: a government will tolerate opposition only when the benefit of tolerance is high and the cost of repression is low. Since the cost of using violence remains moderate to low in the foreseeable future of this nation, it is reasonable to argue the answer must be related to the "benefits" of tolerance or the mechanisms to induce this tolerance.

Before developing this point further, it is important to remind readers that structure factors such as the growth of middle class, leadership changes and globalization are relevant, but less significant than the tolerance inducing efforts of religious activists in this process. The resilience of the Chinese Communist regime provides an unfortunate but ideal setting for the researcher to rule out structural factors because relatively little change occurs in this nation’s political institutions. The change of leadership and the switch from authoritarianism to a more responsive management style has been expected

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54 Putnam et al. argue that the vitality of civil society organizations (civic community or latter be called social capital) is the critical foundation of democratic institutions. Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi, Raffaella Nanetti, 1994, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy.
56 For reflecting the centrality and also ambiguity of state in regulating transnational religious activism, I adopt the “strategic-relational approach” (SRA) developed by Jessop (2001; 2008). Bob Jessop, a British sociologist scholar on state theory, develops the idea from neo-Marxist Nicos Poulantzas that state is not only a governing entity but also a social relation with differential strategic effects on its citizens, social groups, and politics beyond its sovereign borders. It is a relational process where state shapes politics as the ‘art of the possible,’ while other forces struggle over state power and reshape state’s apparatuses and practices. In other words, state is also socially embedded. Bob Jessop, 2008, State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach, Cambridge: Polity Press: 1-6.
by some journalists and observers of Chinese politics as the indications of better
treatment of religious activist groups. Different people in the position of power, from
Mao to Deng, from Jing to Hu, have distinct mindsets about transnational religions and
might treat them distinctly. This may hold some truth, but also leaves many unanswered
questions. If Party leadership is the key factor explaining growing tolerance of religious
activism, observers should see a nation-wide pattern of openness consistent with the shift
of leadership, but this has not happened.\footnote{For example, the basic rule of no foreigner has not been changed since the 1950s and the same party continues to rule in this nation with minor progress on its human rights records. The frustration toward the leadership explanation creates what famous China expert, Lucian W. Pye (1990) calls “erratic state, frustrated society” syndrome: the higher the hope outsiders have on certain sign of reform from the government, the higher the disappointment the people get in the reality.} Moreover, the state seems to have exerted
more, rather than less, control over various civil liberties under the current "fourth
generation" Hu Jintao leadership (Lam 2006; Ewing 2003).\footnote{More discussion of alternatives is in the fourth sector.}

In contrast with the popular leadership thesis, this chapter explores a relational
explanation (Mohrenberg 2011; Tilly and Sidney Tarrow 2006; Tarrow 2005; Risse et al.
1999; Keck & Sinkkik 1998). A relational approach assumes that actors are interactively
engaging to and conditioned by relations: in the form of network, system, or structure that
they are embedded or "rooted."\footnote{Tarrow 2005: 42.} The increased state tolerance of transnational activism
is facilitated by the proximity of its participants to the political system: state-sponsored
social groups are closest, independent social groups are second, and foreign advocacy
groups are the farthest. Since modern world religions are often both financially and
organizationally independent, and their cross-border expansion is further advanced by
technological development and global migration, transnational religious activism is automatically suspect in the eyes of authoritarian leaders. When foreign advocacy groups sponsors groups who are not on the "trusted list" of the regime, e.g. an independent social group or an individual with records of dissidence, then officials begin to intervene in the transnational aid collaboration and use violence when necessary.

On the other hand, officials restrain the use of coercive power when they are convinced by participants that the collaboration proposes no/minor threat to the regime, or the backlash from repression would be too great for the regime to bear. Since the second condition is rare in a strong and stable authoritarian state, the persuasive process becomes critical for promoting transnational religious activism. In short, the institutional closeness and concurrent persuasion is the key determinant of repression and tolerance that dictates relations between Christian believers and the state.

Advocacy groups often cannot control how they are perceived by authorities but can work at improving the persuasive process. NGOs from the U.S. would face more suspicion and resentment than the groups from Europe, for example, because the diplomatic relationship between China and the U.S. has undergone great transformation since the 1990s. Advocacy strategy is critical for survival of transnational activism, and

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61 It is Robert Dahl’s formula for political opposition: restraint to political opposition can happen only when the cost of violence crackdown is higher than the benefit of crashing the opposition.
62 Religion is always a part of political institutions in Communist China. In 1954, the Bureau of Religious Affairs, precursor of the current State ARA, was created as a core control agency under the State Council (Guowu-yuan). However, it is no secret that neither the State Council nor State ARA has the authority to alter an existing policy. The real power is from the United Front Work Bureau (Tongyi Zhanxian-bu), a Party organ that supervises all non-Party social groups. Ashiwa and Wank 2009: 10.
63 The 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre indicates the beginning of "human rights diplomacy" between Western states and China. In the 1990s, both Europe and US-based human rights NGOs lobbied sanctions and diplomatic pressure on Chinese government for the release of the Tiananmen dissidents and therefore
the direction of advocacy is toward government-sponsored social groups, not
temporized/repressed groups or international media. For example, China has been on the
watch list of Transparency International (TI), a Berlin-based INGO, for decades, but it
had no success in persuading Chinese government to adopt its corruption-management
framework until the field manager of TI built a partnership relationship with Chinese
university scholars and think tank experts. These people hold no government position but
all sponsored by and closely related to Chinese legal and law enforcement agencies. The
result is the publication of a Chinese version of the Corruption Report, which clearly
adopts the guidelines provided by TI.\textsuperscript{64} For Chinese leaders, the TI annual report
criticizing corruption in China is a threat, but the TI that brokers knowledge and expertise
through familiar faces is a useful resource. Although TI's China office is still not a
registered NGO, it is "legally" and safely operating under the Centre of Anti-Corruption
Studies at Tsinghua University since 2009.

This logic can apply to progress made by religious groups as well. The critical
distinction between a "good" and "bad" religious group has to do with whether the group
in question brokers foreign influence through unauthorized channels.\textsuperscript{65} Specifically, the

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\textsuperscript{64} It is from the testimony of TI's China director.

\textsuperscript{65} Relevant evidences of forbidden foreign influence are plenty in official documents. For example, in the
Regulations of Religious Affairs, the highest Chinese law on religion, the Article 4 states “All religions
shall uphold the principle of independence and autonomy. Religious groups, places of religious activity,
and religious affairs shall not be under the control of a foreign power. Religious groups, places of religious
activity, and religious instructors shall deal with outside parties on a basis of friendship and equality.
Other organizations and individuals shall not be subject to religious requirements during cooperative or
more unauthorized foreign support the advocacy group provides, more likely the
government will consider it a threat until it proves otherwise. Consequently, activism for
broader religious freedom becomes possible when activists adopt strategies to “prove”
that they and their foreign partners are not a political threat to the leadership; such proof
includes various measurements from sharing information to sharing aid to government-
approved religious establishments. Advocating a new practice or a new idea is not always
a zero-sum game: government wants the leadership intact, and advocates want the
freedom to expand and deliver more resources. There is a tacit middle ground indicating
two sides can have the things they want the most, though reaching this point may require
some compromise, and mastering a certain “secret handshake.”

One in the cycle story of this secret handshake is the creation of the Amity
Foundation in Nanjing City, China. Bible distribution caused a major contention between
the Chinese government and foreign Christian advocacies during Mao’s period and in the
early days of Deng Xiaoping’s leadership. Christians used to sneak in hundred copies of
Bible in their luggage and risked being arrested for smuggling. Through the help of
Christians in Taiwan and Hong Kong, the American Bible Society and several other
Christian organizations negotiated with the Chinese government and reached a tacit
agreement that foreigners could donate a million US dollar to create a “non-governmental”
organization, under the management of TSPM, to produce “legal” copies of Bible in
China.66 Foreign denominations and Bible societies provided funding, training and took

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66 Nanjing City is the parish of formal Anglican Bishop K. H. Ting, later the highest leader of TSPM from
the 1950s to today. Today the Amity Foundation has become the largest Christian charity organization in

exchange activities of an economic, cultural or other nature.” Orthodoxy in China, English Translation by
Peter Erickson. Cited in http://www.orthodox.cn/contemporary/zjshwtli_en.htm
charge of most translation work. Chinese collaborators organized a printing facility in Nanjing and produced a million Bibles to government-censored retailers each year.  

Now the Amity Printing Company (APC) is the world biggest Bible printing company and taking orders in 80 languages from countries over the world.

Interestingly, such unexpected political openness has never been reported or studied. It is an unexplained puzzle that Chinese government showed restraint in response to foreign involvement and even granted concessions to a foreign authority engaging in theological interpretation. The censored version of Chinese Bible is not revised or modified by the Chinese government and it is almost identical to The Holy Bible Chinese Union Version, officially published by the Hong Kong Bible Society in British Hong Kong.

Several scholarly books and articles have proposed explanations for the rise of Chinese Protestant activism and the repression experienced in the past sixty years, but very few studies have included the cases concerning the other side of the state-religion relationship: the "legal" social space for Chinese Protestantism under the label of TSPM Church (Leung 1995; Chan and Carlson 2005). The theme of most studies concerns how underground churches fought with the state religious policy (Xin 2009; Bays 2004; Aikman 2003; Hunter and Chan 1993), and how important this confrontation is to civil China and receives about 400,000 to a million US dollar foreign donation each year. Bible printing has become an independent “business” separated from the Foundation. Interview  

I have interviewed one of the founder and former board member of The Amity Foundation from the outside of China. He confirmed this story and detailed the process of this negotiation. More details are in Chapter 3.

http://www.amityprinting.com/english/about.asp

society, political reform and human rights (Hamrin 2004; Spiegel 2004). The study of the political implications of foreign religious advocacy is even more scarce (Madsen 2003; Kindopp 2004). According to my reading, no work has been done on providing a comprehensive picture of state repression on transnational religious activism. The China studies discipline in general has reasonably good comprehension of political opposition and its failure in this repressive system, but people who study opposition and activism in China rarely discuss religious groups and overlook the unexpected space of activism created by these groups. This gap in the literature needs to be addressed.

2.2 Network Spiral and Opportunity Spiral: The Debates

Despite lively debates on many issues, two contemporary scholars of transnational activism tend to share two major premises: first, that Western non-state actors are essential to any campaign for political change and second, that the "internationalization," the strategies and language of highlighting international agencies, Western values, and global norms are necessary. This study challenges these premises and argues that two alternative strategies are necessary in front of a high-capacity regime. First, foreign non-state actors need local collaborators to do not only legwork but also advocacy job that market the new perspectives and practices to the state. Second, this transnational network of advocacy needs to avoid the language of internationalism.

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70 There is a growing literature of religion in China. The revival of all religions after Mao’s period is an astounding phenomenon and has attracted scholars from religious studies, anthropology, sociology, and political science to this issue. Many are written by people with strong religious compassion. The newest and most comprehensive list of academic literature can be seen in Yoshoko Ashiwa and David Wank 2009, Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China, Stanford University Press: 3-5. Ashiwa and Wank especially oppose the paradigm of “the state vs. the religion,” which neglect the reality that religion is always inside China politics.
because it may produce unnecessary difficulties when collaborators try to bargain more space for this activism. I have argued in the first chapter, the key inadequacy of current theories is the downplaying of the essentiality of local activists and their uneasy politics with state-sponsored groups. Both network and opportunity spiral approaches emphasize the networking, "gatekeeping" or "marketing" capacity of international actors who can travel, communicate, and allocate resources freely across borders. These theories show weakness when these foreign-based actors cannot move, talk and distribute resources freely in a target nation; practitioners have to seek the mobilizing, networking and marketing capacities from some unconventional "activists," who may or may not possess the conventional characteristics of non-state advocates.

Network Spiral: The TAN Paradigm

The core research premise of putting international non-state actors as the foci of transnational activism needs reconsideration. Transnational activism is broadly defined as policy changing interaction across borders involving at least one non-state actor (Risse-Kappen 1995). Its narrowest definition form has to satisfy four basic criteria: (1) it involves political contention based on a conflict of interests; (2) challenging or supporting certain power structure; (3) involving non-state actors; and (4) taking place fully or partly outside formal political institutions. I adopt the narrowest definition for transnational religious activism but theorize it as policy contention mainly comes from

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actors outside conventional political processes and refuse being forcefully separated, "secularized," from the policy discussion related to its agenda.

The essentiality of transnational actors is their ability to promote compliance to globally accepted norms, which local actors lack because their bargaining power has been stripped away by the repressive regimes. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), the celebrated theorists of international human rights activism, have argued that distinct behavior logics of norms entrepreneurs, mostly non-state and grassroots in nature, separate them from the organizational boundaries of state-operated international and national organizations, and help to advocate internationally accepted norms more effectively.\footnote{Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 1998, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," International Organization (1998), 52: 887-917: 888.} Sikkink (1999) further specifies the process of this cycle as escalating contention and bargaining between non-state and state actors and calls it "boomerang pattern" of political change; NGOs obtain information about human rights violation that states are too embarrassed to share and then "boomerang" out the information to international media, IOs, and concerned liberal states. The collective actions of these international actors may boomerang pressure back to the target state and promote protection on the opposition and solidarity of transnational activists.

Empirical studies have shown that transnational advocacy networks (TANs) shape the politics through (1) holding government accountable by exposing gaps between rhetorical commitment to international treaties and practices through transnational mobilization (Risse-Kappen 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse et al. 1999; Thomas 2001; Cardenas 2007; Okafor 2007); (2) challenging authoritarian rule through
strengthened “rule-oriented” or pragmatic domestic elites (Burgerman 2001; Hawkins 2002; Schmitz 2004); and (3) creating legal precedents and global norms through the collaboration of legal communities and NGO activists on serendipitous events (Okafor 2006; Evans 2005; Roht-Arriaza 2005).73

The key mechanisms of promoting changes are through networking the advocates and activists who share the common norms and values in different societies as described in the “boomerang effect.” The networks service as the platform to internalize/socialize international standards, knowledge, and organizational and financial resources into target states (Risse and Sikkink 1999) and internationalize the domestic grievances into international society (Bob 2005), a cyclic process described in Figure 2.1.

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**FIGURE 2.1 The Boomerang Mechanisms of TANs: Internalization and Internationalization**

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<th>National Level</th>
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<td>Protest: naming and shaming</td>
<td>The Repressive Regimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transnational Advocacy Networks</strong> (E.g. Human Rights INGs)</td>
<td>Domestic Opposition: Grassroots NGOs, political dissidents, victims of state-sponsored violence and persecutions…etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalization: amplify local grievances</td>
<td></td>
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<td>IOs and States (E.g. Western powers and the UN Human Right Committee)</td>
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Who is the Brave Soul?

If transnational advocacy networks provide otherwise absent resources and leverage to local groups and try to politicize their demands, it is natural for the governments to hold strong suspicion on transnational religious collaboration because they may turn against it someday. For this reason, transnational religious advocacy groups could be seen as a political threat to authoritarian states despite whether the participants make political claims. Therefore, TAN framework shows its weakness when the target state makes precautionous measurements and refuses to recognize the basic rights of advocates and activists. When the freedoms of speech, movement, and communication are the issues in contest and they are stripped away, such as in the house arrest cases of Chen Guangcheng in China and Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, foreigners’ attempts to contact these well-known activists become the very reason for them to be further persecuted.

Consequently, TAN framework cannot explain why authoritarian regime not outlaws all advocacies at once to prevent further complication. Without local informers and conspirators, foreign advocacy groups alone cannot do much. It is almost impossible to imagine an effective campaign while targeted states tactically consent to international human rights standards to divert the attention and oppress local conspirators at the same time. Granzer (1999) has pointed out that transnational human rights advocacy in Tunisia, comparing to nearby Morocco, is very ineffective because the government limited all human rights activists to join the only legal NGO, The Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de
President Ben Ali skillfully manipulated the human rights discourse to secure his power coup, and he even agreed to legalize the branch of Amnesty International (AI) in April 1988 in order to impress the international critics. His tactic secured his office from 1987 until he was forced to step down and flee the country on 14 January, 2011. The human rights power package promoted by advocates, Western state power (France) plus INGOs (AI), is proved to be very limited when the national leader has resolve and is skillful in manipulating international attention and advocacy efforts.

TAN theorists are forced to admit that, there is little to do without two critical preconditions, brave local activists who are willing to take the risk to transmit critical information under repression, and no smokescreen of rhetoric concession from the leaders who know how to take away the most powerful weapon of transnational advocacy: the moral power from exposing government’s denial. Tactic concession and fake compliance deprive the influence of transnational advocacy and leave activists with little alternative, which is a condition prevailing in many authoritarian states. China has signed all major international human rights instruments such as ICCSR and ICESCR, but refuses to ratify and internalize them into domestic law (Kent 1999). Chinese government has organized domestic human rights commission and association and published “Human Rights White Paper” each year since 1997, but the actions are considered by many critics

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74 In Risse et al, 1999: 116.
77 Risse et al: 132-133.
as diversion and propaganda projects rather than genuine socialization of global norms.\textsuperscript{78} Therefore activists and advocates in these nations have to work under the framework set by the authorities: in Tunisian case, joining and organizing opposition under the only legal human rights organization, and in Chinese case, cooperating and aiding the state-sponsored "social" organizations.

Opportunity Spiral: the TSM Paradigm

Transnational social movement (TSM), in contrast to TAN, is built on the emphasis of certain structural preconditions, widely defined as the opportunity structure in political sociology literature.\textsuperscript{79} It relies less on international solidarity or transnational advocacies because of this firm belief in the difficulty of collective action. In Charles Tilly’s words (2004: 3-4), a progressive action is “a sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on target authorities.” Without the capacity to sustain an effective movement, a will to change alone is insufficient. When an unexpected change appears, there must be sustainable space to support the change. Based on observation of “rooted cosmopolitans” such as anti-globalization protestors, Sidney Tarrow suggests that there is a transnational contentious space based not on few organizations or networks but "a dense, triangular structure of relationships among states, nonstate actors, and

\textsuperscript{78} Henry J. Steiner, Philip Alston, Ryan Goodman, \textit{International Human Rights in Context: Law, Politics, Morals} (Oxford University Press, 2008): 791. The texts of these papers can be found in government-sponsored English website: \url{http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/index.htm}.  
\textsuperscript{79} The most prominent writers in this branch of literature are Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly, and Sidney Tarrow. In general, there are four criteria of assessing political opportunity structure: 1) the open or closed nature of the institutionalized political system; 2) the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments; 3) the presence or absence of elite allies; 4) and the state’s capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam et al. 1996): 27. A more recent discussion can be seen in Tilly and Tarrow (2007).
international institutions, and the opportunities this produces for actors to engage in collective action at different levels of this system.”

He expands the TAN thesis into a two-dimensional framework, where activists and advocates are not only internationalizing and internalizing their specific issues between different societies but also “externalizing” among different issues. For attracting more audiences, advocates would reframe their claims from a single issue to multiple issues. Like the network spiral model, internationalization and internalization are described as the key mechanisms of change, but Tarrow’s TSM model emphasizes the physical ability of activists to externalize the collective actions, “to shift their activities among levels, taking advantage of the expanded nodes of opportunity of a complex international society.”

He also argues that the strongest form of transnational activism is when participants successfully externalize domestic contention and build a sustainable transnational coalition on a globally extended issue frame; a process starts from local disputes like Euro-Disney protest to a global civil society movement such as the formation of the World Social Forum.

In the context of religious activism, it is evident that many religious organizations have adopted boarder frames such as humanitarianism and cosmopolitanism. Peterson (2010) surveys all NGOs with consultative status at UN's ECOSOC commission and finds that only 10.1% of total 3,183 organizations consider themselves religious; among

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80 From this standard, Chinese Protestant networks are weak and probably ineffective because their leaders, with few exceptions, are still reluctant to take public action against an outdated management policy. Tarrow, 2005: 25.
81 Tarrow, Ibid: 25.
82 Ibid: 34.
the 320 religious NGOs, only 14% focus on religious promotion, while majority of them (47%) focuses solely on secular fields of work and goals.\(^\text{83}\)

Tarrow (2005) argues that one form of transnational collective action against authorities could be two or more socially rooted movements echoing and responding to

\(^{83}\) The effects of secularism on religious NGOs are powerful and affect scholarly work on religious organizations as well. Sociologist Kurt Alan ver Beek (2000) review the literature of humanitarian and development aid and find religious NGOs is mysteriously overlooked by researchers. He calls religion is a "development taboo" in humanitarian and development aid literature. Quoted from Marie Juul Petersen, 2010, "International Religious NGOs at the United Nations: A Study of Group of Religious Organizations," The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance. Online: http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/847
each other and therefore creates collective pressure that is more powerful than a single movement can produce alone.\textsuperscript{84} In short, it is a local movement that shares its knowledge of financing, campaigning, and organization with local partners in other societies. There may be money and manpower involved, but they might be inessential. One of the prominent examples is the international anti-globalization protest that has spread around the world since the 1990s, such as the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC) that appeared in France and was later adopted by activists in Germany, UK and other European Union states. Once a “civil society-like” global moral space emerged, its power is not limited to promoting change in a single issue.\textsuperscript{85} In other words, the growth of activism and a society’s development are interconnected: once the power of the civil society has reached a certain level, activism is inevitable.

Based on TSM paradigm, the opportunity structure of transnational Christian movement, if there is any, is determined by the strength of the global contentious space, and most important of all, by the status of civil society movement in each state. In the case of China, it is easier to see a global “society” for promoting religious freedom from Christian communities all over the globe, but is there a Chinese civil society that is strong enough to echo this global claim and collaborate with it locally? Are Chinese activists

\textsuperscript{84} French and German protesters are concerned with different local issues, but they can learn from each other about tactics, organizational strategies, and most importantly, by framing themselves as a united movement, they are all benefited by the internalization process. In terms of localizing the emerging global norms, this mechanism inherits the “spill over” thesis from early functionalism and argues that movements can produce impacts inside and outside their targeted paths: once a globally connected movement or a transnational, “civil society-like” moral space emerged, its potential is not limited to promote a single issue, and therefore progressive norms and practices can transfer and diffuse by participants everywhere (Evans 2005; Kolb 2005 in (Tarrow 2005): 32).

learning from and collaborating with their global partners, and sustaining a movement to challenge the status quo when knowing they have to do this by their own?

Without Civil Society?

In contrast to what has been said in newspaper and TV programs, studies of civil society in China reveal some positive signs, but besides religious believers and ethnic separatists, other social groups show very little resolve and capacity to challenge the status quo. Social groups in China in general seem to "accept" the authoritarian status quo (Wright 2010). Kellee S. Tsai, in *Capitalism without Democracy: the Private Sector in Contemporary China*, rejects the popular perception that a rising business sector will become status quo challengers in terms of policy concerns, public values, or political preferences. Nearly half (43.5%) of the business owners interviewed said they want to join the Communist Party. Yiyi Lu studies the performance of Chinese NGOs and concludes, “I quickly realized that not just social welfare NGOs, but the Chinese NGO sector as a whole, were still at such an early stage of development that the majority were unlikely to measure up to even minimal performance standards.” If China’s civil society is still in its early stage, how can we explain the rising civil disobedience of Protestant churches and the growing tolerance to them based on the political opportunity created by civil society?

Studies on other authoritarian regimes reveal similar problems of using NGOs as a political opportunity creator. Abdelrahman (2007) discusses how foreign involvement

86 (Tsai 2007a):101.
87 (Lu 2008): 108.
delegitimizes the local human rights and political campaigns in Egypt. As second largest social funds receiver (next only to Mexico), Egyptian NGOs in general highly relies on foreign and government funds and show limited legitimacy and social influence. On the contrary, Islamic NGOs, which have popular bases and capability of mobilization, are purposely underestimated (informally estimated as 43% of Egyptian NGOs) and repressed by the regime, while minority Coptic NGOs enjoy sizeable funds from Western governments and donor agencies (9% of all NGOs).\(^8\) Egyptian government ensures their control over NGOs through the process similar to Chinese: the legal framework and corporatist strategy that require NGOs to be members of a federation in a state-controlled hierarchical system. Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) under the infamous Law 32 of 1964 is the foundation of this system that authorizes government officials to intervene in selection of NGO leaders, budget and expenditure, allocation of government grants, and control over foreign funding.\(^9\) Different from Chinese religious counterparts, Islamic and Coptic social organizations enjoy a higher level of autonomy from the state because donations from religious institutions abroad do not under the supervision by MOSA. They successfully refuse to be co-opted by the state and maintain their activism and independent status.\(^{10}\)


\(^{9}\) *Ibid:* 128-133.

\(^{10}\) For example, Sadat regime freed all members of Muslim Brotherhood and officered them legal status as an apolitical NGO, but they refused. *Ibid:* 138-141.
2.3 Internal Spiral: Mechanisms of Marketing Transnational Religious Activism

Many religious studies experts have found that religious advocacy, in the forms of intellectual dissent and rural disobedience, poses significant challenges on formal political institutions in China. The rapidly expansion of unregistered congregations and spreading of unorthodox beliefs cause serious confrontation between the state and religious communities (Yang and Lang 2011; Marsh 2011; Cao 2011, 2008; Xin 2009; Lumsdaine 2009; Chau 2006; Lambert 2006; Yang 2006; Kindopp 2004; Wenger 2004; Aikman 2003; Kipnis 2001; Madsen 1998). From those cases, I find evidences that different parts of this advocacy possess the modalities of information exchange, coordinated tactics, and joint mobilization, which are pointed out by transnationalist scholars as the dominant features in rights advocacies (Table 2-1). Transnational religious activism is organized through their share discourse, tactics, and networks to better their chances to fight with religious repression.

For example, Yalin Xin (2009) finds that one of the largest underground Protestant networks in China, The World of Life (WOL) has brought a small village congregation in Henan Province into a two million-member, national and transnational network. The leader, Peter Xu, accepts the evangelical teaching from Western missionaries such as Hudson Taylor and turns it into a Chinese version of “Great Commission.”91 WOL’s impacts on Chinese politics and transnational communities are evident: its “renewal” (propagation and conversion) model becomes a strong alternative to government-sponsored methods and its continuing existence and growth inspire the resistance to

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91 Xin 2009, Inside China’s House Church Network: 32.
authorities’ unity policy.\textsuperscript{92} As an important player in the Protestant communities internationally and locally, its coordinated tactics and joint mobilization with other evangelical movements are noteworthy. For instance, WOL has become the important figure in the transnational “Back to Jerusalem” (BTJ) movement since the 1990s.\textsuperscript{93}

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<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Dominant Modality</th>
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<tr>
<td>transnational network</td>
<td>information exchange</td>
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<td>transnational coalition (campaign)</td>
<td>coordinated tactics</td>
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<td>transnational movement</td>
<td>joint mobilization</td>
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Table 2-1: Ascending Level of Transnational Collective Action. (Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink 2010, Restructuring World Politics: 9).

Anthropologist Nanlai Chao (2008, 2011) discovers a different pattern of institutional strategy in another Protestant group: Wenzhou’s “capitalist” Christians. Distinguishing himself from early researchers, who categorize Chinese Christianity as an “unfinished Western project” growing up from the influence of Western missions and a victim of an inherently hegemonic state-society relation, the “Wenzhou model” he describes is more local-driven and apolitical.\textsuperscript{94} “Boss Christians” often own and operate small and medium-sized enterprises and have good relations with local officials. The religious network expands as the business of Boss Christians grows from home factories into transnational corporations. It happens under the conditions of “a modernizing state,

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Ibid}: 128-137.

\textsuperscript{93} BTJ is a popular international Evangelical movement, which refers to the Crusade in the 11th to 13th Century but stresses the non-violence means. The Chinese version of BTJ is to emphasize the geographic significance of China to Central Asian and Middle East and therefore the responsibility of Chinese Christians to fulfill this historical destiny. \textit{Ibid}: note 101 on 46; 108-109; and 134-136.

\textsuperscript{94} Nanlai Chao, 2011, Constructing China’s Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou: 5-6.
lax local governance, an emerging capitalist consumer economy, and greater spatial mobility among individuals.”95

Although there are many publications on transnational collective action on Chinese evangelism, fewer have positioned themselves on a theory-driven inquiry of institutional change. Case studies like WOL or Wenzhou provide detailed insights about how leadership, organizational structure, and theological standpoints affect their institutional strategy and impacts, but they helps little on unpacking the secrets of how advocates overcome obstacles from the establishments, especially those limitations of constraining their transnational modalities. Both repression and tolerance toward these modalities permitted by the system requires attention.

Christopher Marsh (2011) compares the religious revival in post-communist Russia and post-reform China and finds that the institutional legacy of “militant atheism” from the pre-reform time plays an important role in determining the patterns of religious repression and tolerance. However, atheist state is not the only institutional source of religious repression and tolerance. Gordon Melton (2011), a historian and the Director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion, points out that the tension is not only between the atheist state and untamed religions. There are struggles between established (official) religions and sectarian (unregistered) groups, ethnic religions, and new religions. For Protestants, unregistered congregations may act as dissidents and distance themselves from the establishments. However, taking into account of ethnicity and theology, some unregistered congregations, such as Wenzhou’s Christians, are closer than other religious

95 Ibid: 11.
sects to the establishments for their own reasons, while “new religions,” such as the “cults” groups like South China Church, Three Grades of Servants, and Eastern Lightning are repelled by both established churches and regular unregistered congregations like WOL.96

Also recognizing the importance of registration, Yang Fenggang (2006) asserts that religious groups’ distance to establishments is the result of a biased national policy. In his well-known article, “The Red, Black and Gray Market of Religion in China,” Yang provides a critical insight of the repression and tolerance that seems chaotic to outside observers: state regulation on religions is a long-term and institutionalized tradition that dictates the spiritual life of China. When the “demand” side of religions is raising rocket high after the end of Cultural Revolution, the “supply” side, membership and participation offered by organized religions, are in great deficiency. While deregulation is never the norm of Chinese politics, it is no surprise that there are a great proportion of Chinese religious groups in the “gray” or “black” areas and suffered from constant harassment and persecution, while there are also a proportion of religious “red” groups operate with restrained interference.97 Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke (2007) test this

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96 Please see Figure 1, the Four Classification of Chinese Religion in Melton 2011: 60, “History in the Social Scientific Study of Chinese Religion,” in Yang and Lang (eds.), Social Scientific Studies of Religion in China: Methodology, Theories, and Findings: 47-60.
97 Yang 2009: 96-99. Although treating religion as private goods have strong theoretical foundations, this idea is not without criticism, but criticism focuses on its assumptions, not method. It has been seen as a part of the popular argument of Chinese secularization that believes this nation has a long and unique tradition of secularization, which can be dated back to the 9th Century (Davis, 2001; Hansen, 1990; Hymes, 2002; von Glahn, 2004; Ownby (2003). This line of argument is built on an arguable assumption that “Chinese people and particularly their social and intellectual elites as secular rationalists.” (Szonyi 2009: 316). See Michael Szonyi (2009), Secularization Theories and the Study, Social Compass 56(3): 312-327.
thesis in a cross-nation data and find strong evidences to support the conclusion that “[over]regulation leads to persecution.”98

In sum, findings from comparative religious studies have suggested that political institutions, including state organs and state-sponsored organizations based on different type of secularism each state possessed, shape the capacity and influence of religious groups. Nonetheless, these militant atheism, secularization, regulation or supply deficiency theses all focus on the role of the state, which to some degree underestimate the significance and particularity of world religions and transnational characteristics of modern religions. For example, Buddhism is a “Red” religion and its religious advocacy groups have rarely run into trouble with Chinese government in the Post-Mao China; however, this classification loses its clarity if we count in Tibet Buddhist activism from India or Mahayana Buddhist advocates from Taiwan. State regulation theses also fail to address the obvious double standard on rural and urban religious groups on social policies (Laliberté 2009; Tsai 2007; Eng and Lin 2002). Since world religions are transnational, a transnational theory of religion, including its local and transnational actors, is needed.

Internal Spiral with Limited Externalization

TAN and TSM models have identified three major mechanisms of transnational activism: internationalization, internalization, and externalization. This chapter reconstructs additional two sets of mechanisms in the domestic level. The logic of

facilitating activism in an authoritarian state is straightforward but difficult to accomplish: the advocacy needs to avoid rejection from the key veto group involved (the "other" social organizations stated in Article 4) and win the support from the majority of the target community (a primitive democratic rule). The assumption is even a strong authoritarian regime would not crash a popular demand without think twice about the high costs of repressing a proposal with majority support. When the popular demand does not directly threaten the survival of the regime, the officials may decide to ease off their responses because of the potential costs of angering the whole community. The logic demands an adequate strategy and proper opportunities occurred, which are addressed by different disciplinary traditions.

While TAN framework from IR discipline emphasizes the socialization and internalization strategies, TSM framework from political sociology stress the limitations set by political institutions and the opportunity provided by externalization. In a conceptual perspective, as illustrated in Figure 2-1 and 2-2, TAN argues that the spiral process can happen when the principled groups in delivering and receiving ends are collaborating in an issue network (a "vertical process" from domestic level to global level), while the TSM asserts spiral goes both geographic and ideational directions depending on given conditions (a horizontal and vertical process). The internal spiral I proposed is mostly horizontal and it is discreet about the vertical process. It is an indirect process between the state institutions and challengers. It is discreet because the state does not want outsider to perceive its self-restraint as a change of policy, which might signal weakness and encourage more challengers (Ginkel 1998; Shiu and Sutter 1996).
Shiu and Daniel Sutter demonstrate in their political repression model that the central government has to take a stand against the students in Tiananmen Square because it cannot show weakness to its periphery rivals. John Ginkel uses formal method to understand the success of Velvet Revolution and the failure of Tiananmen Square in the 1989 and concludes,

...when the cost of exposure is high for the dissidents, the mob is more likely to trust their signal and heed the call for mobilization...Run-of-the-mill participants invested trust in the student leaders, heeding their call for mobilization and assuming that the student leadership had greater knowledge about the government's type than they... In Czechoslovakia,...dissidents' estimation of the government's type was informed by events that directly affected the government's ability to withstand challenge. This was not the case in China. (Ginkel 1998: 309)

In the post-Tiananmen Square period, the prerequisite of" not-showing weakness" becomes even much stronger obvious. Local activists and dissidents, especially those who have confronted the authorities for years, know the government type and "red line" of it well. So they try to expand their freedom of action by expanding the "sites" of activism but avoiding the language of internationalism, a form of secret handshake that has been signaled by years of patriotic education and persecutions. They deliver, share and pass on normative and material resources among domestic, transnational, and international participants, but they prefer the label of local operation than a global movement. Therefore, the critical difference between transnational activists in an authoritarian state and conventional activists in the democracies is the lack of political opportunity to adopt international frame. For Chinese social groups, whether registered
or unregistered, the basic mandate from the state institutions is to keep foreign influence away. Since activists still want the financial and organizational resources from foreign advocacy groups, they have to work out a way to keep the authorities at bay. Borrowing a concept of Bob's *Marketing Rebellion*, advocates and activists need to market themselves and the proposed collaboration as beneficial and harmless to the regime as possible. For this reason, they need a second kind of local "activists" to bargain with the officials who used to acting hostile to international and transnational collaboration (Figure 2.3).

In addition, religious advocacy networks in a strong authoritarian setting need to be cautious about the range of the activism. They try to not only avoid the language of internationalism but also limit the issue scope of their operations. While their actions are clearly involved wide range of civil and political rights from the freedom of speech to socioeconomic rights of poor and marginalized population (many local religious organizations carry welfare functions; Tsai 2007), very few religious advocates or activists frame their issues beyond legal rights of citizens according to Chinese constitution. The absence of global framing of universal human rights or freedom of religion is a careful choice of these participants. Unlike their German or United States' counterparts, religious advocates and activists in China face a much more closed society, which is exposed to decades of atheist education and patriotic movements against foreign-imported religions. Nevertheless, the avoidance of global issue frames does not cover the fact that the networks of advocacy are working on a global scale and frequent collaboration on challenging biased religious policy on Chinese Christians.
The Basic Mechanisms of Marketing: Internalization, Sharing and Alliance Formation

Neither TAN nor TSM can explain the puzzle of transnational activism in strong authoritarian environment: participants have to overcome the great repression under conditions of absent or very weak civil society. In many of the cases locals do collaborate with foreign advocacy groups despite of the difficulties. As I have argued in the first chapter, the alternative “marketing” strategies or mechanisms are the keys for transnational activism to succeed. Foreign advocates with local partners produce space or opportunity of activism through backdoor listing and majority alliance. The remaining
questions are, why they join this risky business and under what conditions will they work together? The core argument, what I refer to as the "internal spiral," is the need for this activism to encompass registered groups. The following section will explain the different dynamics of a foreign aid group collaborating with registered and unregistered groups and why these groups are likely to take the "risks" of joining the law-breaking business of transnational activism under certain conditions.

This internal spiral requires three major steps. First, a local group requests help and externalizes its disputes with authorities, such as housing or bible usage, to foreign advocacy groups. Foreign advocacy groups can choose to internationalize these issues to a broader audience such as international media or human rights watch groups or internalize them through domestic means. Internal spiral happens when a foreign group decides to seek solutions locally. In order for them to work locally, foreign religious advocates need to gain the permission of entry and present themselves in the way that Chinese authorities would not close the door at the first minute. They need a proper front or cover to operate legally in China. Invitation from registered groups is one of the starting points and foreign advocate groups can list themselves as the educators, co-operators, services providers, or sponsors of legitimate social projects in order to enter China. Second, foreign religious advocates can bring in aid and services to registered groups and then work on projects that would benefit the majority of the Christian community, which means the aid and services can be shared by both registered and unregistered groups. Third, the relationships with both registered and unregistered groups become a tacit alliance to advocate changes of religious policy in their favor. Later when repression
appears, no matter from an discontented church leader to tell on the participants or a police officer who receives an order from the governor, this majority alliance supported by a transnational advocacy network would work together to protect the foreigners and especially the leaders from registered group would try to convince the authorities that there is nothing to be worried about.

During my fieldwork, I have been helped by this kind of alliance and watched high-ranking Party and police officials walked by without being questioning or provoking any trouble. In many Chinese cities I visited, foreign advocates are working with Chinese Christians under all kind of covers, students, teachers, businessmen, aid workers, and tourists, to promote their shared values and the goal of evangelism which is supposed to be confined within Chinese-only organizations and government-censored facilities. I also recorded many cases that groups or individuals who did not have this kind of local alliance and had to be extremely cautious and tried to hide their present from authorities and sometime escape from search and raid.99

Involvement of Registered Groups

The key local factor of successful alliance I identified is the attitude of registered churches. Under the strong authoritarian rule, the local collaborator will have to evaluate the risk of this proposed operation according to its relationship with the authorities and the local Christian community, especially Christians in other kinds of churches. One

99 Almost every underground missionary I interviewed has the experience of hiding or escaping from police research and raid. Local churches are often capable of helping outsiders. One church leader, whose church was underground but registered under TSPM in the 1990s, told me that their newly built training center has a special lock door, which is specially design to stop the raid and give time to illicit workers and missionaries to escape. Interview No. 99. July 12, 2011.
critical consideration is whether the aid can be shared by others. If the church decides to open the door to welcome the whole Christian community to participate in the operation, it means the competitor can also enjoy the aid and obtain certain insider information of the transnational connection such as the name and nationality of the aid worker. Once the resources or information are shared, participants from outside the church will have the chance to decide if they want to report this collaboration to the authorities, and the aid receiving church needs to take this risk into consideration. Registered churches have the advantage of sharing these resources with much lower risk; they are "legal" and have registered facilities and therefore can harbor "illegal" personnel and services more easily. In addition, leaders of these facilities usually have existing ties with local government and law enforcement agencies, which allow them to mitigate the "spoiler problem" more easily.

My readers might wonder why the powerful state would restrain their behavior just because registered groups are on board of the operation. In general, the government would prefer stopping aid over allowing any church to receive aid. First, we need to consider the severity of government’s punishment. A cautious aid receiver will evaluate the cost of this action before taking the support from foreigners. Punishment for collaborating with foreign religious organizations could be a threatening phone call or serious jail time, depending on the severity of the case. The evaluation of the severity falls on the hand of local law enforcement agencies, and they rely on a set of criteria to judge: if the aid-receiving group gets registered, approval, or having other permission from other legal agencies in non-religious areas such as business, charity or education.
Under the grand policy of Reform and Openness, local officials are serious about cracking down a legitimate social activity that might contribute to the local development, except the situation that they are ordered to do so.\textsuperscript{100}

It should be noted that it is not only the TSPM label, the registration status of the church, that grant protection to an operation. The protection comes from a set of institutional affiliation to the regime, such as a graduate certificate from a government-censored theological seminary, a pastor’s “lecture license” issued by ARA office, and other leadership titles such as a membership to a GONGO organization such as Chinese Christian Council or being a representative to the local branch of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a “political consulting” agency directly supervised by the Party’s United Front Work Bureau (\textit{Tongyi Zhanxian-bu}), a organ that monitors all non-Party social groups in China and overseas Chinese communities (Potter 2003; Vala 2009). Those complex personal and institutional connections help to ease the suspicion of security agencies, and convinces the law enforcement agency that the proposed operation poses no harm to the regime and most important of all, the safety of their jobs. For example, when a police officer is informed that a foreigner-involved religious activity is in town, he would call the local TSPM leadership he knew for details and then contact the ARA field office for further clarification. Whether the TSPM and ARA put a good word for the activity, either “we know the guy” or “everything is under our control,” decides the next action the police will take.\textsuperscript{101} In short, it is the institutional

\textsuperscript{100} Interview No. 98, August 21, 2011.
\textsuperscript{101} The concept of embeddedness is raised by sociologist Mark Grnovetter’s work about economic policy and introduced into political science by Robert Putnam (2000) in his seminal work on American political participant, \textit{Bowling Alone}. This phenomenon is well-documented particularly in corruption literature,
embeddedness (Granovetter 1985; Putnam 2000), i.e. the closeness of church leaders to political elites that can call off a crackdown on transnational aid collaboration.

Current studies of religion in China show that increasing foreign involvement has alarmed Party leaders, and triggered a new method of control through emphasizing the “accommodation” of religion to the needs of development and “legality” of its participants and activities (Leung 2005). In order words, government would not object to a foreign aid project without proper assessment of the cost and benefit coming with it. Foreign aid, through various forms, accommodates the socioeconomic needs of Chinese society, while the potential risk is uncertain. The regime would crack down the outside support if it is deemed harmful. The regime would see the aid is harmful when it helps the growth of unregistered congregations (in gray and black market) or impedes the growth of registered population (in red market)(Yang 2005).

Why Take the Risk? The Incentives for Participation

For churches to participate transnational activism, the cost-benefit calculation is obscured. Should a church leader take the risk of jail time or loss of his/her church for helping the work of evangelism? The answer would probably be no but there are many exceptions. Personal testimonies and reports have provided many cases of how individual Christians and churches fight for their freedoms and values not limited to their own, and the stories attract great attention when incidents of arrest, torture, persecution and

where institutional embeddedness is often treated as one of the sources of double-standard law enforcement, i.e. corruption. Here I see the relaxation of regulation or selected punishment as opportunity to expand social group’s freedom because Chinese religious law itself is designed to constrain, not protect the religious groups. The original concept can be seen in Granovetter, M. (1985). "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness". American Journal of Sociology 91 (3): 481-510.

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demolition of churches are reported to international society (Aikman 2003; Bays 2003; 2004; Kindopp 2004).

However, the participation should not be understood as only from individual heroism or religion-inspired sacrifice. Participating in transnational evangelism has many "rewards." Since the Wealth of the Nations, Adam Smith and many economists have noticed that self-interest motivates clergy as well as regular people to pursue material and religious rewards (Iannaccone 1991). The rational choice school of religion has argued that religious groups propose various rewards and costs to keep their members (Stark and Bainbridge 1987; Finke and Stark 1992, 2000; Iannaccone 1991, 1992, 1995; Chaves, 1995; Durkin and Greeley, 1991).\(^{102}\) In many occasions, religious rewards are realized in material forms; churches are constantly competing for “patrons” and their loyalty through demonstrating various secular successes.\(^{103}\) Attracting outside funding and skillful preachers, for example, is eminent ability for a clergyman to show off his/her success in front of the crowd. Chinese clergy are attracted by foreign aid for both material and spiritual reasons. My interviews on House Church leaders show that foreign sponsorship was essential to sustain the living of many church leaders in the early time when local offerings were forbidden and limited. Today proficient outside speakers are still popular for providing spiritual stimulation and authenticity of particular theological stands. For example, foreign ministers are often asked to preach on offerings, which would be seen as immoral if overemphasized by local clergy. For maintaining the palatial church

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buildings left by pre-1950 missionary agencies, TSPM clergy also do not shy on revealing their connections to foreign denominations and patrons.\textsuperscript{104}

Today foreign donations in many cases are still critical for building church facilities, funding charity efforts, and especially sustaining missionary work. Foreign connections and support are highlighted by clergy as personal achievements or resources to strengthen the leadership.\textsuperscript{105} Therefore, Chinese churches in general would prefer receiving aid if the conditions permit.

Unregistered Groups: There is Nothing to Lose

For the unregistered church, it is in their best interest to participate in the transnational activism. Either rejecting or accepting the aid changes the fact that government's tolerance on House Church is slim. The church leaders know the government would never allow them to participate in transnational collaboration and would try to search for the illicit money and personnel if it obtains the intelligence. So the question for the leaders of the unregistered group is simply: will the benefits of accepting aid outweigh the costs of crackdown? If the answer is yes (e.g. the church may be able to hide the money or missionary from the search successful), church leaders would be very likely to choose rebellious behavior.

\textsuperscript{104} For example, one of the historical Anglican church building in Shanghai recently went through major remodel, and the clergyman told me all the materials were from England and they received help from Anglican Church, although he refused to comment on the source of funding. Interview No.10, August 29, 2010.

\textsuperscript{105} This is true for both registered and unregistered church leaders. The ability to bringing in extra cash or skilled preachers is critical for a local lay worker to stand out of his colleagues, when most of Chinese churches are struggling to deal with various government interferences on their financial and recruiting strategies. For example, preaching Tenth Offering is still considered a taboo because the authorities believe it is a violation of people’ right to not offer to church. Interview No.1, November 15, 2009.
From the angle of churches, this behavior structure enhances the necessity of participating in transnational advocacy network’s backdoor operation, if available. When repression is common and expected, rule-breaking behavior (accepting aid) is possible only when the group can tolerate the repression and successfully keep the rewards through underground, backdoor processes. It suggests that the capacity of backdoor listing moves, such as hiding foreigners as tourists or teachers in the busy city life, may decide the frequency of collaboration being successfully exercised. This structure also suggests that rule-breaking could be common since the churches have very little to lose if punishment is unavoidable: unregistered congregations often do not have many properties or fixed locations to be confiscated due to the fact that existing policy already took away their rights to be "further" punished. They already are used to a nomadic church life from locations to locations, a member's home to another apartment, and quickly recover from policy raid. Unless SARA decides to permanently imprison key participants, it is reasonable for resolve and well-connected church leaders to keep participating illicit transnational collaboration.

Government's Threat Becomes "Cheap Talk"

The situation becomes more complicated if the aid goes to a registered church. Ideally, government would be less likely to object to a foreign aid proposal when it targets a registered population. The registered group would also make their choice of receiving or rejecting the aid based on the expectation of government’s behavior. However, allowing a foreign involvement indicates a shift of official policy and it may
also provoke new demand from the untamed side for equal treatment. In general, the government would still prefer stopping aid over showing restraint, but whether the church rejecting aid becomes less relevant. The biggest worry is whether the church would respect the leadership and understand the policy: the two worst-case scenarios are the church accepting the aid when the government not allowing it and when the church rejects the aid but actually the government does not plan to stop it.

For a registered church, the reasoning is similar to unregistered congregations except two critical points. The church is less vulnerable to state crackdown because they have some institutional protections: the organization is legally established and the clergy often have government-issued certifications and licenses, which indicate not only legitimate power but also layers of connections to central authorities. I have witnessed that a TSPM pastor used his cell phone to call the police chief to explain the situation of multiple “foreigners” appeared in his jurisdiction. There are also several TSPM clergymen show me their multiple titles in the political institutions: a representative status to the local CPPCC, for example, demonstrates that this person has obtained the official approval from the Party’s United Front Work system. Second, the institutional protection comes with responsibility. It is against TSPM’s self-interest to stand on the opposition side of the governmental policy. Therefore, the church wants the aid and not worries about the consequences, but they would see resonating government position as a plus.

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106 All participants of CPPCC are invited only. Chinese Communist Party selects individuals they can trust to represent the groups that supposedly select their own representatives to the CPPCC. Heads of TSPM are the necessary members of Chinese Protestant delegates to the National CPPCC. CPPCC is a grand system instituted levels of meetings from the state, provinces, metropolitan areas, major cities, to counties. As long as there is a government structure, there is CPPCC.
For a corporatist government, its highest priority is to synchronize state and social groups' actions, on the basis of national interests (Unger and Chan 1995). The worst situation for the government happens when the legal coalition goes behind its back to accept the aid. The second worse case is when the government is going to open up but the leader of legal church fails to recognize the unspoken willingness to change. Either case represents the failure of coordination, and therefore the leadership. This is a typical “battle of sexes” scenario (Rapoport 1966), when two players have one common interest (following the leadership) but distinct “tastes” about the disputed item. As Farrell and Rabin (1996) indicated, "battle of sexes" structure increases the possibility of "cheap talk;" participants realize two strategic pairs are almost equally possible and desirable, and therefore the first one to execute or to signal the will of execute the action has the first move advantage. As in the case of TSPM, clergy may choose to accept illicit aid without asking consent from the government because they have known the official restriction is just cheap talk.  

The difference in preferences induces distinct behavior patterns of government to two kinds of churches: for government, it is evident that the unregistered church would behave toward the opposite direction of its interest; while registered church would more likely to respect government’s policy. Therefore, without knowing what exactly churches would actually do, it is reasonable for the government to choose restraint in response to registered groups and repression to unregistered groups. After a few rounds of interaction, government may simply punish whatever unregistered churches are doing, while tolerate

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anything registered churches propose to do. Borrowing Rapoport's words, the psychological expectations may motivate players to either an “exploiter” (the shifting player is always rewarded but the other is always punished), or a “hero” (both are rewarded, but the shifting player gains less than the other).\(^{108}\) When there are always some churches want to be exploiters or heroes, the government has serious coordination problems. From government's behaviors of Chile, Venezuela, Israel and Palestinian to their dissident groups, Shellman (2006; 2007) finds that levels of government repression are affected by the not only the hostility of opposition but also the sequences and contexts of the interactions between two sides.\(^{109}\)

It is also reasonable to believe that signaling is a serious problem between churches and the state, and this problem would be higher between unregistered churches and the state. Knowing government official’s decision on aid is not as easy as making a phone call to a ARA office because first; not every clergyman has the connection to ask this kind of bold question directly. Second; the answer from ARA office is definitely “no,” while the possibility of welcoming outside funding always exits in the money-thirsty local politics.\(^{110}\) A Chinese version of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,” a tacit permission is a common practice to go around an unpopular policy in local Chinese politics (O'Brien and

\footnotesize{\(^{108}\) Anatol Rapoport 1967 "Exploiter, Leader, Hero, and Martyr: The Four Archetypes of the 2 × 2 Game," \textit{Behavior Science} 12(2): 81-84.}


\footnotesize{\(^{110}\) The money relationship between Christians and the local government is full of possibilities. The Amity Foundation is an example of even the center government can be bought. Local governments want more investment, tax and aid when Christians have their means to provide them. One possibility is the investment brought by Christian-owned companies. For example, report has said a Hong Kong-based company announced US$659 million tourism project in China's northeastern Liaoning province to build a Christian theme park. Similar stories are plenty when I interviewed so-called “business Christians” in China. “Businessman plans to build China's first Bible park” \textit{AFP}, November 24, 2009.}
Li 1999). Registered churches have institutional advantages on winning the tacit permission because first; government officials expect they would respect the policy “red line” and second; even the registered churches decide to go behind their back, it is much easier for them to pretend nothing serious happen or explain this backdoor move as a harmless “exception” to their superior. Both scenarios have been observed in my fieldwork and further discussed in Chapter 4.

2.4 Competing Explanations

Mainstream theories predict that the progress promoted by religious groups should not happen in a stable authoritarian state like China. Skeptics may argue that this unexpected progress could be made by factors other than transnational Protestant activism. The significances of Protestant activism have been argued by numerous scholars in varying theoretical traditions. As Max Weber (1958; 1968) has argued, religion may be one of the cultural and organizational contributors of modern society, where religious beliefs and religious institutions matter to spur the foundations of capitalism. Robert D. Woodberry provides historical and statistical evidence that Protestant missions heavily contributes to the rise and spread of stable democracy through mass education, mass printing, and building civil society around the world; the effects are remaining significant when his model controls more than 50 control variables.\footnote{Robert D. Woodberry, 2012, “The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy,” \textit{APSR} 106(2): 244-274.} While not discrediting other possibilities of promoting political progress, this project found that at least in the region where fieldwork has been conducted, backdoor
listing and majority alliance do play essential roles. I selected four cases which are all in highly developed urban areas so as to control for these alternative explanations. The controlled comparison shows that geographic location, social capital, economic development, and foreign relations have little direct effect on the unexpected progress.

The Chinese studies literature illustrates four possible alternative explanations (1) Skeptics may ask why not other social groups instead of religious groups (Tsai 2007; Lu 2009; Goldman 2005).\(^\text{112}\) (2) The tolerance of government on religious activism may be the result of human rights diplomacy of Western Powers (Osofsky 1998; Watchman 2001). (3) The regional variation may be the byproduct of unequal economic growth (Pei 2006), or (4) distance to authorities’ power centers (Leung 2005).\(^\text{113}\)

For social organizations other than religious groups, the strongest argument for their power comes from the social capital thesis: the intensity or diversity of social participation or connections may introduce better quality of politics (Putnam 1994). Nevertheless, there is little reason to exclude religious components from other social groups; evidence shows that they may be both inseparable parts of politics. Tsai (2007) points out in her study of village’s social provision that religious as well as kinship organizations supplement the missing check-and-balance functions in Chinese grassroots politics.


Secularism Promoted by Western Powers?

Human rights diplomacy thesis emphasizes the role of foreign policy instruments of West Powers and international legal regimes on restraining an authoritarian government’s behavior on its social opposition. The historical origins of this concept are from the diplomatic precedents that powerful states try to protect religious and ethnic minorities such as Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Muslims in Europe. In addition to the reason that strong authoritarian regimes often ignore international pressure, there are imperatives of secularism rooted in this concept which oblige religious activists and advocates in authoritarian states to avoid or at least distance themselves from this strategy and related discourse.

The separation of state and religion has been seen as the fundamental principle of modern international relations and domestic politics and deeply embedded in the state-based analytical frameworks (Hurd 2007). Secularism assumes the separation of the church and the state and implies legitimate religious activism is confined to non-state sector and secular, humanitarian and charitable work. In the countries where religions have been integrated into political institutions, this assumed separation creates analytical problems. Except for few studies, these democracy-civil-society frames exclude or ignore transnational religious activism disregarding the fact that religious actors do contribute to cross-national networks, campaigns, and movements intensively. Hurd (2007) points

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115 Among the few exceptions, Tarrow (2005) recognizes religious organizations as a part of "embedded cosmopolitans."
out that this obvious omission is due to "the unquestioned acceptance of the secularist division between religion and politics" from laicism and Judeo-Christian tradition of secularism, which assumes and demand religion to be private affairs. 116

The neglect, exclusion or discrimination of religious agenda can happen in various political regimes across democracy and autocracy line when secularism is a shared value among states; the chance of activism emerged will be higher when political exclusion and discrimination are facilitated by the separation of religion from political processes.

"Religious freedom and religious persecution affect all religious groups. A variety of groups - Christians and animists in Sudan, Baha’is in Iran, Ahmadiyas in Pakistan, Buddhists in Tibet, and Falun Gong in China - are now perhaps the most intensely persecuted, while Christians are the most widely persecuted group. But there is no religious group in the world that does not suffer to some degree because of its beliefs." Paul Marshall 2007: 348.

Religious persecutions and secularization are wide-spread and so does the activism stimulated by them. Paul Marshall, the senior fellow at Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom and the creator of Religious Freedom Scale (RFS), argues that French ban on religious symbols and clothing is a violation of religious freedom because the secular demand of dress code should be outweighed by a legitimate right to live according to one's religion. 117 It is no surprise that the ban and other secularization policies become the foci of ongoing debates and fuel the countermovement in Europe and elsewhere. 118

Modern authoritarian leaders share the secular ideology with their democratic counterparts but they are often more pragmatic on embracing certain religious components into political discourse or institutions. The leaders may not be willing to share their power with religious groups, but they do realize the benefits of using religion on maintaining social stability and mobilization, and the danger of having discontent religious population. Empirical evidence shows countries can be politically repressed but religiously open. Marshall (2007) identifies two groups of nations where the scores of religious freedom is surprisingly higher than their worse performances in civil and political categories: Belarus, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine, the remnants of the former Soviet Union, and Cuba, Egypt, Malaysia, East Timor, Guatemala, Lebanon, Namibia, Vietnam and Singapore, Brazil and Zimbabwe, the regulars of the human rights watch list. Marshall notices that they all have large religious population constituting the major proportion of their civil societies. In other words, governments in these nations are self-restrained because religious groups are "hard to repress than other bodies." Consequently, the contention between religious groups and the state could be lower when certain religious organizations or their interests are co-opted by deliberated authoritarian leaders and some key religious figures begin to work within the political system. Cuba for instance, Cardinal Jaime Ortega is well-respected by the regime and the

119 Some of them are adopting religious language and ideology in order to win over their religious population. For example, literature of Latin American has found it is useful to identified "secular" and "scared" variants of authoritarian regimes. Evelyn P. Stevens, 1975 "Protest Movement in an Authoritarian Regime: The Mexican Case," Comparative Politics, 7, no. 3 (April):361-82.
Church is allowed to negotiate the release or better treatment of 52 political prisoners in 2010.\textsuperscript{121}

Almond, Appleby, and Sivan (2003) elaborate this secularism-induced religious activism and make the case that radical form of religious activism, the fundamentalism is not created by a specific theology; the radical turn happens when states prevent religious groups from expressing their beliefs, raising funds, and recruiting. Philpott (2007) makes a similar observation on the basic behavior patterns of religious activism. From cross-religion and cross-regional comparison, she finds that, in addition to their existing theological stands on politics, religious actors would be more likely to pursue radical goals when they are "conflictually differentiated" from the political institutions. Therefore, transnational terrorism will be more likely to happen when believers have suffered from injustice, discrimination, and lack of political opportunities. Empirical evidence has strongly supported her and Almond et al.'s thesis. Abadie's (2004) work shows "\textit{a strong correlation between terrorist risk and authoritarianism, and inverse correlation between terrorism and political freedom, and a lack of correlation between terrorism and poverty}."\textsuperscript{122}

If political exclusion and authoritarianism facilitate religious activism, China fits two criteria and supposedly to have the highest conflictual relation between religion and state (Philpott 2007: conflictual integrationism). However, not every religion in China represents radical behavior. Systematic Tibetan rebellion is stopped in the 1950s and

\textsuperscript{121}Nick Miroff, "Catholic Church Widens Role In Cuban Politics," NPR, June 16, 2010.
crashed again when minor spark of disobedience appeared in the 2000s. Christians and Muslims suffer from great repression but organized activism against the regime is only seen in some remote areas or within overseas communities; for Muslims, organized radical movement becomes visible after the 1990s. If the political superstructure supposedly pushes Chinese religious groups to turn radical, why the activism (violent or nonviolent) fails to grow noticeably? Structural factors such as national ideology and regime type show their weakness in explaining subnational and temporal variants of religious activism. It is highly possible that foreign factors, such as the development of transnational religious activism and the foreign relations with the strongholds of world religions (e.g. India for Tibetan Buddhism and the United States for Protestantism), play a critical role in facilitating political repression on religious activism.

Other National Determinants

In addition to the leadership explanation has been discussed in the beginning, there are several other national factors may shape the way local officials treating Christians. Now we consider the possibility that without the spoiler, the law enforcement agency will still identify and crackdown the transnational operation on their own. There are several situations where this may happen. First, the police may receive a direct order from above and request them to detain all suspicious figures, and break off all irregular activity for special political events like the Joint Meeting of CPPCC and People’s Congress (Liang-hui), memorial days such as the Tiananmen Square Massacre, or arrival of foreign leaders. Second, advocacy groups may contact a radical activist that has been on the watch-list of
the security agencies for serious concerns such as the Charter 08 democratic movement.\textsuperscript{123} Since the issue involved is no longer a purely religious matter, TSPM clergy and the ARA office no longer have much influence on a policemen’s decision. Third, the power struggle between offices and political factions may become a trigger of political crackdown, and invoke another kind of spoiling: pointing out the unauthorized transnational activities in order to attack and question the loyalty of administrators to Party’s police.

It is a daunting task to act alone in identifying illegal religious activity in a multi-million-population city, which may be full of regular religious activities foreign with noticeable number of foreign journalists, businessmen, scholars, teachers, and students. It is also against policemen’s self-interest to provoke political confrontation with the already apolitical community, unless the exogenous pressure is extremely high. Therefore, the above three situations should be less frequent and exceptional. Because all of these factors are exogenous to the church-state relations, and less relevant to the core question of this project, it is reasonable to simplify them as uncertainty activists and advocates need to face. Again, leaders of registered churches clear have advantages on acquiring more accurate assessment of this uncertainty, which makes them the better partners of foreign advocates.

\textsuperscript{123} Both cases have been recorded in my interviews and media coverage. For example, there are waves of arrests in 1999 and 2009 because they are decade anniversaries of the 1989 democratic movement. Although it is never confirmed, it is believed that Chinese government has a list of dissentients and police will make sure they do not talk in public during these special occasions. Christopher Bodeen, "Tiananmen 20th anniversary brings new repression," \textit{The Washington Post}, June 4, 2009.
Christianity as a Possible Factor

Is the difficulty of entering China a Christian problem? It is possible that the semi-colonial history of China induces obstacles for Christian advocates to enter China because Western missionaries are seen as representatives of colonialism (Neill 1966; Stanley 1990)? If Christianity is the determinant, the difficulty for different Christian denominations should be similar. However, the Roman Catholic Church in China is subject to greater repression than other Christian denominations (Breslin 1980; Madsen 2003). Scholars have noticed that Catholicism in China experiences relatively intense internal and external conflict due to the complicated diplomatic relations among Taiwan, China, and the Vatican. Catholic activism is a “peculiar mix of antagonism and cooperation with the government.” The studies of Catholic activism demonstrate that external factors, not domestic conditions or ideological standpoints matter the most.

124 There are many “world religions” with believers living in multiple nations, but they do not necessarily possess the qualities of TANs. Daniel H. Levine and David Stoll (1997) study progressive Catholicism in Latin America and have had a strong local coalition with human rights activists and humanitarian workers since the 1970s. However, this coalition is not directly supported by the Vatican. Agents and organizations are already present before the Church decides to take part in it. “Empowerment and Power in Latin America” in Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (ed.), Transnational Religion & Fading States, Westview Press, 1997: 76. Margaret E. Crahan also points out there is a gap between bishops’ theologians’ social change agenda and actual actions of churches, where non-conflictual is often the norm. “Religion and Societal Change: The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America” in Carrie Gustafson and Peter Juviler (ed.) Religion and Human Rights: Competing Claims? M.E. Sharpe, 1999: 61.

125 There are an estimated 4,000 churches, 4,000 clergy, and 4 million believers in the Catholic cycle. Like their Protestant counterpart, there is a Catholic Patriotic Association, which is led by clergy chosen by CCP and serves as the only legal representative and highest holy authority of Chinese Catholicism. Catholicism in China is supposedly a TAN research topic: great regional imparity (oppressed local churches with strong foreign support) and constant confrontations between practitioners who recognize the Rome-centered norm of Catholicism and the “Patriotic” clergies backed by the Communist Party. The Vatican has acted aggressively to pressure the Chinese government to remove the controls over Catholicism in the past 60 years. However, the “movement” is limited to government-to-government negotiations. Unlike Protestantism, Catholic congregations as a whole remain very passive and compliant to the authorities of Beijing and the Vatican. Ashiwa and Wank: 1. Also R. Madsen. “Catholic Revival During the Reform Era” China Quarterly. 2003. Vol. 174: 468-487.

126 Madsen 2003: 468.
The studies of Catholic activism provide insights about the direction and internal characteristics of transnational religious advocacy. They help to explain why foreign missions and local believers are attracted to each other despite restrictions and obstacles. They suggest that the power disparity between different geographic locations drives the transnational movement. Catholic groups demonstrate distinct transnationality when they face environments in which Catholicism is dominant (e.g., Latin America) or subordinate (e.g., Asia). Baker (1997) pointed out that the West-imported religious communities in East Asia exhibit more autonomy and influence than native religious communities. This is because imported religious communities have international support to defend their autonomy, while native religious groups face great challenges from rising nationalism.\(^\text{127}\) Minority/subordinate environments seem to contribute to greater transnationality of religion. The tougher the local environment is, the more salient the outward, uncensored, and “foreign” nature of the religion may become. Dark (2000) examined religious changes in the Asia-Pacific region and found Christianity rising at an unprecedented rate, with China as a major contributor to that growth; Christianity’s rapid growth is likely to be related to persecution and suppression, which is not unusual throughout history.\(^\text{128}\) In sum, relevant literature suggests that the differences between religions or denominations are less important than the power disparity between host and delivering nations. Power disparity may trigger nationalism and, therefore, severe suppression of local Christian communities. Historically, Catholicism has received more political pressure than

\(^{127}\) “World Religions and National States: Competing Claims in East Asia” in Rudolph and Piscatori: 145.

Protestantism. Nevertheless, the difference in Christian labels does not explain the spatial variation within the same group.

Corruption and Personal Favoritism

One strong alternative to my explanation is the transnational opportunities created by personal skills, such as bribery, total secrecy, and publicity craftsmanship, means people would not share in common interviews. Participant observation was conducted so as to rule out these personal factors. In the context of authoritarianism, beginning transnational collaboration through total secrecy, successful lawsuits, and media exposure is unlikely. Bribery is a possible tool because Christian business communities, such as the famous “Wenzhou people,” have a strong influence on the local economy, and Wenzhou Christians do enjoy great latitude in religious freedom in China. However, as I observed in the past year, bribery is less likely to be a common strategy because Christians usually consider this kind of option to be immoral and financial conditions of most churches are not good enough to sustain such strategy. Also, the idea that corruption explains variation is at a minimum overstated. Government officials can only accepts

129 One example is the ordination incident of Guo Jincai (郭金才) in 2010. There was no significant local resistance except the rumor that seven Bishops were forced by police to attend the ceremony. The Chinese government decided to ordain Mr. Guo, a 42 year old Chinese Bishop and the vice chairperson of Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and this decision broke the unspoken agreement between the Vatican and Beijing that every ordination will be held after both sides agree on the candidate. The Report said the Vatican expressed clearly that “Bishop Lei had been informed, for some time that he was unacceptable to the Holy See as an episcopal candidate for proven and very grave reasons.” John Thavis, “Vatican condemns illegitimate ordination of bishop in China” Catholic News Service, July 5, 2011. Cited in www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1102658.htm.

bribes allowing individuals to violate the law only when the violation is unobserved. Aid to Christian groups is often observable so either something makes it acceptable. Consequently, individual bribery or favor cannot explain why transnational aid is accepted or punished differently across sectarian and provincial lines.
CHAPTER THREE
Religious Freedom Policy and the Registration Issues
of Chinese Protestant Groups

3.1 Religious Freedom Policy: The Changed and the Unchanged
3.2 Three Self Patriotic Movement and CPPCC-TSPM framework in the 1950s to 1979
3.3 The Institutional Reform and the Religious Freedom Doctrines in the Reform Era
3.4 When Jesus Meets Law: The Registration Issues of Protestant Groups in the 2000s

This chapter introduces the historical analysis of the increase in political restraint to transnational religious activism in China. Two lines of development have occurred in the past 60 years. First, official religious freedom discourse has fundamentally changed from a militant, intrusive, and corporatist style to a more secular, neutral and less state-central one. Directive religious management is transferring and the globally accepted norms of religious freedom seem to be internalized to some extent. Although state policy no longer requires officials to fully control regular religious activities, the new management method is still underdeveloped because the political institutions remain the same. The “rule by law” doctrine emphasized by the Hu Jintao government fails to establish a legalist relation between the state and Protestant groups because the core deadlock, independent social groups' the right of association, is unrecognized in the political system. The second line of development is the rapid growth of Protestant congregations and their demand for transnational exchanges and collaboration over the past three decades. While current religious regulation still forbid unauthorized transnational activities, many Chinese churches, including registered congregations,
disobey this restriction and demonstrate a strong spirit of activism to challenge this official policy. The open discourse and closed institutions constrain the development of transnational Protestant activism; any attempt to build a connection beyond existing platform will be crushed immediately by the regime. Yet, control becomes more and more difficult since the existing framework is viewed as insufficient and outdated even by many state-sponsored churches and frontline officials.

This chapter illustrates these two lines of development from the 1950s to the 2000s; religious freedom policy based on “Three Self Patriotic Movement” (TSPM) and transnational collaboration in terms of the treatment of underground missions. The findings lay out the historical foundation to support basic premises of this project: (1) Chinese religious freedom policy is based on the core agenda of protecting the freedom of government-sponsored groups and oppressing unsponsored groups. (2) Their legal status becomes the key standard of local enforcement agencies to treat religious groups. (3) Accepting foreign donations and services become a tacit breakthrough of this biased religious freedom policy because all local participants, registered and unregistered, recognize the benefits of evading this restriction.

By observing the increasing incidents of disobedience without the state’s direct interference and punishment as in the past decade, it is reasonable to argue that the government shows great restraint to the growing religious activism, although the restraint is a tactic and varies significantly across groups and locations. Dahl's thesis of opposition is correct from the perspective of Chinese history: before 1979, there is little incentive for the regime to tolerate any potential opposition when the cost of repression is close to zero
due to total submission and the weak, dependent, and divided features of Christian enterprises. After 1979, when Protestant activism was no longer trivial and discredited by the anti-imperialist discourse, restraint on the government side appeared.

Departing from conventional criticism made by human rights lawyers and religious freedom activists, the chapter shows that the major predicament of Chinese religious freedom is not the government's failure to meet its constitutional duties. On the contrary, CCP takes the Constitution and its legal promises seriously and frontline officials especially take them to heart. The law is created by CCP with no objection and it has made legal regulations to reflect the ideological and political needs of the regime. The rigid interpretation and despotic political structure means officials cannot deviate far from the written meanings in the Constitution and key policy documents: religious freedom as people's right to be free from religion and registration requirements for preventing autonomous religious groups to jeopardize this mandate "freedom" already granted to registered groups.

Nevertheless, fully executing the principles and regulations is virtually impossible under current circumstances. Unregistered congregations have become three times larger than registered churches. Frontline officials must be flexible and selective in enforcing regulations and registrations. Therefore restraints can occur when activists encourage frontline officials' in "law-breaking" behavior by working out a way to satisfy the minimum legal requirements while respecting the needs of churches to keep the independency and to grow, to propagate, and even to collaborate with foreigners.
3.1 Religious Freedom Policy: The Changed and The Unchanged

Chapter 2 explores an internal process of spiral collaboration and differentiates roles of government leadership, advocating strategy, and a degree of collaborative effort between local practitioners in this process. The model of internal spiral implies that the “power” of this transnational religious advocacy network is from the institutional advantages of registered groups and solidarity of both registered and unregistered Christian churches. This solidarity reshapes and rebuilds the substance of religious freedom under the name of the “Three Self” patriotic doctrine the regime demanded.\(^{131}\)

However, the content and current status of this government-defined religious freedom is under debate. Scholars and experts have different views on whether it has changed from demanding total submergence in Mao’s period to recognizing nominal subordination and tolerating certain advocacy and entrepreneurship today. Opponents believe that religious freedom remains highly repressed while supporters see significant progress.

This dissertation argues that changes occur in the policy executive level while the guiding doctrines and central political structure have barely shifted. It is an uneven result of the delayed political reform after gradual economic liberalization; the enforcement portion of the institutions evolves while the decision-making part remains the same. Frontline officials realize the need to relax some outdated regulations. Some realize from experience that transnational religious collaboration rarely poses any threat to the regime,

\(^{131}\) Different from the Western concept of religious freedom focusing on protection of believers’ legal rights, Chinese version of religious freedom focuses on protection of non-believers; especially the ideological purity of atheist party members. Under this logic, any form of propagation is forbidden. According to Li Weihan, former head of the United Front Department and an influential theorist of Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the goal of religious freedom policy is “keeping non-believers from zealous believers.” Leung 2005: 899.
and permit some religious aid projects to bring financial benefits to the community. Yet they cannot do so without worrying that the restraint might harm their career. When the rule-breaking cases go public, their superiors may hear negative comments from their career competitors or superiors may not like the rule being broken. These institutional concerns make openness and restraint possible but they are legally and ideologically wrong, while "religious freedom" in principle is repeated guaranteed by official discourse. While the growth of the religious population and its organizations is the reality of the past three decades, certain restraint and openness toward this reality become necessary. Due to strong regulatory and corporatist tendency in current political institutions, restraint and openness would be tacit, selected, and back-and-forth based on circumstances, but the pressure to push for a full-scale reform is evident and growing.

These latent features of institutional reform have been identified in political economic literature. As the post-socialist reform expert and economist Jim Leitzel has argued, over-regulation and strict authoritarian rules make rule evasion unavoidable and common in daily practices. Delayed reform and outdated rules make law breaking and disobeying regulations attractive and justifiable (1995, 2003). In China, economic reform loosens state control over economic affairs and some level of societal activities, but does not reach the political realm and the society organizations closely monitored by the political institutions. Harsh repression and zero tolerance do not necessarily increase the efficiency of government regulations but could rather create a “balloon effect” (Andreas 1994), “broken-window parable” (Wilson and Kelling 1982), or “cascades of disobedience” (Leitzel 2003) in practice: like squeezing a balloon full of air, rule-
breakers would not simply change by force; they move to another area, and the rule-breaking examples in one area could inspire others and spill over to another area, which may lead to a total breakdown of social norms. Leitzel calls this “a Law of Motion of Socialism:” in a socialist system where massive disobedience and evasion is inevitable because the all-pervasive and over- regulatory system cannot actually relocate resources and innovate itself to new challenges efficiently as it promised, and therefore, enduring corruption and rule-breaking is the “law.”

Chinese leaders understand this problem and adopt the dual-track approach (Cao, Fan and Woo 1997) to deal with the deficiency: liberalize its local and private sector and keep centralizing its key political and strategic sectors. This dual-track strategy is successful in terms of preserving the stability of the regime and preventing the level of corruption and organized crime that greatly pervade the Post-Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the half-done reform leaves central-planning as the virtue of organizational life of Chinese citizens. Therefore, religious activists and advocates, whose work often leads to rule-breaking and needed social provision, are repressed yet welcomed at the same time by different parts of the Chinese political system.

In order to reveal this long-term struggle over religious freedom policy and its changing impacts on religious groups, this chapter examines the historical development of religious management doctrines in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), especially the transformation from the 1951 Directives of Progressing Religious Reforms, the 1982

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Document 19, to the 2004 Regulation of Religious Affairs. On the one hand, the Three-
Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) on Protestant Christians was state-driven and one of the
longest political movements in China, and its core values, total subordinate to Party
leadership and obedience to needs of the state, have not been changed significantly. On
the other, the lives of the clergy and lay workers of it experience dramatic transformation
from being government affiliates with full benefits to employees of self-reliant social
organizations. As millions of workers of state and collective enterprises were released by
the economic reform, TSPM churches could no longer rely on the support of government.

While economic reform goes deeper and wider, the economics and management of

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133 On March 31, 1982, CCP publishes the On the Basic Viewpoint and Policy of the Religious Question
during Our Country's Socialist Period, later called Document 19. It admits the mistakes of the Party made
in religious policy such as the Cultural Revolution and summarizes basic policy viewpoints on 12 related
subjects for the future, including: (1) religion is a historical pheromone and will not disappear even in a
socialist period. (2) Religious issues in China are diverse, complex, and having a mass character. (3) Since
the founding of the People's Republic of China, there have been many "twists and turns" [mistakes] in the
Party's work with regard to the religion. (4) The basic policy the Party has adopted toward respect for and
protection of the freedom of religious belief. (5) To win over, unite and educate persons in religious circles
is primarily the task of religious professionals. (6) To make equitable arrangements for places of worship is
a means of implementing the Party's religious policy, and is also an important material condition for the
normalization of religious activity. (7) To give full play to the function of the patriotic religious
organizations is to implement the Party's religious policy and is an important organizational guarantee for
the normalization of religious activities. (8) Educating a new generation of patriotic clergy in a planned
way. (9) Communist Party members cannot have religious beliefs and ethnic minorities party members
need to adopt and respect the traditions in their lives. (10) A determined crackdown on all criminal and
anti-revolutionary activities which hide behind the facade of religion, which includes all superstitious
practices which fall outside the scope of religion and are injurious to the national welfare as well as to the
life and property of the people. (11) Our policy is to actively develop friendly international religious
contacts, but also to firmly resist infiltration by hostile foreign religious forces. There are reactionary
religious groups abroad, especially the imperialistic ones such as the Vatican and Protestant Foreign-
mission societies, who strive to use all possible occasions to carry on their efforts at infiltration "to return to
the China mainland." (12) The basic guarantee for the successful handling of the religious question is the
strengthening of the Party's leadership. The Party's religious work is an important constituent of the Party's
united front and of its work among the masses since it touches upon various aspects of social life. Wei De-
dong (魏德东) "The 30 Years Anniversary of Document 19 (纪念十九号文件发表三十周年)" Selected
Works of Religious Affairs Work in the New Era (新时期宗教工作文献选编) (Religious Culture
Publishing House, 1995): 53. Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University has a collection
of Chinese religious affairs documents in English.

established and unregistered churches become complex as well as any private enterprise. Now properties, licensing, hiring, accounting and other administrative issues are the common disputes between them and the government. Registration issue is the center of these disputes: it decides which church can receive the official recognition and can use it to bargain with government on these logistic issues; and most important of all, use it to as protection to deal with unexpected political disturbance and policy shift on foreign aid.

This TSPM movement began in the 1950s to absorb all Protestant groups, but failed, yet the institutional and policy legacy continues even today. It creates the registration policy based on TSPM membership and the opposition to resist being absorbed into this state-driven enterprise. The two seemingly independent Protestant blocs, one registered under TSPM and another resisting it, are both affected by the changing definitions of this official “religious freedom policy” in very different ways, especially when foreign donations and assistance are increasingly important for their development. Since the 1980s, the rule-bound TSPM churches were granted more freedom as legally protected civil organizations but failed to freely engage foreign donors and missionary agencies due to the Three Self policy. The unregistered congregations in the “House Church” bloc, on the other hand, had received aid and services from foreign parties despite their underground status. After the 1990s when foreign missionary aid and services came to China more frequently and usually unpunished, the official religious freedom policy based on “Three Self” practically created a twisted reality where law-breaking was

134 One exception is the Amity Foundation, which was used as the portal of accepting foreign donation. However, the reach of Amity’s operation is very limited; mostly within Jiangsu Province and nearby Long River area cities.
normal and law-binding was financially punished. The 2000 “Rules of Managing
Religious Activities of Foreigners” reflected this concern and tried to re-regulate this
uneven restriction. 135 The effect so far is limited and more and more registered
congregations want to participate in transnational exchanges and collaboration. 136

The Conflicting Trends

Aggregate studies of Chinese religions fail to recognize this delicate and constant
change of religious policy and its diverse impacts on churches and their foreign
collaborators. For most coders of religious freedom indicators, the Chinese religious
situation is only slightly improved in the post-Mao period and keeps almost unchanged in
the past 30 years. For example, the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA)
estimates religions in China as highly repressed, highly regulated, and showing over-
average state favoritism to some religious brands or groups. 137 Marshall (2007) and Grim
and Finke (2009) code China as having the worst religious freedom, 6 out of a 7-point
scale (1 is the freest). Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Data project describes

135 “Rules for the Implementation of the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens
within the Territory of the People Republic of China” Retrieved in 04/01/2012 from
http://www.purdue.edu/crcs/itemResources/PRCDoc/pdf/Rules_for_the_Implementation_of_the_Provision
s_on_the_Administration_of_Religious_Activities_of_Aliens_within_the_Territory_of_the_People.pdf
136 For example, Chinese students from both TSPM and House Church backgrounds are now the major
foreign enrolment in major Chinese-language theological seminaries in the United States. Interview No. 1.
September 21, 2009.
137 ARDA’s religious freedom indexes use a 1-10 scale and include several different measurements (1 is
best and 10 is worse). China’s Religious Persecution Index (RPI) is 9; Government Regulation Index (GRI)
is 8.7; and Government Favoritism of Religion Index (GFI) is 5.2 (Eastern Asian average is 2.9). The GRI,
GFI and SRI values reported on the National Profiles are averages from the 2003, 2005 and 2008
International Religious Freedom reports, while the Religious Persecution measure is an average from the
2005 and 2008 reports. All other measures derived from the International Religious Freedom reports were
that China is always in the worst performed group (score 0 in a 0-2 scale) among the 195 countries since 1981 to 2009; the situation is improved only in 1986 (score 1). For these researchers, continuing appearance of religious persecutions and restricts indicates the core policy of the regime has not shifted. However, even though persecutions and harassments have not disappeared, the content of Chinese religious freedom policy has changed (Wan 2007). From the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) Political Prisoner Database, arrested members of Protestant churches occupies 5.27% of total political prisoners (8% if includes “cult” groups and unrecognized Christian groups). It is much smaller than Falun Gong (20.7%) and Tibetan Buddhist groups (66%). Among Protestant political prisoners, 90% of the cases happen before 2000. It is clear that fewer dissidents are arrested after 2000; the decline is especially evident for Protestant groups. The restraint could be even more prevailing if we consider the size of Protestant Christian communities is continued growing. How can we explain the increasing variation between religious groups and the state?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist (Mahayana)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guanyin Famin</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic (registered)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic (unregistered)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic (unspecific)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian (unspecific)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

139 There are 74 out of 686 arrests after 2000, including mainstream Protestants and cult groups like “Shouters,” “South China Church” and unidentified Protestant groups.
The political motivations behind the repression to Falun Gong and Tibetan Buddhists are obvious and comprehensible (Chang 2004; Smith 2010); however, the reasons for Protestant groups are not so clear.\textsuperscript{140} The difference in scale of repression does not mean the standard of Chinese Communist Party on religions is fundamentally different. On the contrary, Chinese government shows very consistent but flexible attitude toward its potential social competitors. CECC annual report states that:

\textit{Officials took into custody or confined to their homes hundreds of members of unregistered Protestant congregations who assembled into large groups or across congregations…Cases of harassment and detention of Protestants since late 2010 suggest that authorities’ sensitivities have intensified toward Protestants who}

\textsuperscript{140} Falun Gong became the target of repression since the massive street protest for legal persecutions on its members in front of CCP’s headquarter in Beijing in 1999. Tibetan Buddhists have faced severe repression since the uprisings in the 1960s and the nature of the conflict between them and the CCP is more ethnic-oriented than religious.
organize into large groups or across congregations, or who have contact with foreign individuals or organizations.\textsuperscript{141}

Protestant groups could become the targets of state repression like other religions when their organizations become too big or connected to foreign advocacy that is deemed threatening to the regime. Although the state policy is no longer mandating officials to eliminate or directly control religious activities since the publishing of CCP’s “Document No. 19,” the new management method is still underdeveloped. The “rule by law” doctrine emphasized by high-ranking officials is still on paper. Many Christians believe that failure to establish a normal relation between the state and Protestant community because the core deadlock, the right of association of unregistered churches, is not recognized by the regime. The registration or “legalization” issue of underground groups is treated differently across provincial and sectarian lines. The CECC report also points out the strategic importance of registered establishments when “the government also called for ‘guiding’ members of unregistered Protestant groups to worship at registered sites.” Arrested underground Protestants were sent to registered churches of their residencies instead of prisons for “re-education” and “thought reform.”\textsuperscript{142} The clergy of registered churches have no legal power or facilities to hold the protestors in custody so they basically can walk free after the “chat” with the clergy and showing around the “new spiritual homes” they could have if they wanted to. Popular explanation based on classic Party-State theory especially fails to account for this “improvement” of treating


\textsuperscript{142} Ibid: 18.
Protestants in general and utilizing some Protestant groups to “work” on or co-opt others in the recent decade.

The second unsolved puzzle brought up by Protestantism is the rapid growth of transnational religious collaboration, which is clearly forbidden by current religious policy, and the uneven distribution of this collaboration between registered and unregistered churches. From existing reports of religious persecutions and suppression, government restraint toward Protestant groups increase in places away from economic and political centers, where most foreigners live and work. For example, Fujian, Yunnan and Sichuan province have the best record of religious restraint toward underground churches, for the reasons have not been explored by academic literature. This chapter illustrates these two lines of development from the 1950s to the 2000s: religious freedom policy in terms of “Three-Self Patriotic Movement” and transnational collaboration in terms of the treatment of underground missions. The findings lay out the historical foundation to support the basic assumptions of this project. The next section discusses the origin and political functions of TSPM set up by post-1949 history.

### 3.2 Three Self Patriotic Movement and CPPCC-TSPM Framework

**In the 1950s to 1979**

Western critics often see the pre-1979 history of Chinese religious freedom is a one-sided victory of an atheist agenda toward total religious elimination. Many Chinese elites hold the same view but they justify the victory through the angel of anti-imperialism: “every Chinese are taught from childhood that religion is opium, and since
they are quite familiar with China’s disastrous experience with the Opium War, they find religion so abhorrent that they unconsciously substitute emotion for science;” words by the former Anglican Bishop and later TSPM president Ting Kuang-hsun.\textsuperscript{143} The anti-imperialism prevailing at the time legitimizes the demand to build independent Chinese churches, not relying on the support and directives of foreign missionary agencies.\textsuperscript{144} Ting and early Christian leaders deciding to begin the Three Self Patriotic Movement, know they there is a critical decision in front of them after the brutal civil war between the United States-backed Kuomintang (KMT) regime and the Soviet-supported Chinese Communist Party:

\textit{Freedom of religion has become the universal principle recognized by the world; this principle cannot be rejected by anyone. Chinese Communist Party, in both public announcements and private occasions, recognizes and shows respect to this universal principle. However, many Christians doubt whether this respect is genuine or strategic. Is this respect temporary, or is it permanent? My answer is: CCP’s religious freedom policy is sincere....but CCP’s respect is conditional; if a personal or a group is reactionary or superstitious, or they use religion to conduct reactionary tasks, they will intervene. (Wu Yao-tsung, 1949).\textsuperscript{145}

Wu Yao-tsung, director of YMCA’s publishing department, and many Chinese Christians made the judgment that as long as Christians insisted on CCP’s united front

\textsuperscript{143} The quotation is from Marsh 2011: 149.

\textsuperscript{144} More recent work has found indigenization of Chinese churches has begun much earlier than CCP-directed TSPM movement. In fact, the truly independent and locally rooted churches suffer the greatest repression, such as Wang Ming-Dao, a self-taught Protestant pastor who built Christian Tabernacle church in 1937 and was one of the largest Chinese-owned evangelical churches in China during the 1940s.He refused to join TSPM and imprisoned for 22 years. Lian Xi, \textit{Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China} (Yale University Press, 2010): 116.

\textsuperscript{145} The article is originally printed on Tian-Feng magazine on August, 1949. Wu Yao-tsung “Christianity under People’s Democratic Dictatorship,” \textit{Selected Works of Wu Yao-tsung} (Shanghai: TSPM publishing, 2010): 185.
policy of anti-imperialism, persecution of Christianity should be temporary in the chaos and lawless of war; the change was mostly a new king to the worldly throne. The choice was clear when knowing the new king would not tolerate disobedience. Three months before the charismatic leader and his followers stood on the wall of Forbidden City and declared the victory in Beijing on June 30, 1949, Mao Zedong wrote a article titled “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship” to express his view of the new rule:

> Imperialist aggression shattered the fond dreams of the Chinese about learning from the West. It was very odd -- why were the teachers always committing aggression against their pupil? The Chinese learned a good deal from the West, but they could not make it work and were never able to realize their ideals... We are talking about how to deal with domestic and foreign reactionaries, the imperialists and their running dogs, not about how to deal with anyone else...

> ‘You are dictatorial.’ My dear sirs, you are right, that is just what we are.  

In the Post-War War II context, everyone at the time knew the designated target of Mao’s words, domestic and foreign reactionaries, includes Christian missions and their Chinese followers. When the early Sinologists believed the revolution is domestically determined. Mao knew his success was related to superpower politics between the United States and Soviet Union. However, superpower politics also gave transnational religions a hope for a foothold. The United States, for example, had been seen as the alliance to defeat the Japanese imperialism and so the 1,000 American missionaries

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147 The emphasis of imperialism is not only a propaganda scheme. Mao’s earliest works show his worry about interference from the United States and the world order supported by it. For him, anti-imperialism is not a moral judgment, it is a strategy of survival. See Mao Ibid.
should be friends of China. Surviving eight years of the Sino-Japan War and a much longer civil war, missionaries, educators and clergy never abandoned their enterprises and parishes, including 240 schools, 13 universities, 210 seminaries and Bible colleges, 322 hospitals and 17 publishers in China until they were forced to leave in 1952.\footnote{Philip L. Wickeri, \textit{Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China's United Front} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988): 118. Number of Christian publishers are from CCP's censorship report in 1951. Ying, 2008a: 123.}

According to Cartwright (1949) study, more than half the foreign missionaries decided to stay in 1949 when news and rumors about Red Army and communist collaborators tortured Christians and took away church properties.\footnote{While most of the coastal areas were controlled by KMT regime before 1937, many inland Catholic missions were facing the present of communist dictatorship much earlier than protestant groups. Reportedly 40 Catholic missionaries and 15-20 Protestant missionaries lost their lives before 1949. Marsh (2011) points out that this different experience make Catholics start to oppose Communist take-over and share little of Protestant’s optimism about continuing missions after 1949. Marsh 2011: 159. Originally from Richard Bush, Jr. \textit{Religion in Communist China} (New York: Abingdon, 1970): 50; also God’s. \textit{Underground in Asia} (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1953).} The incoming socialist dictatorship seemed not the end of the Great China Mission in the beginning, especially for Protestants. Comparatively, Protestantism does not have a central authority located in a foreign land and Protestant organizations have worked for indigenization since the 1920s. Most schools, board of charity organizations, and missionary agencies have been co-run by Chinese and few foreign nationals.\footnote{Ying 2008a: Ch.3.} By adapting the new environment, Protestant activists emphasize they are "pro-Christianity," not "anti-Communism." Dr. Frank. T. Cartwright, a Methodist missionary and the chairman of the China Committee of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, wrote letters to fellow missionaries asking them to act cooperatively. His organization also appealed the United
States government to give up current foreign policy and recognize the new political order:\textsuperscript{151}

\textit{We believe our churches would welcome a bold proclamation of policy by the President of the United States, delivered before a joint session of the Congress,...}

\textit{We believe the further advance of Communism in China and Asia cannot permanently be stopped by military action. Such military assistance as the United States placed at the disposal of the Chinese Nationalists proved unavailing.}\textsuperscript{152}

In addition, dictatorship that links foreign-sponsored religions with invasion is nothing new in Chinese history. Emperor Wuzong of Tang Dynasty (814-846) persecuted Buddhists and forced monks and nuns to return to lay life because he considered Buddhism a foreign religion that was a threat to his own Taoist tradition. He went after other foreign religions including Islam, Judaism, and Nestorian Christian churches.\textsuperscript{153}

Although neither Christianity nor Islam was popular in China before twentieth century, events like the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) and Muslim uprisings in the late-nineteenth century reminded political elites that these foreign religions may not be directly sponsored by, but always relate to foreign forces that might threaten the stability


\textsuperscript{152} Editor's supplement article to Dr. Cartwright article, "The Churches and U.S. Policy," \textit{Far Eastern Survey}, 18(26) (Dec. 28, 1949): 305-306

and legitimacy of present Chinese authority. The key for foreign-imported religions to survive in China is to adopt and indigenize. Protestant Christians believe they have done so already since the consensus of the international missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910 (Sumiko 2000). A China Continuation Committee was formed in 1913 to advocate a coalition to unit different denominations and national backgrounds, leading to formation of the National Christian Council of China (NCC) in 1922. The work of NCC ultimately contributed to the formation of the first organically united Protestant platform in China, the interdenominational National Church of Christ in China (CCC) in Shanghai in 1927. The NCC-CCC framework included 60% of Chinese Protestant Christians and became the first target of CCP's anti-religious take-over in the 1950s.

Table 3-2 Protestant Missions in China before 1949

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sending Agency</th>
<th>Number in China at Postwar Peak</th>
<th>Number in China in 1949</th>
<th>Change in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Baptist</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>-41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciples of Christ</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical and Reformed</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>-31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Presbyterian</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>-39.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

154 The authority was the secular power supported by the mixture of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist tradition of righteous governance (“mandate of heaven, tianming) of the Middle Kingdom. After the 1911 republic revolution, this traditional value system is tumbling and opens for challenge. Marsh 2011: 158.


Southern Presbyterian 62 20 -67.7
Protestant Episcopal 142 69 -51.4
Seventh Day Adventist 136 89 -34.6
United Lutheran 24 5 -79.2
YMCA 17 12 -29.4
Total 1037 608 AVE.(-45.5%)

Source: Cartwright (1949), Protestant mission in Communist China

The predecessor of the Communist Regime was neither friendly nor tolerant to religious activism as well. Although it is reasonable to perceive that the pre-1949 relaxation on Christianity based on the fact that both generations of KMT’s leadership, Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek were Protestant Christians, the actual policy of KMT is not pro-Protestantism. In June 1931, the Central Committee of KMT publishes the Regulation of Guiding Foreign Religious Organizations.157 The target of the Regulation is the foreign-sponsored religious organizations active in engaging Chinese youth, such as the YMCA, which are suspected to be in competition with political parties and accused of “cultural invasion.” The Regulation asks all missionary groups to be under the supervision of the KMT and Nationalist government. Their regular meetings should invite KMT members and they may not advocate thinking against KMT’s San-min Doctrine.158 In addition, without proper registration (registering with the KMT Central

158 San-min Doctrine or Three People's Principles are political philosophy of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, which aims at promoting Chinese nationalism (The Principle of Minzú), democracy (The Principle of Mínquán), and Welfare (The Principle of Minshēng). The platform is highlighted by the KMT as the highest political
Executive Committee and then filing reports to local government), the government can ban the religious organization. However, the Regulation is never fully enforced due to continuing turmoil and conflict. Only three Chinese Christian organizations have registered. Before 1949, no foreign-sponsored organization applied for registration and no group has been punished.

The Regulation proves that the militant, intrusive, and corporatist kind of policy toward religious activism is not unique to Communist ideology or because “imperialism” (the United States and the United Kingdom; alliances to KMT) are behind those missions as critics often state. It is a consistent phenomenon since missionary enterprises and their social work has become one of the important social forces since the late nineteenth century. For example, Tai Chi-tao, a member of the KMT’s Standing Central Committee and the Minister of Propaganda met with David Z.T. Yui, the Chief Executive

guideline against the radical socioeconomic reform promoted by Communism, but the fundamental ideas are shared by both CCP and KMT. In fact, Dr. Sun proposes “supervised democracy” as the transitional period before constitutional democracy, which is similar to democratic dictatorship of Lenin in the way that legalizes party-state system and strip civil and political rights away from regular citizens. Dr. Wang Shih-Chieh (王世傑), French-educated constitutional expert and congressional representative of KMT, argues that “supervised democracy” is single-party system but it is still democracy since its framework puts legal restrictions on the party and itemizes the boundaries of party’s power. Wang Shih-Chieh and Ch’ien Tuan-sheng (1946/1997), Comparative Constitution Law (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press).


160 Anthony C. Yu has argues in his book on religion and state in China that “there has never been a period in China’s historical past in which the government of the state, in imperial and post-imperial form, has pursued a neutral policy toward religion, let alone encouraged, in terms dear to American idealism, its ‘free exercise.’ The impetus to engage religion on the part of the central government is for the purpose of regulation, control and exploitation whenever it is deemed feasible and beneficial to the state.” Although it may be also true that American definition of religious freedom is exceptional and few states would let religion alone, his work provides systematic evidence to reject the conventional wisdom that Chinese state is not religious and always act neutrally. Anthony C. Yu, “On State and Religion in China: A Brief Historical Reflection,” Religion East and West 3 (2003): 1–20; State and Religion in China (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2004).
Officer of YMCA and the founder of the Red Cross Society of China in the aftermath of KMT’s northern military campaign. Tai demanded Yui follow three principles of party-religious relationship: respect religious freedom, work under the *San-min* Doctrine, and the YMCA would belong to the Chinese people.¹⁶¹ A similar scene reappeared when the Communists took power. Zhou Enlai, Head of the Central United Front Department and later the first Premier of the Communist republic, invited five mid-ranked Christian administrators of the YMCA and other organizations to Beijing after the military victory of CCP was expected. In the meeting on May 2, 1950, Zhou told his Christian guests that the Party had two bottom lines. First, Chinese religious groups should insist on Chinese anti-imperialism and cut their ties with Western states. Second, religious freedom is protected as long as it is about individual beliefs, not its organizational and associational rights:

> Although the Party believes in materialism while religions are based on idealism, we recognize the difference and only request religious groups to free from the control of imperialism. The Party will not wage anti-religion campaign and will not go into churches to preach Marxist-Leninism. At the same time, the churches should not go on street to propagate their beliefs.¹⁶²

The principles of two parties from two ends of political spectrum are similar toward foreign-sponsored religious groups: the first priority is to secure a non-liberal version of “religious freedom,” which is defined by them as freedom from being captured by hostile groups: to prevent religious groups or Chinese youth to become alienated from its official

doctrine or at least not become sympathizers to its opponents’ ideology. Both parties accuse Christian social organizations as agents of imperialism; however, imperialism in this context is closer to a witch-hunting strategy. Both CCP and KMT know social groups like YMCA or National Christian Council of China are not agents or spies of foreign governments, but trying to discredit these foreign-sponsored groups can be propagated as achievements of “fighting” imperialism and winning over the nationalist crown. From a self-interest standpoint, these nationalist claims are also beneficial for the mid-ranking Chinese employees and clergy to obtain better promotion opportunities. Indigenization of Chinese Christian enterprises, at least for the Protestant part, has been the trend since the late 1920s.

The side changing history from 1949 to 1950 reflects the self-fulfilling prophecy of imperialist accusation. Nationalists and reformists within Christian organizations gradually turn these church-owned enterprises political. Sympathizers in YMCA and other Christian institutes quickly recognize the legitimacy of the new regime and denounce the old one despite the caution of many Christian leaders. In the eve of revolution, rival parties had tried to win over as many religious institutions as possible for their own causes; the one winging the civil war also won over most of social organizations including churches. For instance, T. C. Chao (趙紫宸), world-famous Chinese theologian at the time and dean of School of Religion at Yenching University,

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sent series of letters to the United States to support the new regime after Beijing was captured by the Red Army. Kindopp et al. (2004) points out that many student organizers of YMCA become the future backbone of TSPM local administration. Ying (2008a) finds that 12 out of 25 preparatory committee members of TSPM are from YMCA system. By the end of 1952, without massive physical coercion, 60% of Chinese Christians population signs the document to proclaim the loyalty to the Communist regime and denounce the foreign missionary societies who have supported them for more than a century.

The carefully crafted “backdoor” collaboration between nationalist Protestants and CCP is the reason of this successful turnover. In an internal document from CCP to

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164 In 1948, the first general assembly of the World Council of Churches elected him as one of its six presidents. He is one of the 40 church leaders who signed the first *Three-Self Manifesto*. His letters in 1949 include “Days of Rejoicing in China” “Christian Churches in Communist China,” “Christianity and Crisis,” and “Red Peiping After Six Months” praises the discipline of Red Army and believes Christians would receive fair treatment after CCP seizes power.


166 Many suspect that many Protestant Christians who actively support the denouncement campaigns and the establishment of TSPM are secret Communist Party members. For example, Pastor Li Chu-wen of Shanghai International Church, the largest church in Shanghai serving mainly foreign nationals, admits that he is an undercover Communist member when Red Guards tortured him during Cultural Revolution. Ying Fuk-tsang (邢福增) 2008a, *Christianity’s Failure in China? Essays on the History of Chinese Communist Movement and Christianity* (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies):70-71.

provinces and cities, *Directives of Progressing Religious Reforms 1951*, CCP admits that Three Self and other patriotic movements in this time are promoted by it.

*From these and other experience in the past, it is impossible to expect that an effective reform movement of Protestant or Catholic Christians is self-initiative. It can only happen and develop under the aggressive directives of the Party and People’s government...regular Christians, for their survival and interests, are unable to not participating in the reform.*

Different from Soviet and other Eastern European nations where Orthodox churches have long history and strong social bases, Chinese Christian communities are feeble and in many ways are much easier to be captured by international and domestic forces. CCP leaders have learned from Soviet experience and added a new twist to it based on its own experience on fighting with KMT, who has the ideological advantage on persuading Christians to suspect atheist Communists. As Soviet helped the schismatic clergy to start a “coup” within Orthodox Church in 1922, CCP adopted a similar method in the 1950s and obtained a successful result in shorter time.\(^{169}\) In Soviet Union, Patriarch Tikhon was released by the court and the schismatic church continually losing support. The unpleasant result forced the Soviet government to give up the plan in 1924 when Lenin died.\(^{170}\) CCP instigated some pro-Communist Christians to begin anti-imperialist campaigns and helped them with propaganda machine and mass mobilization. During the meetings of Zhou Enlai and pro-Communist Christians in 1950, a ten-point document

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\(^{170}\) Stalin begins his new strategy on repressing religion through collectivization of church properties with carefully designed steps of social mobilization such as arresting church elders, anti-religion activists removing cross and bells, and “anti-religious carnival” vandalizing church properties. Marsh 2011: 61.
was drafted and revealed in the CPPCC conference on May 20 and mailed to 1000 Christian leaders for demanding their support on July 28.

The document, later called *the Way for Chinese Christians in Building New China* or *Three-Self Manifesto* in short, highlights the principles of self-administration, self-support and self-propagation, but the hidden agenda is to rebuild the leadership of Chinese churches through thought reform. The *Three-Self Manifesto* signifies the beginning of a four-year movement to purge current administrations of all Protestant enterprises and possible dissidents within established churches. Since 1950, Wu and his collaborators traveled across China and organize public gatherings in major cities to promote the *Manifesto*. In the beginning two months, the self-promoted movement progressed slowly. On September 8, 1950, under Mao’s personal order, *People’s Daily* published the *Manifesto* in the front page and a signed editorial to praise this “spontaneous patriotic movement” with a detailed list of 1527 co-signers.\(^{171}\) The purging movement was combining with CCP’s new wave of anti-imperialist campaign since the Korean War broke up on June 25, 1950. Before Chinese army joined the war on October 19, patriotic campaigns had already organized throughout the major cities. On October 10, collaborators led the last annual meeting of National Christian Council of China (1922-1950), the biggest Protestant association and missionary platform in China, and declare the second version of *Manifesto*. While the first version abstractly denounced the financial sponsorship from the West, the second *Manifesto* added provocative political missions to Chinese churches: patriotic Christians want to (1) passionately participate in

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\(^{171}\) Signed editorials must have the authorization of CCP. CCP literature published latter also recognizes and shows proud of this resolute action. Ren Jie 2007: *Ibid.*
the movement of *Anti-America and Aiding Korea War*, (2) support the governmental policies on dealing with land reform and anti-revolutionaries, and (3) resolve on rejecting any temptation from imperialism, helping government to find reactionaries and villains, exposing the plots on Three-self movement, and organizing denouement campaigns in all Christian churches and organizations.\(^{172}\)

After hundreds of “denouncement meetings” in 133 major cities where Christians were forced to accuse and criticize foreign missionaries, their Chinese co-workers and any possible “anti-revolutionaries” inside churches, the first National Protestant Conference opened in Beijing on July 22, 1954. The conference decided the basic institutional structure of Chinese Protestantism for the next 6 decades: Chinese Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Committee became the only legal authority of Chinese Protestantism and the first institutional implement of “democratic dictatorship” above Chinese Protestants. The first generation of TSPM body includes 232 representatives from 62 churches and organizations from 18 provincial areas; those organizations have been purged and seared to follow the political agenda in *Manifesto*. The era of “Great China Missions” is ended (Price 1952).

There is a four-stage process to transform Protestantism in 1950 to 1954 (Vala 2008). First, craft a new Protestant collective identity through correcting three "wrongs" of old identity: denying existing political identity assigned by class status, "opiating" mass with faulty hegemonic identity, and subordinating to organizational identity controlled by foreign imperialists. Second, set up the system of Three Self Patriotic

Movement to promote the new collective identity. Third, impose a new TSPM hegemony through "thought reform" on church leaders and align them with the CCP's atheist agenda. Four, monopolize Protestantism under the TSPM.  

By the early 1952, the number of Protestant missionaries have declined from 1,800-1,900 to less than 100.  

40 American missionaries requested to leave but could not obtain travel permit from Chinese government; 11 were in prison. Foreigners in Chinese Christian enterprises became liability of their organizations and Chinese colleagues to anti-American imperialist accusation. Since February 1951, CCP announced the “Law for the Punishment of Counterrevolutionaries” and few key Protestant leaders are arrested without clear charges. The chilling effect enhanced the speed of TSPM’s purging actions. In April, CCP invited 150 Chinese Protestant leaders to Beijing and the meeting “discussed” the new centralized leadership supported by the government:

We believe that the care of People's Government on Protestant churches is very deliberate and well-considered in every possible way. The Article 5 of “The Common Program of the CPPCC” guarantees the freedom of religion, and we

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173 Vala 2008: 40-52.  
177 Two of famous cases are Methodist missionary F. Olin Stockwell and Chen Wenyuan (陳文淵), Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in China. Stockwell is charged with espionage activities and deported in 1953. His case can see his memoir, With God In Red China: The Story of Two Years in Chinese Communist Prisons (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953): 72-85. Chen’s case can see Ying Fuk-tsang (邢福增) 2008a, Christianity’s Failure in China? Essays on the History of Chinese Communist Movement and Christianity (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino- Christian Studies): 56. Ying’s work collects documents from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong; it is the most detailed and balanced work on the struggle between Wu’s TSPM and independent Chinese churches.
indeed enjoy the freedom. Government policies encourage and stress our confidence to realize self-administration, self-support and self-propagation. We not only support these policies but also want to express our wholehearted gratitude...We believe, relying on God and fellow Chairman Mao’s brilliant leadership and government’s assistance, Chinese Christians totally can use our own power to build much better, much pure enterprises and more services to Chinese people.¹⁷⁸

The meeting is an example of how CCP transforms and reconstructs Chinese Protestant churches. First, it made the mission-based churches to agree on the formation of TSPM system. Second, during the meeting, church leaders were forced to learn how “progressive” Christians should act through denouncing their foreign and Chinese colleagues. The list of targets under denouncement, including two American missionaries, four Chinese leaders, and two national associations were given by CCP officials to assigned speakers.¹⁷⁹ The same strategy was repeatedly used in denouncement campaigns throughout the years: CCP's United Front Work officials decided the targets and directions of accusation, pro-Communist Christian leaders (many are suspected as undercover agents) made examples for their church members, then mass meetings were organized and followed up by government’s encouragements (news paper articles and radio programs), appraisal (supervision of Party officials) and punishment (charging the targets with anti-revolutionary crimes). After the present leadership was expelled, jailed

¹⁷⁸ The United Declaration of the Representatives of Chinese Churches and Organizations,” People Daily, April 21, 1951.
¹⁷⁹ For example, Presbyterian missionary and the Chief Pastor of Shanghai International Church, Frank W. Price is accused as an “American imperialist” by and forced to leave China in October 1952. Ying 2008a: 88-89.
or forced to leave, people with “correct attitudes” got promotion and gradually took over the organizations.\(^{180}\)

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\(^{180}\) Ying 2008a:118-119.
Director of BRA, He Cheng-xiang stands in the middle of the participants of the preparatory meeting of the Taoist Association of China, Taoist version of TSPM in November, 1956. This is the direct evidence that Chinese officials participated and closely involved in the establishment of religious CONGOs in the 1950s.

From Hierarchical Establishments to Grassroots Networks: 1954 to 1979

Although the purging process was a success, Manifesto, denomination campaigns, and Three-Self organization have their limitations on taming and co-opting all Protestants. The leadership that Communist sympathizers can take is the proportion built by foreign missionary agencies. After Beijing decided to join the Korean War and Washington frozen all properties and investments, there was little thing left to be fought for in these mission-based establishments. All churches, schools, hospitals, publishers, and charity organizations used to be administrated by the jointed forces of Chinese clergy and foreign missionaries, now proclaimed loyalty to TSPM and the political force behind it. However, the united front of the “progressive” Chinese Protestants and CCP now faced the real problem: the Chinese local churches that built by Chinese had never received sponsorship from foreigners. The imperialist accusation had no effect on them. The enterprises captured by TSPM were the mainline Protestant missions motivated by social gospel and liberal theology. Pentecostal, charismatic, and independent evangelist preachers had their own followers and they do not possess and do not advocate to posses great amount of properties and organizations as mainline social gospel Protestants. Therefore the economic sanction and government embargo had little effect on them as well. According to the standards set by the Manifesto, they were the true “three-self” churches.

Independent Chinese churches opposed the political agenda behind the *Manifesto* and became the target of second round of political repression. Watchman Nee (Ni Tuo-sheng) of Christian Assembly (a local-grown, nationwide church system) asked his colleagues to follow the policy of “Not listening, No believing, and Not spreading” to *Manifesto*. He was imprisoned in 1952 and remained in prison until his death in 1972. Wang Mingdao is the pastor of one of the largest non-mission churches, Christian Tabernacle, and a famous evangelist in China. He criticized the participants of TSPM as “nonbelievers” in several occasions and one of his articles in 1955. Pastor Wang, his wife, and 18 church members were arrested in 1955. He refused to be released under the condition of being used as a diplomatic gesture to the new Mao-Nixon relationship in the late 1970s. He insisted staying in prison until being “tricked” out off the facility in 1980. When mission-based establishments are fully controlled by TSPM, independent grassroots churches show resilience to state-sponsored repression until the last minute. Nee and Wang become the martyrs among Chinese Christians. Many House Church congregations I visited upholding them as their spiritual roots even though they do not share any institutional connection.

There is no data indicating how many persecutions independent Chinese churches have received and how many of them survived in this period. Yet limited statistics show

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182 It is also called Assembly Hall or Little Flock in other writing; *Juhuisuo*. Ying 2008a: 43.
185 Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, 200-201.
independent churches were significant Protestant forces in that time and their influence continues to be underestimated for political purposes today. There is estimated one-quarter of all Chinese Protestants who do not belong to mission-founded, mainline churches and TSPM strategy has little effect on them.\textsuperscript{187} Chinese official statistics exclude this group of Protestant Christians and state there is only 700,000 Protestant Christians in 1949. Table 3.2 summarizes the key figures of known statistics of Protestant Christians from different sources. Note that there is a 300,000 gap between government-declared number and scholar survey in 1949. American historian Kenneth S Latourette (1970) collects the data from 18 mainline denominations and concludes that these mainlines alone have around 750,000 Christians in 1948. Rev. Frank Price, noted American Presbyterian missionary (Southern) to China for over 50 years, has made a similar estimation (790,000) from the same group of mainline denominations.\textsuperscript{188} Recent Chinese government publications still maintain the 700,000 number; however, a Chinese scholar have found a local achieve that State Bureau of Religion Affairs (BRA; the predecessor of State Administration of Religious Affairs) has concluded a survey for internal reference and it mentioned the number is 1005699 in 1950.\textsuperscript{189} BRA’s number includes 22 mainline and domestic denominations in China, such as True Jesus Church, Jesus Family, and Christian Assembly. Since many of the domestic churches refused to join TSPM system or were classified as cult religions afterward (e.g. Christian Assembly

\textsuperscript{187} Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, Protestantism in Contemporary China (Cambridge University Press, 1993): 134. Quoted from Vala 2008: 34.


\textsuperscript{189} Ying Fuk-tsang, \textit{Ibid.} The original source is “The Review and Future Direction of These Three Years Work on Christians (Draft),” \textit{Fujian Provincial Archives,} No.150 (1): Appendix 1, 2 and 3.
led by Watchman Nee is banned since 1952), the exclusion of them in official statistics as well as their rights of existence are a logical choice for the authorities.

Table 3.3 Statistics of Chinese Protestant Christians: 1900s to 2000s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Missionaries</th>
<th>Missionary Agencies</th>
<th>Clergy</th>
<th>Churches / Meeting Points</th>
<th>Christian Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900s</td>
<td>1296</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910s</td>
<td>5144</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>161,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>8000</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>4478</td>
<td>430,669a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>650,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>4062</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>700,000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000,000c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>(Cultural Revolution)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,900b</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,000,000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4,500,000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18,000b</td>
<td>37,000b</td>
<td>10,000,000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23,000,000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70,000,000c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 1936 Handbook of the Christian Movement in China: vi
c. According to Chinese scholar, Ying Fuk-tsang: 218-219 The distance between two numbers is the “underground” congregations often excluded by official statistics.

This discrimination on grassroots Protestant Christians remains strong even today, despite the fact that they have never been collaborators of imperialism or not self-governance and self-reliance. This contradiction supports my understanding of Chinese religious freedom policy: the policy, the source of repression and restraint is the urgency of the "distance" between social groups and the regime; the self-governance nature of grassroots churches made the leaders of CCP uneasy and resolved on getting rid of them. Foreign intervention or "imperialism" may accelerate the urgency (in the cases of mission-based enterprises who were sponsored by foreigners) but it is not the core reason of governmental interference. The interference and harsh repression continued even when mission-based Protestant enterprises were all dissolved or nationalized after 1954. The persecutions on non-mission-founded churches show that full control of autonomous social groups is the real agenda of the anti-imperialist project. This overreaching control is the origin of the underground House Church, which is, not surprisingly, flourishing from rural areas where lack foreign missions' work and TSPM’s presence.\footnote{Vala (2008) makes a similar observation and he believes that the resistance demonstrated by Protestant dissidents in 1950s becomes the “seeds” and inspiration of Protestant social activism in the reform era. Vala: 23.}

In a broader historical context, established Protestant enterprises in urban areas are taken away by the state and become the foundation of registered churches reemerged later in the mid-1980s, while the grassroots churches and the individuals purged out of established churches in the 1950s become the backbone of House Church networks emerging in the countryside during the late 1970s. Further of these processes will be
discussed in the next section. As Vala (2008) has pointed out, state-sponsored TSPM campaign creates an unexpected result: Chinese Christian community is transferred from a hierarchical structure led by top-down, foreign-educated and sponsored clergy stratum, to a more bottom-up system where is full of center-less, grassroots networks.

The Failure of TSPM-CCPCC Framework: When Co-optation is not Enough

It is evident that in the beginning of the People’s Republic of China, the official religious policy is not elimination of religions; the Common Program of CPPCC has been emphasized by Mao and other Communist leaders as constitutional level of promises to non-party social elites. In the Program, CCP promises that political rights and opinions of all democratic parties and social groups would be protected through participation in the CPPCC framework. It was not an empty promise at first: churches join the TSPM, leaders of the TSPM join the CPPCC, and Communist leaders would listen to the comments and recommendations from the CPPCC. It was propagated as the "win-win" situation: Christians win their protection and access to politics while atheists win their loyalty, which is nothing irrational in the post-imperialist setting that everyone should pitch in the national development after Western powers left.

Nevertheless, the unfortunate “turn and twist” that leads to the destruction of all private and public space is no accident. Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) is only a small part of this “turn and twist” mistake admitted by the Party today. All independent social forces ceased after the “Anti-Rightist Movement” in 1957 and open religious activates had stopped after years of "unity," "mergence" and ultimately closure of church facilities
during the 1960s to the 1970s. Beijing's number of churches declined from 65 to 4; Shanghai's dropped from 200 to 23; Wenzhou, historically populated with believers and having been called the Jerusalem of China, declared its "no religion zone" in 1959. All religious establishments and visible religious activities basically stopped after 1971 (MacInnis 1975). The history from 1954 to 1979 is a long process of transforming the whole Chinese state as well as individual Christians to adopt Mao’s "democratic dictatorship" agenda. The "CPPCC-TSPM" framework and "democratic dictatorship" doctrine have inherent contradictions. Dahl's thesis of opposition is correct even in an authoritarian state: when the cost of repression is close to zero due to total submission, there is little incentive for the regime to tolerate any potential opposition and even listen to it, not matter how trivial it is. The CPPCC-TSPM promise became a cheap talk when the co-optation is not enough for the top leaders.

Existing records of Chinese religions published in China skip the period from 1954 to the 1979, which is related to the hypocritical features of the practices of this time. Mao himself repeatedly expressed the necessity of understanding religions and claimed that “history,” not political forces to determine the fate of religious groups, but the state machine had set the course to totalitarianism and ready to took down any social component not fit into this new order. Many provinces began “no religion zone” in the end of 1950s, long before the Cultural Revolution took place. Tolerance of intellectuals, democratic parties, and religious and social organizations is all based on the need of

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192 For example, in February. 1956, Mao still guaranteed that “people's religious feelings cannot be hurt, not even a little bit.” Selected Work of Mao Zedong (Mao Zedong Xuanji), Volume 7 No.4 ((Beijing: PLA Literature Publishing House, 1999): 429.
against the equally repressive KMT regime. When recognition of religious freedom is built on this kind of tactical reasons, the restraint to religious groups becomes unnecessary when there is no political enemy left for CCP and Mao to fight off. After the devastated failure of the Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1961, Mao still believed his direction of "Continuing Revolution" (or Uninterrupted Revolution) and persisted in another round of anti-revolutionaries movement. This time the targets become the subordinated groups and top government officials. For instance, top religious affair officials during that time were arrested and tortured for "surrendering to revolutionaries" and some died in prison. Nominal freedom of Protestant elites and churches, which were contained and "protected" by CPPCC-TSPM's framework to some degree, were officially eliminated by pushing Mao's "democratic dictatorship" doctrine to an extreme in the 1960s to the late 1970s.


194 See Table 3-3.

195 Western scholars often sees this idea as the key difference setting Maoism apart from classic class struggle "stage theory" based on Marxist-Leninism. Chinese literature on the other hand, sees this as a political justification to maintain the dictatorship after the external enemies have been destroyed but internal opposition to the dictatorship remains, which leads to the Cultural Revolution aiming at "revolting" against the CCP bureaucracy from a bottom-up approach. The theoretical debate in the English world can see: Graham Young and Dennis Woodward "From Contradictions among the People to Class Struggle: The Theories of Uninterrupted Revolution and Continuous Revolution," Asian Survey 18:9 (September 1978): 912-934. Lowell Dittmer China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch, 1949-1981(University of California Press 1989). Chinese literature can see Yongfa Chen (陳永發), Seventy Years of Chinese Communist Revolution (中國共產革命七十年) (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 2001) Second Volume: 463-465.
3.3 The Institutional Reform and the Religious Freedom Doctrines

In the Reform Era

Korean War, patriotic mass campaigns, anti-imperialist propaganda, skillful and patient strategies of Communist organizers, and many socioeconomic problems existing in the socialist China all contribute to the rise of state-sponsored CPPCC-TSPM framework and its decline in the Cultural Revolution later. However, people have seen a different China today through thirty years of economic liberalization. Does the Reform and Openness since 1979 change the nature of CCP's religious freedom policy based on CPPCC-TSPM framework? Official CCP documents refuse to recognize there is any change in the fundamental doctrines of democratic dictatorship. There are only few correctable mistakes made in the past such as the over-concentration of power from personal idolatry.\(^{196}\) The new leadership persists in the direction set up in the early 1950s and allows only institutional, not political reform in the Reform era. The reform focuses on collective leadership in the center and diffuses more power to private and local sectors. These strategies ultimately create a dual state-religion relation: in the center and principal level, religious freedom is narrowly defined as personal "hobbits" with bad tastes; they are not agreeable under Party's atheist doctrine, but they are tolerable as long as believers not trying to organize and expand the activities out of CPPCC-TSPM framework. In practice, both the orthodox doctrine of religious freedom and CPPCC-TSPM framework are evaded by constant rule-breaking behavior. TSPM and local officials show

remarkable restraint to these trouble makers. On the one hand, religious policy seems rigid and unchanged. Officials constantly request Protestant Christians to join the TSPM and obey its leadership. On the other hand, the implementation of the policy reveals a totally different picture. The system tolerates most illegal missionaries and underground congregations with their uncensored evangelism.

Why the rigidity? A quick answer from literature is the authoritarian decision-making structure based on the doctrine and system of “democratic dictatorship.”

The Article 1 of the 1982 Chinese Constitution reflects this doctrine: “The People's Republic of China is a socialist state under the people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants. ... Sabotage of the socialist system by any organization or individual is prohibited.”

Although the constitutions of the socialist system in China today has changed since business elites emerged and now can join the Party, the "people's democratic dictatorship" under single-party rule is unaffected and its impacts on the state remain strong. In most documents today, the term "democratic dictatorship" is replaced by a more neutral term, "democratic centralism." Yet the key concept of dictatorship, inferiors' unconditionally obedience, "individuals obey organizations, minority obeys majority, the lower level obeys the higher level, all party members obey the party center," is

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implemented in all formal organizations from the CCP to "consultative" organizations in the CPPCC.\(^{198}\)

As political scientist and Chinese expert Kenneth Lieberthal has pointed out, one key feature of Chinese politics under CCP regime is every government official acting like a *petty dictator* toward everyone under him: for survival and promotion, the necessary action for an official is to look up and understand what the superior want and execute the policy accordingly.\(^{199}\) Upward-looking may not be unique to the socialist system, but monitoring and disciplinary mechanisms in China are designed to aggravate the tendency. Unlike parties in single-party autocracies as separated ruling bodies from professional bureaucrats (Peterson 1966), Communist Party members work in every public office and monitor every step of the state's daily functions. On the one hand, the *Big Brother* is watching every step of a government office to fulfill his/her duties and Party members do hold every key decision-making position in government. Lenin and Mao know the strength of this dictatorship and they believe it can create extra motivation to accomplish difficult revolutionary changes. Deng and latter Chinese leaders have no intention to change this.\(^{200}\) Theoretically, democratic dictatorship centralizes leadership that would systematically promote officials with the strongest performance because they maximize the "encompassing interests" for the ruler (Olson1993; Olson and McGuire 1996).\(^{201}\) For this reason, the system rewards overachievement (or pretended overachievement) in

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\(^{200}\) Ibid: 176.

\(^{201}\) The longer time horizon of CCP, as Mao, Deng and many Communist leaders insist that the revolution should take century to finish, also make it the "stationary bandit" and have more incentives to "extract the maximum possible surplus from the whole society and to use it for his own purposes" (Olson 1995: 568).
expense of deliberation for quicker realization of given political agenda. Each level of officials over-interprets a little bite of the policy in order to go ahead of others and avoid punishment for failing to reach the goal that has been push up by other career competitors. For example, if the central government demands 10% more steal production for this year, an upward-looking governor would ask his district officials to do 12%. Consequently, after level and level of new targets added, local front line officials have unrealistic and almost impossible quotas in front of them to accomplish. As Mao asked moderate approaches to weaken religions, the system rushed the steps and implemented aggressive measurements to eliminate religions. Mao thought the overachievement, as well as other fabricated socioeconomic figures came in the early 1960s, was an encouraging sign of success. In the mist of Cultural Revolution in 1967, Mao gave order to gather the brightest minds of religious fields to study Christianity and believe the faith might be one of the secrets of Western industrial civilization. The order never went through since all research facilities were soon dismantled and religious scholars were in re-education and labor camps.\textsuperscript{202}

The over-achieving tendency may produce opposite effects and become hurdle of change. When a superior demands no reform and no radical change, as the political reform stopped after Tiananmen Square Movement in 1989, the petty dictators in every level become extremely conservative and try their best to stop any break of routines. Authoritarian regimes already have a narrow winning coalition by default and the ruling elites tend to focus on the factional and encompassing interests than service provision to

\textsuperscript{202} Jie, 2007: 19.
society at large (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). The unrealistic quotas and directives also aggravate the narrow focus and lack of initiative of local officials. When the gap between policy and reality widens, frontline officials tend to hide the problem than try to propose solutions that might be counterproductive and upset the leaders. When local-grown independent churches becomes prevailing, officials still stick to the anti-imperialist discourse and fabricate data in order to conceal the needs for change. Religious affairs officials have no incentive to honor the freedom and rights of religious groups because they cannot bear the risk of something bad may happen on the way if they relax the control over growing independent churches and transnational religious activism. In addition, the political cost of continuing old practice is relatively low since church people have little voice in the system. Consequently, we see religious affairs officials today push for more legislations and regulations in order to clarify what can be done and cannot be done; they are asking for more directives and ways to throw the responsibility to the upper levels.

On the other hand, the Big Bother is not really watching when there are about 80,000,000 party members and they are all afraid of making mistakes. In addition to over-achieving and over-risk-averse tendencies, this bureaucratic despotism creates serious corruption and principal-agent problems from information asymmetry (Akerlof 1970; Stiglitz 1987). Anyone who has contacted with Chinese locals know there are always two groups of numbers: one published by the central government based on

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203 Evidence is easy to find in formal Chinese publication and propaganda materials. During my interviews, some high-ranking TSPM clergy and SARA officials often repeatedly tell me the cases happened in the early Twentieth Century to show me how foreign missionaries act as collaborators of imperialism and it is justifiable the Chinese government takes extra caution and intrusive measurements in church affairs.
statistics collecting from local offices, and the one hides in the drawers of local officials' desks. The missing numbers of Protestant Christians are examples of many. Two mechanisms have been employed to address the information problems since the Long March period but the effects are limited. First is the "democratic" component of the democratic centralism. People's Congress, CCPCC and other united front agencies supposedly provide honest information and opinions before despotic decisions are made. In recent years the People's Congress has become more outspoken about policies when some of its members are using the growing media exposure as a leverage, yet there is no sign of real improvement on transparency or accountability.

The second mechanism is the intertwining meetings and independent document system outside levels of offices. Meeting and documenting are designed to improve the efficiency of information exchanges and quality of management. Each year before the national "Two Meetings" (Lianghui; the CPPCC and the People's Congress) hold in Beijing in March, provincial cities and provinces need to have their own "Two Meetings" finished (often in January or February) and prepare the reports to the national meetings. ARA officials often meet intensively with other organs during the Fall and numerous conferences will follow after "Two Meetings" to deliver important policy messages. In addition to regular visits, ARA officials often invite top TSPM clergy to participate in some meetings to "exchange" opinions and information.

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204 Lieberthal told the story of Chinese government asked Washington for satellite images on the area under cultivation in the early 1970 during Sino-American rapprochement because Chinese knew the reports from provinces were unreliable. They found out that almost 20% of its cultivated land was not reported by provinces. They were "hided" in order to lower the percentages of procurement on the grains and taxes. *Ibid:* 175.
Contracting analysis to research institutes and think tanks has become more common since the 1980s for their ability to provide third-party assessments on policies. Yang (2005) reports China now has more than 500 well-trained religious scholars, 60 religious and ethnic research institutes, and 60 academic journals dedicating to provide independent assessments on religions.\textsuperscript{205} However, stronger consulting agencies, more meetings, detailed documentation, and independent opinions are not sufficient solutions for information problems since these secretaries, scholars and experts are still parts of the system and they cannot break through the extreme degree of secrecy and bureaucratic "xitong" boundaries.\textsuperscript{206} Managing to get accurate information is difficult for outside researchers as well as top leaders when local officials have strong incentives to hide and to deceive. For example, one of the very few empirical studies of Chinese religions, the \textit{Religious Blue Paper} published by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) each year since 2007, has conducted a first large-scale, nation-wide public survey of Chinese Protestant Christians across 321 randomly selected counties in 2010. The 63680-case data is widely criticized by Christian community and overseas researchers for its surprisingly low number of Protestant population it estimated. Except some aggregate regional and national numbers, details of the dataset are not opened to the public. One well-respected, senior Chinese scholar told me that he had tried to request the dataset for his own research but "they told me it is impossible because the project is funded by SARA."\textsuperscript{207}

\textsuperscript{205} Yang believes the scale of this research body is enough to create a self-sustaining discipline and work independently "without much fear of political ramifications and the consequent administrative reprimands." However, the Chinese scholars I interviewed often expressed different opinions about their academic autonomy. Yang 2005: 33. 
\textsuperscript{206} Lieberthal 1995: 177-179. 
\textsuperscript{207} Interview No.68 November 11, 2011.
Empirical work on Chinese bureaucracy supports this petty dictatorship thesis (Mertha 2008; Lieberthal 2004; Whiting 2001, 2004; Lieberthal and Lampton 1992; Bachman 1991, 2006; Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1986). Bachman (1991) finds that the alignment of bureaucratic interests with Mao's radical doctrine produces the seemingly irrational policy that caused 30 million deaths during the Great Leap Forward; officials motivated by factional interests were competing and attacking each other by interpreting the discourse provided by the highest leader differently. When the leader chose the radical one that fit his revolutionary ideology the best, the winning side helped the leader to defend the path by distorting information and repressing criticisms.\textsuperscript{208} Shih et al. (2012) find similar conclusions from the career paths of alternate members of the CCP Central Committee from 1982 to 2002. They find loyalty to senior leaders and factional ties are still important in the reform era. Economic growth in their districts, expected or unexpected, has no direct effect on the promotion of these career seekers.\textsuperscript{209} These findings support the rational view of authoritarianism: under dictatorship, officials act differently from bureaucrats in democracies not only the ideologies or norms they hold but also the incentives and constraints provided by the system. The end of Mao's period indicates a new generation of "collective leadership" and the punishment becomes less brutal and more rule-bound, but the core feature of petty dictatorship is not fundamentally changed. Officials become more factional and the way to go up is still trying to tie with senior central leaders through taking care of their interests.


The Institutional Source of Rigidity: Religious Management System

Since November 1953, CCP formalizes the system of democratic dictatorship in religious affairs and put all religious and ethnic non-party leaders and their organizations under the collective leadership of the United Front Work Department of CPC Central Committee (UFWD).²¹⁰ In the 1950s, there is no division of labor between party and government. The power of religious policy making belongs to Division 2 of the UFWD, and the Department has offices and regional branches in every level of government. In October 1955, Bureau of Religious Affairs (BRA) was established and an initial institutional reform was taking place; this government branch is supposedly under the dual leadership of State Department (government) and the United Front (party). The original idea is to separate the party from the government functions in order to increase the quality of decision making and the efficiency of execution. Due to the complexity of religious tasks and also the aftermath of Hundred Flowers Movement since May 1956, CCP decided in March 1957 that UFWD officials in all levels still led religious affairs and the BRA took charge of only administrative tasks, especially regarding to cooperation with other departments such as propaganda, policing, foreign affairs, Communist Youth League, and the National Women's Union. The highest decision and

²¹⁰ November 1953, CCP announced "Decision on Enhancing Administrative Work of Cadre"(關於加強幹部管理工作的決定) and decided the leadership of each level of government administration should be under the each level of Party cadre. Non-party elites, representatives of democratic parties, and religious leaders and their associations belong to the United Front Work Department. Jie Ren 2007: 429.
collaborative body is the Religious Affairs Committee inside the central United Front Work office.\textsuperscript{211}

The institutional reform in the 1950s did not move the power to State Department system; on the contrary, Party organs remained the sole center of religious affairs. For example, before all government organs stopped by Cultural Revolution, the United Front Work organs have 5,700 employees, Civil Affairs organs have 2,600 employees, and BRA has only 560 from provinces to Beijing.\textsuperscript{212} Party leadership in principle is easy to state, but it is difficult to exercise in practice when everyone in government belongs to some factions of the Party. There are two groups of "Party" in religious affairs: one is constituted by the Party members trained and promoted in the UFWD system; the other one is the group of bureaucrats, also mostly Party members, who work in the BRA and under the supervision of Party Group in the State Department. The unspoken rule is that for securing the leadership of UFSW on policy making, the chairperson of the Party Group in BRA should always come from a superior Party agency, in terms of religion, it is the UFWD.\textsuperscript{213}

For example, Xiao Xian-fa (肖贤法) was both the Chair of the Party Group in BRA and the Director of BRA from 1961 to 1981. He was an political supervisor in Red Army and then operated a radio station for CCP's delegates in KMT's wartime capital city.

\textsuperscript{211} Jie Ren 2007: 428.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid: 429.
\textsuperscript{213} This design is called “gateway” (Dui-kou or Kou), CCP organizes the top executive members of it into major functional areas in order to make sure that party’s will is always followed in government units/agencies. This inside member is referred to inside the party as a Kou and the government unit as a Dui-kou unit. In short, every government office has one or many party “gateway” agents as superiors to ask and consult about certain policy issues. For religious affairs, the gateway is always the United Front Work kou, but if the issue involves legal or law enforcement action, the consulting may include security and military kou. Lieberthal 1995: 192-193. Also Harmin chapter in Lieberthal and Lampton (1992).
He also built the Xinhua News, later the biggest PRC's overseas news agency, in Hong Kong in 1946. For his communication and foreign affairs work, he was promoted as the first UFWD Office Director after PRC was established. After several different positions in UFWD, he was assigned to the newly established BRA as the Party Chair and bureau Director. During Cultural Revolution, BRA was forced to close and Xiao was sent to reeducation center for four years. Deng Xiaoping government cleared his name and Xiao regained his original position in 1979.

From Table 3.4 of BRA/SARA's previous and current administrators, it is evident that leadership of UFWD in religious affairs has never been changed; 6 out of 7 BRA/SARA top officials are directly transferred from the United Front Work system. From the backgrounds of post-1979 directors, the most common preceding position is the director of the Second Division in UFWD, which is the highest bureaucratic position of religious and ethnic affairs inside CCP. The only exception is the current SARA Director Wang Zuo-an (王作安) assumed the position in 2009; he is the first internally promoted official from the seven deputy directors of SARA (although he did serve in provincial UFW positions for years). The highest ranked official to SARA is the former UFWD's Deputy Director, Zhang Sheng-zuo (張聲作); he hold a concurrent director post in BRA during 1992-1995, possibly due to the political instability in the early 1990s. For addressing the growing problems in religious affairs, BRA was greatly expanded and renamed to SARA in 1998.
**Table 3.4 BRA/SAR Chairpersons from 1954 to 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair of BRA/SRA</th>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Previous Position</th>
<th>Factional Backgrounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He Cheng-xiang</td>
<td>1954-1959</td>
<td>Director of the Cultural Committee in State Council; Vice Governor of Gansu Province</td>
<td>Organizational Department of the Central Bureau, Deputy Director of UFDW's 1st Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiao Xian-fa</td>
<td>1961-1975</td>
<td>UFWD Office Director</td>
<td>UFWD; Xinhua News Agency Hong Kong Branch <em>(de facto)</em> diplomatic office of China in Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiao Xian-fa</td>
<td>1979-1981</td>
<td>BRA Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qiao Lian-sheng</td>
<td>1982-1984</td>
<td>Deputy Director of BRA Deputy; became Director after Xiao died in his term</td>
<td>UFDW Secretory Office, Deputy Secretary General; UFDW Party Organ Office Chair (1979-1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1985-1992</td>
<td>(Acting Director)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Director)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Sheng-zuo</td>
<td>1995-2009</td>
<td>UFWD Division 2 Director; Deputy Director of UFDW(1988-1998)</td>
<td>Office Deputy Director of Xinxiang government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ye Xia-wen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Party Secretary General of the Communist Youth League in Quizhou Province (1985-1990); Deputy Director in the UFDW Office in Central Youth League (1990-1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1983 into UFDW right after college. 1985 moved to Guizhou Province and served in top official in Youth League and provincial Deputy Director of UFDW. 1987 entered SARA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The management process of this UFWD-SARA framework is summarized in Figure 3-1. On the policy-making level, UFWD consults religious affairs with other Party organs such as Department of Politics and Law (DPL) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) depending on the nature of an issue. For nationalization of Protestant properties in the 1950s, Zhou Enlai was the key engineer through his positions as the Head of the Central United Front Department from 1947-1948 and the Minster of Foreign Affairs from 1949–1958. His successor, Li Wei-han worked in UFWD on major events including negotiating the peace treaty with Tibet (1951), promoting nationalization of private sectors in urban areas (1953), drafting the 1954 Constitution, and fighting with "Gang of Four" until Cultural Revolution.214 The Party Chair of UFWD is critical for the stability of the regime: its job is to collaborate or to fight with every internal organized forces including religious organizations, business and professional associations, and democratic parties during the 1950s, student movements in the 1960s and 1970s supported by anti-bureaucrat Party cadres, and overseas Chinese came back for family reunion, business opportunities and religious purposes since the 1980s. UFWD cannot dictate policies involving so many parties and interests since the administrative level of UFWD is not high. The pay level of the Chair of UFWD is equal to a state minister or a provincial governor and there are 400 officials in this level.215 Yet its organizational opinions and

interests are never taken lightly inside the Central Politburo (CP), the 24-member power house of the Chinese Communist Party. For example, in the 17th CP (2007-2012), there are 3 members represent the United Front Work system (military system has only 2 representatives). Liu Yan-dong (劉延東) and Wang Zhao-guo (王兆國) have been the heads of UFWD. Since 2002, Jia Qing-lin (賈慶林) has been the Party Chair in CPPCC and the No.-3 person of the core decision-making cycle, the 9-member Standing Committee of Central Politburo.

On the policy implementation level, UFWD plays the gateway (Kuo) role through three key offices: Division 1 is responsible for CPPCC, where eight democratic party leaders have the higher administrative pay level than UFWD division directors but they have to listen to the directives from these UFWD officials. In terms of religion, the unwritten rule is each religious and ethnical background has at least one representative in CPPCC. There are 74 representatives from 16 minority groups and 5 legal religions. TSPM has been guaranteed one representative as the co-chair of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Committee in CPPCC. Division 2 is responsible for religious and ethnic affairs and it supervises SARA, State Ethnic Affairs Commission (SEAC), and provincial Religious and Ethnic Affairs Committees. Division 3 takes charge of activities involving individuals from overseas Chinese communities, including religious and all non-governmental organizations from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, the United States and many other nations. Consequently, every transnational collaboration has to be

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processed by SARA through correspondent office then approved by the Central Office of UFWD. If an operation does not go through the official censoring process, SARA has the responsibility to ask its regional offices to check and verify its threat level to the regime. If the operation is deemed hazardous, coercive action may take place. Depending on the severity, the coercive action ranges from a "coffee" with agents, deportation of foreign participants, and maybe jail time. A proposal requires dozens of offices and their stamps to obtain legal permission. Quoted my Chinese Christian friend words, "getting permission is a mission impossible."²¹⁷

Approval of certain transnational religious collaboration encompasses political agenda. For approaching Taiwanese Christians and their growing underground missions, for example, Chinese government invited 19 leaders of major Protestant denominations, charity and missionary institutes to visit China in March 2011. The trip was hosted by SARA, but the core agenda of the trip, the discussion of the underground religious missions in China, was done with the Deputy Minister, Zhu Wei-qun (朱維群) of UFWD. According to my interview with one of the key participant, missionary leaders are impressed by the resources Chinese government used on religious management and the reasons of China needing these regulations. "now I give more appreciation to these restrictions," one of the participant said. Although Taiwanese side is optimistic about Chinese promises on permitting exchanges on theological students, pastors, and recorded or printed publications, China's redline is unchanged: transnational religious

²¹⁷ Only a small number of individuals, such as Dr. Chow, Lien-hwa (周聯華), have been approved by SARA/UFWD to perform limited religious services, such as teaching a small group of students in state-sponsored seminaries. He is a Taiwanese pastor who has served in the board of Amity Foundation for decades.
collaboration has to go through TSPM framework and obtain permission from SARA, which basically means "no" to all out-side-in missions under current religious policy.\textsuperscript{218}

The local level of transnational collaboration has to go through similar censoring and approval process, although records show certain provinces have more positive attitude toward transnational religious collaboration. Fujian and Guangdong Provinces have vigorous Buddhist and Taoist exchanges with Taiwan and Hong Kong. In the news, UFWD and SARA officials are standing in front of the religious crowd and shaking hands with outside believers; these are staged united front works with clear political motives; for improving the relations with two overseas societies, UFWD would approve certain transnational religious exchanges under close supervision. For example, the remains of "John" Sung Shang-chieh (1901-1944) were re-buried in his hometown in Putian City, Fujian in 2012. The ceremony was ministered by provincial TSPM and some overseas Christian leaders were invited to attend. The project required around 1,000,000RMB ($156593) from foreign donation for building a missionary training center and a memorial under John Sung's name.\textsuperscript{219} It is unclear whether the project is sent to SARA for approval, but judged from the level of completion of the project, it should obtain certain level of consent from city's ARA and UFWD offices.\textsuperscript{220} John Sung was the son of a pastor of the local American Wesleyan Methodist Church and became a famous

\textsuperscript{218} I have interviewed the key participant of this meeting. Photos and the list of this trip can see "Pastors from Taiwan received warm welcome from China," \textit{Christian Daily} (Taiwan: Taipei). Retrieved on July 27, 2012. http://news.dhf.org.tw/News.aspx?cate=03&key=712

\textsuperscript{219} Details are from interview and the testimony of Baptist Pastor Wu Wen-ren (吳文仁) on http://twbap.pixnet.net/blog/post/34520631

Chinese evangelist. He traveled to Southern China, Taiwan and Southeast Asia during the 1920s to the 1930s and became one of the few Chinese evangelists with international reputation at the time when Protestant missions were dominated by Western missionaries.\(^{221}\) John is seen by many as the key figure in the indigenous Protestant movement before 1949; his legacy fits TSPM/UFWD's ideology.

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The evidence here suggests a curious phenomenon of Chinese religious management: it is a hyper rigid system, which is only temporary discontinued in the 1970s. Two things are never changed: Party's control and the leadership of the United Front Work on religious affairs, yet on the local level, the practice is complicated. In John Sung's case, the local TSPM church successfully obtained foreign support and some donation but the religious official, the director of city's ARA office Zhang Yuan-kun, expressed his attitude in "stopping and cracking down an illegal religious activity to use the name of John Sung" in his 2011 and 2012 public reports. Besides his tough words, so far no church building is dismantled and no one is arrested. For local religious officials, John Sung is a dilemma; his daughter was a leader of unregistered church network and had been sent to labor camp for 20 years and died after a police raid on an underground gathering in 1993.222

However, the building of training center and memorial is beneficial for the development of registered churches, which is also Zhang's obligation. In addition, religious donation from Taiwan to Putain is a rising, superior-approved business; Fujian government has ordered districts to enhance their relationship with Taiwanese religious organizations in order to bring in more donations and "friendship" between Taiwanese people and China.223 Does Christianity be treated differently from Buddhism and Taoism because the imperialist history? It is so at least on the paper, but exceptions have been

223 Hong Rong-wen 2008 "Inherit Relationship and Communication Between Fujian-taiwan Folk Faith," Journal of Quanzhou Normal University, 2008: 01-09.
given to some exceptional Protestant activists. The scene of police raiding churches led by ARA official is one of many and maybe least likely possible results. To my best knowledge, activists have worked on Sung’s case for two years before it has today’s ambivalent result. “Door-busting” kind of coercive behavior did not happen in this case. Chapter 4 and 5 will introduce the first-handed evidence on similar events happened in Province S and Province T. By closely exploring the interactions between officials, local leaders, and foreign advocates, the causal mechanisms of cracking down or tolerating transnational activism can be more clearly identified.

The Source of Flexibility: the Discourse of Religious Freedom Policy

The key source of flexibility on religious control is the discourse of religious pragmatism in the 1950s. This seemingly odd retrogression is from the painful lessons and recovery from the late Mao’s period. As a political system still highlights the correctness of Maoism and especially his dictatorship doctrine, the new ruling elites look at writings from Mao and other major leaders and try to keep the consistence of guiding discourse. The national propaganda machine rebuilds the history and insists on the legitimacy established by Mao and the early revolutionaries through emphasizing the credits of unifying the nation and defending the national integrity, but skips the mistakes and hypocrisies the same discourse has entitled to.

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One pragmatic principles they found is the "Four Cannots." In the highlight of Hundred Flowers movement and the end of first Five Year Plan, Mao was confident about his economic and political achievements, and wanted cadres to reeducate and transform social forces with caution. He made one of his famous remarks on the article "The Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People:"

All attempts to use administrative orders or coercive measures to settle ideological questions or questions of right and wrong are not only ineffective but harmful. [1] We cannot abolish religion by administrative order or [2] force people not to believe in it. [3] We cannot compel people to give up idealism, [4] any more than we can force them to embrace Marxism. The only way to settle questions of an ideological nature or controversial issues among the people is by the democratic method, the method of discussion, criticism, persuasion and education, and not by the method of coercion or repression.

In the Chinese Communist discourse, the distinction between contradictions among the people (ren min nei bu mao dun) and external contradictions (wai bu mao dun) makes life-and-death difference. External contradictions indicate that enemies with these characteristics must be crashed with coercive means while internal contradictions (confrontations) can go through "the democratic method, the method of discussion, criticism, persuasion and education, and not by the method of coercion or repression."

This means Party officials do not need to and should not use violence to address these state-society confrontations. The first and longest serving UFWD Chair, Li Wei-han

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225 Ibid: 429
227 Ibid.
elaborate Mao's points and provide five reasons why religion is a part of internal contradictions and the Party should not rush the transformation and reconstruction of religious population: religions are mass-based, ethnic, internationally driven, long-lasting and complex in character. Due to the complexity and wide-ranging social forces involved, he suggested CCP should learn from the experience in wars with KMT and Japan that Party should ally with religious groups, not push them to the opposite side.

"Four Cannots" and "Five Characteristics" have become the foundation of CCP's religious freedom policy in the reform era. Deng Xiaoping government pasted Document 19 to all level of government in the 1982 and re-emphasize Mao's united front thinking and "Five Characteristics." The interpretation formally acknowledges the legal status of religions in atheist China and adopts a more moderate attitude toward religious population for developmental purposes. Officials since then do not need to pretend eliminating religions or stopping religious growth as they were asked to do since the late 1950s. The line between religious and economic activities is often blurred in local level. Many Buddhist temples are tourist attractions; churches produce revenues that help poor communities to provide social services (Tsai 2007). It was a policy dilemma for frontline officials since relaxation of control over socioeconomic life to boost productivity had become the first priority of Deng's government but they were not sure about how to treat religious activities under this new agenda. Document 19 confirmed the importance of

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religion and restated the leadership of UFWD and its pragmatic views on religious management. This retrograde definition of religious freedom from the 1950s reappeared in 1982 Constitution, Article 34 and 36:

**Article 34.** All citizens of the People's Republic of China who have reached the age of 18 have the right to vote and stand for election, regardless of nationality, race, sex, occupation, family background, religious belief, education, property status, or length of residence, except persons deprived of political rights according to law.

**Article 36.** Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.230

These two articles are clear about the "new" religious freedom definition: it is not about the protection of faiths based on an individual's inherent rights. The definition is closer to French tradition of religious freedom, *laïcité* or secularism that asks a more hostile separation of religion from public space, than American tradition of religious freedom implying friendly recognition of religion and exclusion of agnosticism and atheism.231 As human rights law expert T. Jeremy Gunn pointed out, both doctrines rooted in French and American constitutions showcase not two cohesive consensuses shared by citizens of republics but rather confronting ideas that reflect the violence, struggle, and even intolerance among dissentient groups common in the founding

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moment. Most important of all, the same sentences of the doctrines are still cited by groups today for self-absorbed purposes to fuel confrontation, debates, and controversial regulations that continue divide citizens.232

*Document 19 and 1982 Constitution* also reflects the confrontational and polemical nature of the founding moment of the "new" PRC in the *Reform and Openness* era: it inherits the Leninist-Maoist despotism and atheism, yet the new discourse is based on Deng’s critical interpretation: the nature of religion may be harmful *opium* to numb Chinese proletarians as Marx described, but before China has enough economic foundation provided by bourgeoisie, it is necessary for CCP to allow the proletarians to addict to the opium for a little longer.233 Nevertheless, this "healthy" addiction requires two bottom lines based on secularism: (1) religion does not provide superiority or immunity to any individual or group, and (2) citizens' freedom of religion as well as freedom *from* religion should be protected. Chinese constitutional scholar, Wei Hong (2006) believes that this two legacies are from the mistake of putting Party's atheist ideology above constitution's secular framework, which asks the state to be neutral between religions and also between religious beliefs and atheism.234 These two principles constitute the legal foundation for religious persecutions since the 1980s: churches are

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233 Deng himself has little remarks directly addressing religion. His policy is realized through the return of former UFWD leaders and religious scholars in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They all express the bitter experience and resentment to Mao's religious policy in their writings. For example, Dai, Kangsheng [戴康生], the researcher (1960-1998) and Party Chair (1993-1998) of the Study of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Dai, Kangsheng 2001. "50 Years of Religious Research in New China" in Yang 2005: 22-23.
subjected to state approval as other social organizations and religious freedom is not an excuse to immune them from scrutiny and registration requirements. Second, propagation outside approved facilities and propagation to under-aged population are considered illegal and strictly forbidden. These restrictions are thoroughly enforced and create most of the state-church confrontations reported to international societies.

Chinese Article 34 reflects some proportion of the French doctrine of individual protection in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen: No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views. Article 36 echoes the recurring theme of French laïcité: citizens need to choose between their religion and the state. Chinese 1950s to some extent is déjà vu to French 1970s. French experience has demonstrated the modern version of state-led conversion to secularism. During the French Revolution in 1789, the Constituent Assembly had declared two decrees to ask Catholic clergy to give their vows to the new Republic. On July 12, 1790, the Constituent Assembly adopted the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which demanded French churches to cut off all relations with foreign religious institutions, including dismissed fifty Catholic bishops and appointed others without consent from the pope. Catholic clergy had to comply, flee France, be imprisoned, or meet in secret. Hundreds of clergy and nuns were murdered in Paris and throughout many parts of France during the riots and political turmoil. After 6 years of violent struggle, on February 21, 1795, a compromised version of law passed and stated the new principle of free worship and forbid state subside on any religious organizations. Yet the legacy of state control on religion
persisted. For example, headscarves ban in 2008 is built on the discourse and legal legacy of 1790s struggle that forbid priests to wear clerical attire in public.

Different from French and American founding moments, Chinese struggle over religious freedom policy in this time exists only within party elites. The retrogression of religious policy creates a dilemma for legitimacy. First, if the Party proclaim the policy was new, how could it justify the anti-religious movements in the past 30 years without hurting the legitimacy set up my Mao? Second, if the Party insisted that the atheism was and will be the core value of religious freedom policy, how could it explain the unsuccessful results from previous and current ant-religious measurements, also designed by Mao? Chinese literature and official documents had proclaimed that religions had died or disappearing in China, how could the Party "make" them "alive" again, in Yang (2005)'s words, "de-secularizing the reality"? Deng took three years to secure his position and his view on Mao's legacy in the Party since Mao died in 1976. Mao's official successor and the faction leader who insisted on Mao's correctness, Hua Guo-feng, was forced to leave power in 1980. After TSPM and other establishments gradually returned to operation in 1979, it took another three years for CCP elites to decide how to solve the legitimacy dilemma. There was a "third opium war" among Chinese elites about the basic policy toward religion in the late 1970s; top religious study scholars in Beijing and Shanghai openly criticized each other's views on interpreting Party's stands on religions. Document 19 is the conclusion of this three-year struggle and deliberation. It

236 The debate is between scholars in Chinese Academy of Social Science (national) and Shanghai Academy of Social Science (regional). The debate is significant because the backgrounds of two institutions represent the conservative and reformist views, not limited to religious issues, heatedly debated.
admits that the religious population does not decline after years of campaigns but these efforts do slow the growth of religions. It believes the slowdown is the achievement of previous CCP's leadership, yet the over-interpretation of Mao's policy creates more harm than good.237 The document is a direct order to Party cadres and ask them to avoid rushing their work and pursuing over-achievement in the future:

*The central authorities of Party and State emphasize once again that all Party members must clearly understand that the Party's religious policy is not just a temporary expedient, but a decisive strategy based on the scientific theoretical foundation of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, which takes as its goal the national unification of the people for the common task of building a powerful, modernized Socialist state.*

Deng's administrators show their wisdom in understanding the backlash of "democratic centralism" and balancing two views of religious policy. On the one hand, it refuses to recognize any change in principle in order to protect Mao legacy and Party's legitimacy; on the other hand, it asks members not to execute the policy word by word at present. There are more urgent tasks such as ethnic harmony, national unification and economic growth needed attention. The formal discourse of religious policy is unchanged in terms of the definitions of freedom and the atheist ideology based on 1950s' standards. Nevertheless, the implications of this policy are changed since religious cadres now have dramatically different tasks: to make religious groups and believers to serve the developmental goals of the "new" regime. Most important of all, the atheist agenda,

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defined by Leninist-Maoism as the elimination of religions, has been indefinitely postponed. Under this new interpretation, the UFWD-BRA-TSPM power hierarchy again leads the operation, but facilitation rather than limitation is set by the top leaders as the highest agenda. TSPM theological experts are writing and preaching the new duties of "Protestant Christians in Reform era;" UFWD officers are helping TSPM on petitions and requests of returning church properties from government; and SARA officials are making sure these transactions and proceeding growth of church enterprises are properly ministered by loyal clergy, and mediate the disputes between churches and government agencies on housing, licensing, budgeting, public safety and other registration issues. If deviations of this "religious freedom policy" happen, such as appearance of foreign missionaries, SARA will choose strategies between persuasion (UFWD) and coercion (Department of Public Security) depending on the situation and carefully to avoid provoking criticism from the religious community.

A senior missionary from Baptist Church of Taiwan told me how the Chinese system responded to his entry of China in the late 1980s. He was approached by a senior provincial UFWD official in a small city in the South. The official politely asked him about the trip and offered assistance. The gentleman never showed his official title but local ARA and police all knew his present and responded to his request immediately. When the missionary agreed to meet with TSPM clergy and his willingness to talk about cooperation, the official introduced him to one of the biggest registered church in the city.
and even offered him the opportunity to deliver a speech in front of theological students in a TSPM's seminary.  

Jiang Zemin (1989-2002) and Hu Jintao (2003-2012) administrations basically follow this strategic and add more emphases on the institutional arrangements of the Document 19. In 1991, after the National Religious Conference in Beijing gathering by State Council, Jiang's Central Committee Office delivered Document 6 and put the legalist principle "manage religion by law" into the policy in the first time. The first step is to strength the management institutions. BRA used to have only one administrative level; state office in Beijing has to rely on UFWD system and meeting system to guide regional offices in provincial capitals and province-level cities; in most cities, religious affairs are combined with ethnic affairs and staffed with civil servants employed locally. Religious work in county-level and below often belonged to local party organ's UFDW officers with no formal institutional assistant and almost no counties had designate religious and ethnic work officer. Document 6 demands all village and town level districts need to have designate personnel in charge of religious affairs. All levels of government above county need to have designated religious affairs offices. Cities with significant religious activities need to have religious work branches in divisions.  

In 1998, BRA is upgraded to a ministerial level agency and renamed to SARA. In Jiang period, the institutional capacity of BRA is greatly enhanced. Now it is equipped with a propaganda media (Chinese Religious Cultural Publisher), a research center (3 divisions on foreign and domestic religious studies and academic exchanges), a training facility

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238 Interview No. 8, December 20, 2010.  
239 Jie Ren and Ling Liang, 1999: 429.
(hosting annual gathering for all provincial religious officials) and a grand administrative compound with 185 relatively young, more professional staff. Two national religious conferences were held in 1991 and 2001 and most of top CCP officials attended these two meetings to educate the policy to the cadres. 240

The second implementation is to reconstruct religions to be useful for development. Jiang's United Front Work officers create a new policy slogan: "leading religions to adopt socialist society" to pair with “Three Represents” doctrine highlighted in 2001 National Religious Conference. 241 "Three Represents" argues that because the Party knows better, it should continue to lead the socioeconomic forces: it "represents" advanced social productive forces, the progressive Chinese culture, and the fundamental interests of the majority Chinese people. Religious population as the minority needs to follow and adopt to Party's vision of society. 242

This new implementation opens the door for religious organizations to operate enterprises for education and charity, which were greatly oppressed during Mao and remained a taboo in Deng’s period. "Three Represents" defends the legitimacy of centralism but also demand cadres to act like progressive leaders in three fields. For acting like progressive leaders, they need to listen to existing progressive forces such as foresighted intellectuals, successful business elites and inspiring social entrepreneurs, and sometimes even allow them to be proactive and autonomous. With the help of SARA and UFWD, YMCA and other Chinese religious CONGOs began to appear on media and join

240 The information is gathered from SARA website on 2012.
disaster reliefs and other social works. Few Protestant organizations are allowed to open vocational and cram schools to complement existing school system. Nevertheless, after decades of docility and order-following, religious CONGOs heavily rely on financial support from government and failed to accomplish the either the new development agenda or the basic “Three Self” goal they were forced to accept 55 years ago:

*Because it [YMCA] is greatly affected by the external force, the autonomy and self-governance are weak; the organizers are often timid and overcautious of planning projects and future development...The management is heavily influenced by planned economy and employees perform inadequately due to lack of motivation and capacity to serve.* (Wuhan City ARA Report to SARA).243

### 3.4 When Jesus Meets Law: The Registration Issues of Protestant Groups

#### In the 2000s

Growing Numbers of Resistance, Rising Costs of Repression

Following economic liberation and rapid development, public uprisings and protests become common in the 2000s. There is no reliable data about how many religion-related confrontations between government and churches occurred due to the sensitivity of the issue, but existing data on collective resistance of civil disputes reveals that costs of repression is rising, and the urgency of finding effective management strategies is manifest for the government to deal with the growing unrest society. In 1993, there were 730,000 people involved in 8,700 instances in 2003. The numbers rise to 3.07

243 These comments are from SARA’s own report on YMCA. Sun Shu-yi [孙沭沂], “2010 Study of YMCA’s Social Services in Wuhan City” Religious Study Center, State Administration of Religious Affairs.
million people in 58,500 cases in 2003; almost seven times higher than in 1993 (Cai 2010). The average number of participants in each instance is 84 in 1993 and 51 in 2003; only 16.1% of the cases in 1993 have more than 100 participants, and the number of large-scale instances is only 12%. These statistics indicate that small-scale social unrest are far more popular and prevailing; organizing a public protest in China is not as costly as it used to be. Cai (2010) find that the key factors of organizing successful public resistance are to gain intervention from central authorities and seek support from alliances inside or outside the political system. The institutional advantages of uprising groups, either have sympathizers inside the Party or media, for example, provide they better chances to invite central government to intervene their grievances with local governments.

Since public protesting is forbidden by law, in-the-system approaches are even more popular. Numbers of legal litigations and petitions are rising in the 2000s as well. After the peak of post-Cultural Revolution justice seeking is passed, the numbers of petitions submitted to the central government were 297,900 in 1984, and they began to rise in 1994 and doubled to 603,000 in 2005. CCP realizes the significance of these growing demands and adopt series of measurements to address various social grievances. After 2000, there are series of academic studies founded by State Council and different CCP organs on various social problems from state-owned enterprise workers, religion, migrant workers, to land-usage in rural areas. In addition, "manage by law" principle is

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245 Ibid: 23.
further emphasized under Hu Jintao Administration. Although he adopted swift and violent measurements to Tibetan uprisings in 1989 and his "martial law" approach won him the trust of top CCP elites, Hu relies on legal approaches more than any other leaders in modern Chinese history.\textsuperscript{246} The State Council has issued a series of documents to regulate the use of forces when confront public gatherings, demonstrations, protests and petitions. A civil resistance action has to be proven "political," "attempting to overthrow the socialist system," "threatening the integrity of territories," "destroying important infrastructures of facilities," or "supported by overseas forces," and then use of forces is permitted.\textsuperscript{247} An unexpected result of this restriction is that numerous reports of local administrators hired thugs and private security personnel to deal with dissidents, the situation of civil rights lawyer Chen Guangcheng and many other activists have faced. The phenomenon also indicates that violent repression from state organs has become more exceptional than a norm.\textsuperscript{248}

Protestant Activism against the Registration System

As stated previously, TSPM movement and anti-religious campaigns before 1979 has turned established Protestant enterprises in urban areas to registered churches reemerged later in the mid-1980s. They also pushed disobedient Christians underground and becoming grassroots churches in the countryside emerging during the late 1970s. The evidence can be found on the changing distribution of House Church congregations:

\textsuperscript{247} Cai 2010: 50.
\textsuperscript{248} \textit{Ibid}: 51.
Henan Province and Anhui Province have the largest Protestant population since the 1980s (about 48% of total Protestant Christians in 1997) but they are only ranked 7 and 10 in 1949 (out of 18 provinces).  

Henan Province and Anhui Province are the poorest areas and the hometowns of many migrant workers since the late Qing Dynasty. It is possible that when Christianity was under great repression in urban centers, these workers’ hometowns become safe heavens of the faith.

After economic booms in coastal regions, migrant workers bring their faith and networks to cities; more tolerant religious management in the 1990s facilitated the revival of urban congregations in major cities. Today every church in Chinese cities, registered or unregistered, is full of believers to worship. Many TSPM churches have to hold five sections of services in Sundays to satisfy the rapid growing church crowd. The problem brought by increasing numbers of Christians is twofold. First, registered churches are still strictly limited by SARA about locations, budgets, personnel, plans of expansion, and projects about outside donations, collaboration, and propagation. Although registered church’s clergy usually can decide most of the daily affairs and officials rarely check in regular operations, the important decisions of the church, such as assuming a pastor position, has to be reported to TSPM regional chair and the chair will report to local ARA office and then to provincial level ARA.

Second, unregistered congregations, estimated occupied 60-70% of total Protestant population, are willingly or unwillingly discriminated by the legal

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249 Ying Fuk-tsang 2008: 12, 15.
250 Without large scale anthropological work, this suspicion remains unproved. However, all the churches I contacted have similar stories that the origins from some elders from the cities began taking about Gospel and then start a small fellowship or bible study groups.
establishments. Due to the persecutions and denouncement campaigns in the past, most senior House Church leaders believe TSPM clergymen are traitors and accomplices of the repression. Fundamentalists also reject the liberal theology popular in TSPM seminaries and rostrums. Most confrontations happened in the early 1980s to mid-1990s when BRA and state organs stood firmly on the side of TSPM and persecuted nonmembers. Based on the long rival history from the 1950s to the 1980s, Chinese Protestant community has divided into two confrontational parts and the distance and grievances cannot be resolved in short time.

The reasons for Chinese state to be biased toward TSPM are historical and also strategic. TSPM framework as well as the religious freedom discourse have been institutionalized in the political system. Protecting TSPM is protecting the system and TSPM has shown its strength in controlling one quarter of Chinese Protestants; the percentages could be higher in urban regions. Managing Protestants through TSPM also costs less: without paying the salaries of low-to-mid rank clergymen, SARA obtains additional 18,000 frontline staffs on monitoring religious activities. Although the levels of cooperation vary significant across locations, strict registration processes and approval procedures of clergy make sure most TSPM clergy have similar ideology, theological training, and awareness of the Party's religious freedom policy.

Series of ARA decrees have been published to provide guidelines to the increasingly complicate processes: the 2000 Rules of Managing Religious Activities of Foreigners; the 2004 Regulations on Religious Affairs; the 2005 Method on Registration and Management of Religious Organizations; the 2006 Method on Reporting Religious
Clergy; 2006 Method on Assigning and Reporting Major Clergy Positions in Religious Organizations; and 2006 Method on Establishing Religious Schools. The message set by these regulations is clear: the leadership of churches belongs to the state and a wider range of freedom can be permitted if proper methods and procedures are followed.

The 2004 Regulations on Religious Affairs (2004 Regulations in short) is the highest level of document passed by the State Council. The Article 4 expresses a relative open attitude toward transnational religious activities:

Religious bodies, sites for religious activities and religious personnel may develop external exchange on the basis of friendship and equality; all other organizations or individuals shall not accept any religious conditions in external cooperation or exchange in economic, cultural or other fields.

Transnational religious collaboration in principle is permitted. The major concern of government is foreign religious organizations use non-TSPM channels to perform missionary tasks, the backdoor listing strategy. Ideally, foreign religious organizations can operate in China for charity, education and other purposes, but the operation cannot involve any religious agenda such as trying to spreading gospel to children when teaching them English. However, if foreign agencies choose TSPM as their collaborator, the operation can include secular and religious agenda. The 2004 Regulations does not specify the process of approval, it intentionally leaves a gray area for UFWD officials to mediate the decision based on circumstances. Cases of this process will be discussed in next chapter. One rule is clear: Protestant-related collaboration has to go through TSPM platform and it is nonnegotiable.
Why it has to be TSPM? The core deadlock is the registration requirements established in the 1950s and formalized in *1998 Regulations on Registration and Management of Social Organizations*. The *2004 Regulations* states that the registration process follows the 1998 law, but the law excludes social organizations who have joined the CPPCC to apply to the registration. As long as TSPM remains as a permanent member of the CPPCC, other religious groups should not be able to register under *1998 Regulations*. SARA publishes the *2005 Method on Registration and Management* to address this issue and the process become very detailed and complicated. The most difficult hurdle is stated in Article 3: "the establishment of a religious establishment shall be applied by the religious organization in the resident county (city, city division, or special ethnic region)." In other words, without the approval of TSPM as the designated Protestant association (joining TSPM and filing the document through it), any Protestant group cannot obtain proper registration.

The second conflict between the *1998 Regulations* and the *2005 Method on Registration* is the management organ of the registration. Can a religious organization register under the Minister of Civil Affairs (MCA) based on the requirements in *1998 Regulations*? From the articles in the *2005 Method on Registration*, it should be impossible, but limited number of churches have registered under MCA and many House Church congregations have hoped this method can become the new norm since they disagree with TSPM on many fronts. Some unregistered congregations choose to get the

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251 Documents are from SARA website. Cited in http://www.sara.gov.cn
TSPM signature without actually joining the organization. The variation in TSPM's attitude and administrative capacity affect the legal status of unregistered churches.

In conclusion, this chapter illustrates these two lines of development from the 1950s to the 2000s. Religious freedom policy based on “Three Self Patriotic Movement” is unchanged because the consideration of Party's legitimacy and legacy. The anti-imperial discourse and management doctrines of "democratic centralism" rooted in this policy greatly restrict the space for transnational and grassroots religious activities outside TSPM framework. The "democratic centralism" especially create a bureaucratic system that officials tend to over-interpret the policy and become extremely conservative and cautious about changes. The administrations of Deng, Jiang and Hu all tried to loosen up some components of the system through institutional reforms. Deng agrees that Party cadres should not execute an atheist agenda in the Reform era; Jiang provides more efficient and professional administrators and allows TSPM to participate in social services; and Hu further supports these strategies with legal procedures and hope to induce more benign interaction between government and churches. Because the leadership of religious affairs is controlled by the same faction of the Party (UFWD) and the discourse of religious freedom are changed very little (freedom from religion), the effects of these institutional reforms are limited.

Nevertheless, Chinese society has changed dramatically in the past 30 years. Protestant Christians as well as other religious groups have become significant social forces that cannot be ignored. CCP refuses to recognize growing unregistered congregations and follows old practices to repress their growth. Officials rely on "carrots"
(more freedom if registered) and "sticks" (repression and forced registration) to tame unregistered population. Yet the results are disappointing because the limited freedom is barely attractive and the prices of violent crackdown becomes higher and higher each day. For TSPM clergy, the existing religious freedom policy is unfair because they cannot accept foreign aid and service, while unregistered churches are almost always "free" to do so. Therefore they co-operate with local officials and try to break the rules and accept foreign donations and services when possible. This tacit breakthrough from registered churches and bold violations from unregistered congregations become two major sources of growing transnational Protestant activism. By observing increasing disobedience without severe state’s direct interference and punishment in the past decade, it is reasonable to argue that the government shows great restraint to the growing religious activism, although the restraint is tactic and varies significantly across groups and locations. Dahl's thesis of opposition is largely correct. After the 2000s, Protestant activism is no longer trivial and now equipped with national networks, mass number of congregations, financial resources, and communication technology; restraint on transnational collaboration becomes more and more visible yet regional due to the rigidity of management institutions.
 CHAPTER FOUR
The Repression of Religion and Protestant Activism
in the Heartland of China

4.1 Protestant Activism in Two Directions
4.2 Religious Repression and Protestant activism in Four Cities: An Overview
4.3 City H: From Building Churches to "Outdoor Worship"
4.4 City W: TSPM and Backdoor Listing

One of the most significant outcomes of the Protestant revival is the rising activism to expand the church’s roles in the public sphere. Believers have revived activities and organizations and have built and rebuilt churches; these efforts have unavoidably clashed with decades of strict regulations and repression of all religions. When believers talk about love, justice, generosity, and salvation by faith, it is natural for some of them to want to implement these principles in practice and to react to human sufferings such as victims of nature disasters and the persecution of other Christians. Churches want to do more than pray and worship. These outward actions demand bigger spaces and wider freedoms for their charity, education, and many other social activities or simply to grow, collaborate with each other, and propagate their faith, but existing institutions do not permit such outreach behavior. The regime wants Christians to stay in their original

252 The literature on the relationship between Christian values and charity, social justice and human rights is too broad to be summarized here. In short, the author does not assume Protestantism would produce any different kind of activism than other religions as Weherian tradition has argued, but simply states that an outward attitude is inherent in the Protestant faith and it can encourage various forms of activism. For example, the anti-abortion movement includes multiple religious traditions and several Christian denominations, but different groups show varying levels of interest in actual actions, for example, criticizing the One Child Policy in China. Doris Buss, Didi Herman 2003, Globalizing Family Values: the Christian Right in International Politics, University of Minnesota Press: 57-62.
locations and not leave the buildings. Networks of activism are therefore created to gain more power and leverage that might be used to alter these restrictions.

Protestant churches have become one of the most important sources of social activism in China because they are connected to transnational networks of religious advocacy, whether directly or indirectly. They are also better organized than other social organizations such as kinship, professional, or issue-based social organizations because of their stable financial resources, moral discipline, and regular gatherings. Hence, Protestant churches are far more “dangerous” in the eyes of administrators because few non-profit organizations in China possess these qualities. One Protestant activist joked about the odd similarity between churches and the CCP: “they [Communist Party] repress us because we are more like the old Red Vanguards than they are now...We never need to ask people to come to church meetings but the Party has to provide many incentives and people still don’t want to go to those meetings.”

Undoubtedly, the CCP still possesses unmatchable organizational strengths and resources, but people have long criticized the loss of volunteerism, self-sacrifice and many other disciplinary qualities. The rise of any other moral entity may make the CCP very uneasy and, could also cause embarrassment.

Consequently, recent religious persecutions in China are mostly cases in which the government has tried to divide and weaken well-respected churches even

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253 The interviewee used to be a communist party member and is now a founder of a local charity NGO. Interview No. 99. December 21, 2010.
254 I have interviewed several NGOs in Sichuan Province after the 2008 earthquake. Almost all religious organizations in China joined the relief efforts, but few received a warm welcome. One story has been told is a refugee shelter built by Protestant Christians from Beijing and was run well. The organizers received numerous interviews by the government-run CCTV and many foreign media. Yet the site was quickly taken over and the group was asked to leave and never come back. The rumor is the success of non-government groups has made the Sichuan government embarrassed about their own efforts.
when they propose no political or security threat to the regime. Two of these kinds of cases will be discussed below.

The analysis of religious activism introduced in this chapter is founded on this understanding of struggle over public space, especially the legitimacy and rightful place of non-party, non-government-sponsored social forces within this public space. The struggles of individual churches concern more than their grievances with the government. Their leaders’ decision and government’s responses are all shaped in the political context of China and the specific environment of their local communities. Yet some leaders are far more successful than others in leveraging the existing strengths and in expanding their freedom. The following two chapters present qualitative evidence to support the internal spiral theory discussed in previous chapters. Chapter 4 reviews the specific conditions of four case studies and focuses on cases in which activist networks fail to improve their status due to the relatively few opportunities available and lack of efforts to expand legal and mass bases for their causes (i.e., backdoor listing and majority alliance). Chapter 5 introduces cases in which activist networks seize the opportunities to pursue changes and expand the social space for their activist networks.

4.1 Protestant Activism in Two Directions

September 14, 2010, is a typical rainy day in City S, central China, a region famous for its prosperous industries and rich history of agricultural production. I am in a 200-student theological institute. The Dean of the institute shows a blueprint and a color-printed brochure to the visitors: “My old friends, I don’t see you as outsiders so I will be
straight with you. This is the plan of our new campus and we will be able to offer
admission to five hundred more students in the future.” He adds, “They [Administration of Religious Affairs] have approved the land usage and the only thing we need is the
RMBxxx for construction. We need all the funding we can get.”

On April 3, 2011, a 1000-member church in Beijing was evicted from its rented
location and saw no hope of moving into its newly bought space. The church had paid
RMB 27,000,000, all from the weekly offerings of the members, for its future home in an
office building more than a year before. The congregants had been told that they could
not worship in their current form, and their existence would be allowed only if they were
willing to break the congregation into small groups.

The church decided to keep its unity. Reuters’ reporters, Chris Buckley and Sui-Lee
Wee wrote “Tears flowed at one of Beijing’s biggest ‘house’ churches when some 300
Chinese Christians prayed on the last Sunday before they face eviction from their
makeshift place of worship.” On April 10, members of the Shouwang Church gathered
outside a city park in Beijing, and 160 people were arrested. On April 17, 30 more people
were arrested. And the Outdoor Worship campaign continued. "This is the cross that the
church has to bear," Pastor Jin Tianming tells the worshippers in an on-line video and on
a one-page printed guideline delivered on the morning of the campaign.

These two pictures of Christianity in China demonstrate two distinct directions of
religious activism. The first direction is to break with or directly disobey the official

255 It is from my participant observation in Province B. The details of the location and participants are
confidential.
256 Because the rented space is very small, the church must have three worship services on Sunday. This is
very common among Chinese Protestant churches. Chris Buckley and Sui-Lee Wee, “Beijing church faces
eviction in tense times“ Sun Apr 3, 2011.
boundaries set by the government. Religious persecutions in China are more than restrictions on a faith or limitations on the freedom to worship. Religious freedom, conventionally defined as the freedom of expressing one’s culturally based values, is inadequate to describe the confrontation between the state and religious activists.  

Ordinary citizens indeed have freedom of choosing and expressing their preferred faiths; no one forces seminar attendants in City S or Shouwang’s members to abandon their views of Christianity or limit their freedom to express their specific version of faith. The trouble comes when they try to organize their activities outside the state-approved boundaries: in City S, the campus granted by Administration of Religious Affairs; in the Shouwang Church case, their own homes. The focal points are their freedom to engage in outreach activities and their ability to expand beyond of the established social space, when their growing capacities have been deemed hazardous to the Party leadership. In my interview with a government official in a city with similar outdoor worship incident earlier, he said “It is not about the money or the office space; it is a matter of whether the

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257 The most referred definition is from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 18: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” [http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a18](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a18) Franklin I. Gamwell identifies five types of religious freedom: (1) The Privatist view (John Rawls); (2) The Partisan View (John Courtney Murray); (3) The Pluralist View (Kent Greenawalt); (4) The Enlightenment Rationale; and (5) The Rationality of Comprehensive Convictions (Gamwell 1995).

258 In the past two years alone, there have been at least six incidents of Outdoor Worship in this country, while public protest remains politically sensitive and strictly forbidden.

259 More discussion on the Party’s leadership doctrine is in Chapter 3. Christopher Marsh, a political comparativist from Baylor University, holds a similar understanding; he argues that religion in Communist states is already politicized through forced secularization; therefore, the de-secularization in the post-communist phase is also highly political. Although I disagree with his theory of “militant atheism” that focuses on a normative battle between religion and communism, forced secularization indeed is the major tool and justification of religious control (Marsh 2011).
church is willing to fully cooperate with the leadership of government." Consequently, this form of religious activism is initiated and facilitated by the progressive actions to directly reject the role or space assigned by the state. For churches like Shouwang, disobeying the demand to disassemble the church is a form of progressive action because it demonstrates the will and ability to outreach and grow beyond their given boundaries.

A second direction taken by religious activism has been to remove the restrictions set by an outdated religious policy, which was rooted in anti-imperial discourse and bureaucratic despotism. Such activists disobey the official rules indirectly by obtaining the cooperation of local officials to not enforce the religious policy. The cooperation of local officials is critical because this is the most effective way to break the restrictions on churches’ outreach and collaboration activities, especially when the outreach and collaboration involve foreign Christian groups.

The transnational and ideational connections with foreign Christian groups are the “original sins” of Chinese Christians. The Chinese government would smash a group with no reservation or hesitation if officials believe there is “foreign conspiracy” involved. The doctrine prohibits any kind of transnational collaboration and has denounced Christianity as “a foreign religion coming to China on cannon balls.” One high-ranked TSPM clergyman once told me “believe me, many foreign missionaries are

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260 Interview No. 120.
261 Kenneth Lieberthal, a long-term researcher and well-known scholar of Chinese politics, has a very insightful comment on this prevailing characteristic of every component of Chinese political institutions: “China, like the USSR, set up a system in which every official is highly vulnerable to those above him but is able to act like a petty dictator toward those below” (Lieberthal 1995, 2004): 179.
262 Words from Ye, Xiao Wen, the former Administrator of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, the top Chinese religious affairs official, in the interview by PBS. “Cannon ball” implies that Christianity is supported and propagated by Western imperial powers.
"spies of their governments." This anti-imperialist discourse is the cornerstone of official religious policy and the normative source of repression on Christians. Although Chinese society today has been opened up to the outside world through technological innovation, trade liberation and globalization, this doctrine and the despotic system executing this doctrine remain unchanged.\textsuperscript{263} Therefore, religious affairs officials have little alternative if a label of "traitor" is put on an individual or a group by either security agencies or "spoilers" inside a Christian community.

This mismatch of management doctrine and ever-changing surroundings creates tension, confrontation, but also entrepreneurship.\textsuperscript{264} This second form of activism happens through the delicate work of entrepreneurs that is taking place at the local level. The Dean openly asks outsiders for donations, which is a clear violation of the "Self Governance, Self Support, Self Propagation" principles derived from the anti-imperialist doctrine, yet his confidence indicates that the restrictions set by the doctrine has been broken. The doctrine, on the legal level, has not changed since the 1950s.\textsuperscript{265} However, he promises his foreign friends that the transaction would not face any obstacles: "we have gotten the green light from the local authorities."\textsuperscript{266}

Breaking the restrictions of anti-imperialist doctrine is not easy. Even Pastor Jin tries very hard to defend the decision that Outdoor Worship has no connection to any outside group like China Aid or the Jasmine Revolution. However, the leaders of the church and

\textsuperscript{263} Details are in Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{264} Andrew Mertha has provided insightful cases of local entrepreneurs using national media (China Center TV, CCTV) and foreign NGOs to pressure the local governments (Mertha 2008). Lily Tsai’s findings support my thesis through another direction. She finds "solitary groups" (family ties, church, and temples) are helpful to increase the accountability of local governance (Tsai 2007b).
\textsuperscript{265} Details of Chinese religious control mechanisms, please see (Leung and Chan 2003).
\textsuperscript{266} The details of this entrepreneurship are in the cases 4.
Beijing authorities both know the decision involves considerations beyond the city lines. Four months ago, in 2010, the Shouwang Church had another Outdoor Worship for the same housing issue, days before President Obama visited Beijing for the first time since he took the presidency. No one was arrested in the two-week walk out, and Pastor Jin and his co-workers decided to end the campaign early because local authorities promised a temporary gathering place and “to save Chinese government’s face in front of Obama.”

Unfortunately, this self-restraint did not win any understanding for the church. The church lost its space again and participants of the second Outdoor Worship were arrested and faced serious harassment after they went back home from police stations.

4.2 Religious Repression and Protestant Activism in 4 Cities: An Overview

In order to isolate the causal mechanisms associated with effective religious activism, I employ mainly the methods of agreement and difference to construct the basic research design of the case studies. Although these comparisons are not fully balanced, they are happening in four largely similar geographic locations and approximately at the same time. Four locations have top officials assigned by the CCP, and they have loyally followed the same line of leadership since the 1980s. Administrators of religious affairs are appointed by these Party cadres, so they have little political incentive to change the policy regarding religious freedom unless they are forced to do so. Economic

267 Quoted from an online document, assumedly written by a member of the Shouwang Church, code name Brother C.

268 Despite the criticisms on the assumptions of these methods based on the methodological standards set by John Stuart Mill (1843/1974), it is reasonable to apply these methods here since structural features of subnational cases are much more controllable than national cases. For the strength and weakness of these methods, please see Skocpol and Somers 1980; George and Mackeown 1985; Ragin 1987; Dion 1994; Collier and Mahoney 1996; and George and Bennett 2005.
development has been the first priority of these city officials since Deng's time but they have similar, though very limited autonomy on either setting general economic policy or relocating tax-based revenues in their districts. What they usually do to create a stable and friendly environment, as most local officials have done in industrial regions of China, is to attract foreign investment in order to expand the tax base and therefore the additional revenues going to local authorities. Furthermore, the locations of four cities under investigation are in the heartland of Chinese economic reform and openness. They are equally vulnerable to interference from Beijing and possess similar levels of resilience to foreign pressure. The summary of these basic characteristics are listed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Summary of Major Features of Four Research Sites

<table>
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<th>Cases</th>
<th>Freedom of Protestant Activism</th>
<th>BL</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>Political Openness</th>
<th>Economic Autonomy</th>
<th>Geographic Remoteness</th>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City T</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City S</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: BL: Backdoor Listing; MA: Majority Alliance.

269 The other important and related source of revenue for local governments is from granting or selling land usage to corporations. Christine P. W. Wong, 1997, Financing Local Government in the People's Republic of China, Oxford University Press.
By identifying the underlying historical and structural factors and, most importantly, the strategies of transnational actors, these cases provide a clear explanation of the variation of repression on Protestants and the uneasy progress of this transnational activism. When foreigners are willing to work behind some legal cover and local conditions allows them to do so (i.e., locals work together to promote and protect the legal framework), the progress is evident and the movement is growing despite the fact that the repressive national policy has been kept the same. Indeed, in the real world, many factors contribute to the success and failure of a transnational network, and there might be reasons overlooked by this project. However, this structured comparison demonstrates my argument that foreign advocates need local activists to "market" them in an unfamiliar Chinese locale, especially in terms of dealing with government officials. For example, the same denominational network receives various treatments and performs differently in these four politically identical cities. Its successful entry and growth in City S cannot be explained without understanding the efforts of "strategic entrepreneurs" who decide to ally with certain establishments such as registered churches that used to be seen as tools of repressors, and the "policy entrepreneurs," the local activists who decide to seize the opportunity to form an unprecedented policy alliance between open-minded officials, registered churches, and underground churches. The collaboration of two kinds of entrepreneurs is modeled by "backdoor listing" and "majority alliance" mechanisms discussed in chapter 2. Four cities here provide the qualitative evidence of these kinds of collaboration and allow me to trace the actual processes of how transnational religious networks can work.
City H: Highly Repressive and Highly Competitive

City H in province A was the one of the earliest entry points for the Chinese Christian mission. Missionaries first arrived here more than a century ago. However, as a stronghold of foreign missionary organizations, it was also one of the main targets of several waves of political campaigns in Mao’s period. Eventually, it became the major battleground of the government vs. underground churches campaign. While the revival of Christianity happened in the late 1970s and 1980s, the city remains behind the national scene. Christians had suffered harsh treatment until economic reform pushed the leadership of the city to adapt a more open policy to all social groups in recent years. There are many foreign missionaries now working in City H, but they are mostly working alone, and many of them prefer to establish their own congregations rather than to co-operate with locals. From today’s vibrant economic development and middle-class-like citizenry, an outsider might expect to see greater levels of religious freedom in this city. However, the freedom of Protestant activists has remained restricted since the 1980s; underground churches not only have to hide their exchange with foreigners but also experience more police harassment than the other three cities and the atmosphere is “tougher” than even in Beijing, as many of my interviewees described. All alternative theories—remoteness, economic incentives, civil society, and transnational advocacy networks—fail to explain why City H is far behind the national level even after two rounds of new national leadership in 1993 and 2004.
One of the university professors I interviewed in the city describes the problem: city officials here have the chance to move up to higher positions. They do not want to “screw up” the chance, so everything here has to be “110%” by the book. This means tougher regulations not only on regular church business but also on the enforcement of Three-Self Principles: contacts and exchanges between foreign groups and local congregations become serious offenses. In the few open churches ministered by foreigners, passport checking becomes the routine before every Sunday service; people without foreign passports would be asked to leave. I was asked to leave a TSPM bible study after identifying myself as a non-citizen. In contrast with other cities I studied, church leaders in City H are extremely cautious about church-to-church collaboration and especially contacts from foreign agencies. Heavy regulations have even stronger negative effects on legal churches; the number of open churches has never gone back to the pre-1949 level. “We used to have more churches than Beijing,” one of my TSPM interviewees told me with resentful feeling. “But Beijing [TSPM] now has three times the churches than we have and they [ASA] don’t allow us to build a new one.”

Underground church leaders have expressed a similar concern about the promotion-minded officials but add another factor to the heavy regulations: competition between congregations. Independent local congregations have developed in this city for almost a century and never died out even under the harsh repression during the Cultural Revolution. After open-door policy and economic reform provided the chance for foreign missionaries and aid to sneak back into China, TSPM churches lost a lot of members to

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270 Interview #85.
271 Interview No. 83.
the fast growing and more "spiritual" House Church congregations, who do not have to put the Party before God. TSPM leaders are particularly unhappy about the quick and easy support the "illegal" congregations have received from the city's prosperous economy and outside supporters, while legal churches have to be “by the book” and kept away from those potential patrons. Many House Church leaders believe resentment from TSPM is one of the key reasons they are closely watched and constantly harassed by the local police and agents from the Internal Security Bureau in the Ministry of Public Security. One House Church congregation I visited has had to move twice in the past 3 years because the TSPM church across the street kept complaining about the "illegal religious activities" to local police.

Case W: "Freedom" under TSPM

City W is two-hour train distance from City H. Although the two cities are located in the same region, the religious situation is distinct. City W also has a long history of foreign missions and has been targeted by political campaigns for decades. When religious activity finally became legal, Christians here were cautious. TSPM congregations and meetings gradually came back and remained strong throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Fewer arrests and less harassment are reported in City W, which makes the difference between City H and W puzzling. Most important of all, transnational activities are vigorous here. The level of freedom jumped up after 1990s. The local

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religious affairs officials seem to have better relationships with TSPM churches and even with house church congregations, according to my interviewees. Many Christians told me the stories of how large-scale, thousand-people outdoor rallies were held in places near City W, which is strictly forbidden and even unthinkable in other places of China.

According to the talk I had with a local religious NGO leader, City W is unique because it has strong personal support from some influential figures in TSPM. They play a critical role in introducing foreign advocacy groups, while convincing the Party and public security agencies that those actions are beneficial to the nation. The action is quite successful, and a huge amount of funding from foreign denominations has arrived. However, the collaboration is very selective. Only certain foreign denominations from certain countries are welcomed, and the selection is possibly due to personal favor and unknown political considerations. In addition, house churches have no place in the exchanges. The boomerang theory, associated with Keck and Sikkink's work on transnational advocacy networks, has some merit here, but it fails to explain the low conflict between registered and unregistered sides. It is possible that biased foreign support eases the dissatisfaction and suspicion of TSPM on unregistered congregations, and therefore the two sides can go their own ways. My readers should be aware that HC’s conditions have become better, but there has been no significant improvement since the national oppression on underground groups cooled down in the late 1990s. House churches remain strong and independent, and there is no clear sign of reconciliation between two sides on their differences and past grievances. More latitude for freedom can be found around the rural areas and satellite towns of City W, not inside the city.
City T: the Birthplace of Locally Grown Religious Activism

City T and City S were the second tier sites of Christian missions in the early 20th century. They received fewer foreign missions and had much less influence compared to City W and City H. This history gives them a special advantage: fewer underground congregations emerged in the late 1970s and therefore the Christians do not have the strong grievances and feuds from the oppression in the 1980s. While religious revival created a lot of tension between TSPM and house churches elsewhere, the situation here was much better. When the number of Christians reached the level that authorities had to worry about, the TSPM system ran successfully and was strong enough to negotiate, make friends, and provide resources to lure house church congregations into its cycle.

The major characteristic of City T is the strong TSPM theological seminary. Its leadership shows a high level of openness, which is unique in the TSPM system. The seminary openly welcomes students from provinces outside its parish, and even students recommended by unregistered congregations. It was a bold move at a time when government agencies had total power over all religious decisions. The state religious affairs officials used to demand that each Chinese region could have only one seminary, and each theological seminary could only take in students from the neighboring five to six provinces. Consequently, all seminaries in China were overwhelmed by enthusiastic students from local churches, but very few of them dared to break the unspoken rules set by the state. This is the major reason TSPM never has enough clergy for its vast and growing parishes.
The Dean and the Chairman of TSPM from City T spoke openly about their problems and how they had addressed them. In the early 1990s, when the school and parishes were overwhelmed by the rapid growth of Christianity and lack of funding, a group of foreign missionaries showed friendship and helped to solve their problems. They provided the funding needed to set up the initial school operation. The generous gesture was unique at that time, when most foreign advocacy groups reached only house churches or large national establishments like the Amity Foundation. The project has created a friendly cycle in which two sides have constantly interacted and produced collaborations that are far beyond what religious affair bureaucracy would usually allow TSPM to do. Once I asked the Dean how they could do this. He said, “We tell ARA what they need to know, and they won’t bother to approve or disapprove our projects because they don’t want to get in trouble….We have their trust [that things won’t get out of hand].”

City S: An Open Space for Transnational Religious Activism

The mutual trust between local officials, foreign missionaries, and TSPM leaders is critical and has a spill-over effect on other cities and relations outside TSPM’s domain. City S is about a one-hour train ride from City T and it is the third-largest municipal area in Province B. Its head TSPM clergyman is a graduate of the seminary in City T and the first to get official permission to study abroad, which makes him popular in the system. The cycle of friendship quickly brings unregistered congregations in City S into the TSPM system. The relationship between TSPM and HC improved even faster than in
City T. For example, the head TSPM official and pastor grew up in an unregistered House Church. His “bad background” has not stopped his career and the chance of education due to the openness policy set by City T’s seminary. Evidence shows that the freedom of transnational religious activism has greatly improved in the last five years. Funding and services flow into City S without any trouble. The transnational network, including the seminary, foreign denominations, and local TSPM, can even set up joint missions to another province. Almost all congregations in City S have joined TSPM. “We have a very small house church population now,” the pastor says.

One impressive story happened while I was in the field. When gathering and meetings of Christian leaders became too sensitive and attracted interference within City T, the network moved its activity to City S for better protection. As I was told in the visit, “There are too many informers there [in City T].” I witnessed them move a ten-person missionary group visiting from Chicago from City T to City S due to a safety warning from friends in the government. The pastor proudly told me, “This is my town and I know everyone…if they ask, my friends in the office will back me up.”

Although City T has grown faster in terms of economic development and its civil society development, City S has seen greater improvements in conditions for religious expression and activism. One of the important factors is the strength of local activists to protect transnational participants and their networks from abroad and City T. In contrast with conventional wisdom, it is the activists that work most closely with local activists and those allied with the state that end up establishing the greatest degree of freedom.

273 Interview # 101.
In addition to my personal participant observation, the general conditions for dissidents and activists (not limited to religious cases) in the past 28 years are largely consistent with my observations (shown in Table 4.2 and 4.3). The numbers of political prisoners from 1982 to 2010 indicates that City S has the most relaxed environment for all forms of activism and opposition. While more people have been arrested in Cities H and W than before (36% to 60% in City H and 25% to 75% in City W), the numbers in City T have declined from 55% to 38% and no arrests have been reported in City S. Undoubtedly, these numbers alone cannot be taken as evidence of successful activism since more arrests may mean stronger activism and no arrests may indicate effective repression; nevertheless, my participant observation rules out these two alternatives: high level of freedom to pursue forbidden collaboration and outreach activates does been enjoyed by Christian leaders in City S. The uneven post-2004 development is clearly related to TSPM-based collaboration. More detailed stories will be discussed in chapter 5.

Table 4.2: Political Prisoners: A Snap Shot of the Political Persecution in Four Research Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Post-1982</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People in</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detection</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Province A, City H</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Province A, City W</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Province B, City T</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Province B, City S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The number in the “People in Detection (PD)” cell indicates the total number of the city residents who are in jail for political reasons during the time period. Percentages followed the number are the proportions of the cases in related to total number of political prisoners in that city.
in past 30 years. Source: Political Prisoner Database (PPD), Congressional – Executive Commission on China, Retrieve on September 21, 2011.

Table 4.3: Levels of the Freedom of Activism in Four Research Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contentious Level (X1)</th>
<th>Post-1982</th>
<th>Post-1993</th>
<th>Post-2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y: Freedom of Activism (FA)</td>
<td>IS</td>
<td>FA</td>
<td>IS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Province A, City H</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Province A, City W</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Province B, City T</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Province B, City S</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The level of Freedom of Activism (FA) and level of Internal Spiral (IS) are labeled as L (low), M (medium), and H (High).

4.3 City H: From Building Churches to "Outdoor Worship"

Transnational religious groups used to play an important role in financing non-TSPM Christian congregations in the 1980s to early 1990s. When the society transferred from the structure of people's commune, state-controlled work units, and directed economy, believers had little extra money to offer to their churches. A few hundred dollars from missionaries could make a noticeable difference by aiding in efforts to buy land, build a church-owned facility, or support a full-time pastor. Among the thirty churches I visited during the fieldwork, most of them, registered or unregistered, have had this kind of experience at some point in the past. Foreigners came and saw the needs of the believers and left or transferred money to the leaders. Many missionary magazines and publications have provided countless stories of this sort of operation. The scales and impacts of this kind of transnational actions are hard to measure, but many church leaders believe foreign support is critical for the survival of this early generation clergy who were under high governmental suppression.

\[274\]
retrieve foreign missionary properties occupied by the state after the nationalization movement in the 1950s.

As the Chinese economy continues to grow, the significance of foreign donations for house church's building projects is declining, but TSPM is gradually losing its institutional privileges and is more willing to obtain foreign support than before. The church building issue, the struggle of how churches obtain funds and permits to build churches, represents a good opportunity to examine the implications of foreign religious organizations. The struggles in TSPM and house church congregations demonstrate distinct patterns of foreign involvement in Chinese religious activism.

“Outdoor Worship” and the Transnational Activism on Civil Rights

Beijing is not my research site but the case of Shouwang Church demonstrates a strategy of religious activism popularly in cities with strong House Church tradition and organizations, including City H. Using open information from the Shouwang case can avoid revealing too many details of similar actions in City H and protect the confidentiality of my interviewees. Cases of "Outdoor Worship" have only been reported in a handful of Chinese cities, and their leaders are closely watched by authorities. The writer of this project has to be cautious about using the interview materials from these church leaders.

Overall, "Outdoor Worship" is the activist strategy highlighted and praised by many human rights activists, and it echoes with the concept of civil disobedience popular in democratic societies. The cause of this action is often related to an unregistered
congregation being forced out of their rented or purchased properties. Members of the congregations then decide to operate Sunday services in a public space in order to "protest" the violation of their religious freedom while pretending not to operate a protest because outdoor public gatherings are forbidden by current law. Few churches decide to stand up against such repression through a protest-like strategy, yet even these cases show church leaders are trying to avoid their actions becoming popularized, externalized or "internationalized." Unlike protesters in democracies who desire public attention and awareness, leaders of Outdoor Worship often try to avoid excessive media exposure and especially reject the support and concerns from outside of China. In order to defend the anti-imperialist criticism used by the regime, religious leaders have to frame their actions as "local only" and purely funded by Chinese Christians. Shouwang's discourse echoes with the language of international human rights, and the leaders intentionally externalize the issue beyond the scope of religion; however, the behavior of participants is extremely restrained and tries to avoid making officials "lose face in front of foreign leaders."

Leaders of Outdoor Worship in City H even reject the international framing and insist that a less confrontational, “House Church Tradition” kind of activism is necessary.

Outdoor Worship: A Network of Disobedience

On April 10, members of the Shouwang Church gathered outside a city park in Beijing, and 160 people were arrested. On April 17, 30 more people were arrested. The Outdoor Worship campaign continued. "This is the cross that the church has to bear," Pastor Jin Tianming tells the worshippers in an on-line video and on a one-page printed
guideline delivered the morning of the campaign began. The campaign continued for 25 weeks and members of Shouwang Church have been house arrested, closely monitored, and harassted at homes, schools or work places in order to keep them from joining the outdoor worship. The movement has received a wide range of international and local support from Christian and human rights communities, while mass media in China are silenced with no follow-on ripple effect in society. The Congressional-Executive Commission on China, a congressional human rights monitoring agency has documented 500 members of the Shouwang Church under house arrest between the autumn of 2010 and the autumn of 2011 reporting year.275

But Pastor Jin’s decision to choose a street protest is not without criticism among Chinese Christians. Two of my Shanghai interviewees said that they support Jin as a respectful Christian leader, but they have reservations about his strategy. When I asked why, they point out that the “Outdoor Worship” brings too much trouble to the congregations and “diverts members’ attention from God to [political] confrontation.” One former member of Shouwang reminded me that the ability to execute such a difficult decision comes from Jin’s patriarchal style of leadership, which is common among many house church congregations.

Nevertheless, sympathy and material support from house church networks all over China are significant. Shouwang’s blog reports weekly that a few believers from outside Beijing joined the worship and were arrested alongside their own members.276 Almost

276 https://www.shwforum.info/blog/
every house church leader I interviewed said their Joint Prayer Meeting (Lian-Dao-Hui; an informal association of underground churches) have put Shouwang on their agenda, and some have gathered offerings for supporting the Outdoor Worship. Although most of these efforts are underground and limited to their members only, one church, Autumn Blessing in Chengdu city, Sichuan province, has revealed it support to the public.277 Autumn Blessing has carried out a similar Outdoor Worship campaign for its housing rights two years ago, and “the Elder” Wang Yi (Senior Pastor) of Autumn Blessing believes that open and legalized House Churches are the rightful strategy. Autumn Blessing’s Sunday worship collects offerings for Shouwang and “for the family members of the prisons of consensus.” The title of donation is printed on their schedule flyers, offering envelops, and church weekly letters.

It should be noted that this level of openness seems rare among House Church congregations due to the fear of persecution. It is an evident that a new kind of Protestant activism has emerged. Even though observers often call them “underground” churches, Shouwang, Autumn Blessing and many other “urban white-collar churches” open their doors to all people, including foreigners, government employees, and even secret police and government agents. I witnessed one of them posting names and cell phone numbers of all co-workers and group leaders on the wall, while a stranger, either a journalist or government agent, took pictures of the information. These new kind of churches are far more connected to the global rights discourse and confident about their ability to resist

277 I cannot reveal more the details here due to my promise of confidentiality to the participants, but Autumn Blessing and Shouwang are not my interview subjects and all the information about them has been collected through open sources and their own publications. They are the symbolic and leading figures of Protestant activism in China.
persecution than before. For example, Pastor Jin and Wang own several different websites and blogs, and constantly send out emails and podcasts about their actions to domestic and overseas Christian followers. Most important of all, they highlight that the legitimacy of their actions is from sources higher than the communist party: God, international law, and the Constitution of China.

In an open petition letter co-signed by Wang Yi and other unregistered church leaders, Jin writes,

*It comes to our attention that "liberty of religious faith" is accepted and provided for in Article 36 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (to which China is a party), and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was signed by the Chinese government. We believe that the definition of "religious liberty" stipulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is both accepted by the Chinese government and in compliance with our faith....

He also expands upon the common idea of religious freedom from individual rights of worship to the collective rights of assembling, associating, communicating and propagating about faiths:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. Therefore, religious liberty is comprised of freedoms of assembly, association, speech, education and evangelism. As one of the longest, largest and most
widely distributed faiths in the world, Christianity enjoys the above-mentioned freedoms in most countries.\textsuperscript{278}

Claiming legitimacy under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) is not new in either Chinese or global Christian communities.\textsuperscript{279} However, it is a step forward to request the civic space and the freedom of a social group to associate with an imagined global citizenry highlighted by global human rights laws. An unregistered congregation trying to buy an office space is not new, and many previous Shouwang have done so already.\textsuperscript{280} What makes this an unsolvable problem is the implications behind this Chinese-style civil disobedience: Shouwang has been offered a government-approved solution (breaking into smaller-sized gatherings) but refuses. In China, all social organizations are government-sponsored and supposedly follow the leadership of the Communist Party.\textsuperscript{281} Once a well-known, sizable church “legalizes” itself by disobeying the leadership, this success could mean the failure of the government-sponsorship system. The success of Shouwang is

\textsuperscript{280} Some observers suspect that the reason might be the visibility of Shouwang, which has a thousand members in a busy urban district. This explanation might be valid, but there are influential urban churches which have obtained their gathering spaces successfully. Autumn Blessing is one example and Jin DengTai (Golden Lampstand) in Shanghai is another. They all walked on the street but government gave in shortly. I have visited other major cities and several urban churches bought their spaces without protesting.
\textsuperscript{281} Chapter 3 has discussed the ”CONGO”-based social control mechanism and the creation of TSPM system for Protestant Christians.
equal to the failure of TSPM in monopolizing the legitimacy of Protestant Christianity. If Shouwang can obtain a conventional fashion of church space (a fixed location, showing religious symbols, and enough space to welcome even nonbelievers for civil activities) without permissions from both TSPM and the State Administration of Religious Affairs (the dual registration system; chapter 3), it means that any congregation can demand this kind of treatment or use this as a precedent to fight with the government.\textsuperscript{282} This is a severe consequence that all members of the establishment, including city officials, religious affairs bureaucrats, and TSPM leaders.

Why does Shouwang not accept the government deal? Jin positions the campaign beyond protecting the right to move in the property owned by Shouwang:

\textit{Why Shouwang chooses Outdoor Worship because the government uses its power to stop churches to have a position in the public space, and enjoy their own room for development. While a church belongs to God and we firmly believe the space he gives to the Church, the tension and conflict between religion and the state is unavoidable.}\textsuperscript{283}

The position in a public space is the common predicament of not only religious groups but all social groups without government sponsorship. For decades, the right to participate in this public space is refused by the state and the space has been basically monopolized by government-sponsored agencies. Activities about women have to be

\textsuperscript{282} There are thousands of house churches networks in China, each with hundred to thousand members now gathering in 30-80 person groups in residential units. Most of them strongly desire to have formal and bigger locations to allow these residential congregations to come together. The “breakthrough” made by Shouwang, if succeeds, will encourage these small house church congregations to further consolidate and merge into several big churches. Bigger churches may create bigger influence, and this is the key reason that the government is afraid of.

approved by the National League of Women; donations to disaster relief have to go through the Chinese Red Cross Society; and building churches have to firstly obtain membership of TSPM. The distress and difficulties suffered in Shouwang are shared by many Chinese social groups and grassroots NGOs. For years, no social group was willing to or capable of challenging this state-sponsored social monopoly. Disobedient Chinese Protestant churches now form a network of activism to question the legitimacy of these agencies and the policies behind these monopolies. Their continued resilience in the face of state-sponsored repression is a proof of revived public space for activism in China, although it is clear that this activism is still in its earliest stage and can be crushed easily without outside help and public support.

A Movement for Public Space: Attending Congress of World Evangelism

My readers may wonder how widespread and effective this kind of activism is. It is too early to know the result of Shouwang’s campaign, but the absence of violence is an encouraging sign. Perhaps to avoid criticism from abroad or in response to their co-operative behavior, Beijing’s police did not jail participants and released most detainees within 48 hours. Yet this campaign is not an isolated incident and is part of an ongoing movement to gain more public space for all Protestants. One earlier example is the failed attempt of Chinese Protestants to participate in the meeting of the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (The Lausanne Movement), a well-recognized global

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284 Of course, home detention and other harassments have never stopped.
evangelical leadership conference, held in South Africa, October 18, 2010. Protestant leaders from Shouwang, Autumn Blessing, Jin DengTai, and many overseas associates of this transnational advocacy were part of this failed effort to attend the meeting.

About 200 church leaders from unregistered congregations were invited to the Lausanne meeting. When TSPM became aware of this event and requested to be part of this international conference, the governing body of the meeting, Lausanne Congress of World Evangelism (LCWE) agreed and sent invitations to both TSPM and House Church congregations. The result was an unfortunate setback for the freedom of Christianity in China but a sign of growing civil disobedience. Most invited Chinese church leaders knew the consequences of their decision to attend the meeting, and they were threatened by talk, violence, or confiscation of their passports. Only around thirty made it to airports but were immediately arrested after they checked in at the counters. It is evident that all arrested church leaders from different locations in China had realized the consequences of their actions, but proceeded on the trip towards a collective goal.


286 In responding to the criticism from Chinese foreign minister, Executive chair of The Lausanne Movement Doug Birdsall makes a official statement: ‘The Lausanne planners have no intention of challenging the Chinese government’s principle of independent, autonomous and self-governed churches. We recognize the nature of the Christian community and their contribution in Chinese society while respecting China’s established institutions. We very much regret that our intentions and the decentralized invitation process to our Chinese brothers and sisters have been wrongly perceived.’ “China Missing from Global Table as Cape Town 2010 Congress Opened Sunday in South Africa” Cited in http://www.lausanne.org/zh-TW/about/news-releases/1287-china-missing-from-global-table-as-cape-town-2010-congress-opened-sunday-in-south-africa.html (Retrieved in October 17, 2011)

287 OMF International reports that only four delegates representing Mainland China were able to attend. One from a TSPM church and another one from a House Church background congregation. Two other Chinese came from overseas Chinese churches: OMF International to the former China Inland Mission and Overseas Missionary Fellowship, founded by James Hudson Taylor in 1865 and one of the biggest foreign mission in China. Cited in http://www.omf.org/omf/us/resources_1/newsletters/global_chinese_ministries/gcm_newsletter_2011/global_chinese_ministries_february_2011/the_lausanne_congress_and_the_chinese_church
Liu Tong-su, a former Chinese House Church leader and now serving in a Chinese congregation in San Francisco, made this online remark to encourage participation before the meeting: “Do not be cowered, it isn’t a personal or individual church matter for the representatives to join [Lausanne], but it is the testimony of the greatest degree of representation of the entire church of China.”

"Failed" Outdoor Worship in City H

It is too early to tell the result of Beijing's "Outdoor Worship" campaign, but a couple of similar movements have been carried out since 2009. City H has also experienced several similar outdoor campaigns. Here I introduce one case, which has been seen by the cycle of Chinese Protestant leaders as the "failed" successful campaign against government repression because the church deterred the attack on its freedom of worship by moving into a smaller, less ideal location. This church, code-named the Jeremiah Church (JC) demonstrates a method of religious activism different from Shouwang.289

The Jeremiah Church was a small blue-collar congregation established in 2001 following the tradition of the House Church: reject joining the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and maintain self-governance and autonomy. Due to the financial crisis in the late 1990s, many factories were bankrupted and left empty buildings in the corner of the city with no public attention. The church rented one of the factory warehouses and

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quietly developed it into a church with roughly 800~1000 members. In 2007, there were hundreds of this kind of underground congregations in the city, and their leaders decided to form an informal platform of collaboration, privately called Joined Prayer Meeting, in order to strengthen cooperation and provide more services to Protestant community. JC is unique because most churches have no permanent locations and mostly gather in members’ houses or apartments, the typical format of the House Church. The factory building provided enough space for bigger gathering and group training activities and therefore activities of Joined Prayer Meeting were often held in the Jeremiah Church.

The 2008 earthquake in Sichuan Province gave the year-old Joined Prayer Meeting a chance to conduct its first social work outside of Province A. By combining the resources of dozens of church systems, Joined Prayer Meeting donated RMB1,000,000 to sponsor students of vocation schools in disaster areas; many church members also volunteered to help recovery efforts in Sichuan. When I was in Sichuan in 2010, there are still hundreds of local missionaries and aid workers sent by churches stationed there. The 2008 earthquake has been seen as the "wake up call" for Chinese activism on disaster relief, charity, and social justice; hundreds of thousands of regular Chinese directly participated in post-earthquake relief voluntarily and many others joined the movement of criticizing corruption and quality issues related to 7,000 collapsed classrooms, approximately 10,000 deaths of schoolchildren.290

However, the rising activism also alarmed the Party about the Joined Prayer Meeting and the cross-church collaboration. Leaders of Jeremiah Church had begun to aware of

government concern but no serious interference happened. City officials took action right after 200 members of churches under the Joined Prayer Meeting attended a missionary conference in Hong Kong in 2009. The decade-long contract of the warehouse was suddenly rescinded and the church was evicted.

No ARA or any city agencies contacted the Jeremiah Church about the decision or tried to work out the differences. The cost of repression is very low in places like City H, and it is apparent that a phone call can make a huge impact on victims with little traces back to the repressor. Pastor H was unaware of this crisis until the landlord notified him: "if you guys (government and the church) can fix the problem, this place is always ready for you." A 1000-people church suddenly lost the place of gathering for eight years; the decision to respond to this crisis is pressing.

Pastor H explained to me his decision to choose Outdoor Worship instead of looking for other solutions:

*Government knows its action is indefensible and violates the legal rights of us. They know they are wrong so they did not contact us... We cannot give in; we cannot go back to the old way [worship in members’ homes]. As the leading church in this movement, the collapse of the Jeremiah Church would be the great setback of the whole movement.*

Pastor H is also clear about the advantages of his church in this struggle with the authorities. It is well-connected to other local churches; most church members are local residents who have lived in the city for several generations and have their own strong social ties (churches like Shunwang have many migrated from other cities). The costs of massive arrest would be significantly high for the authorities. Most important of all, a
large scale international event is coming in few years. Pastor H realized that the situation would only get worse since the public space was shrinking every day. Since the church has been forced to the corner, there is little more to lose.

This is the first time for these church goers to manage a street campaign. Pastor H admitted that he and other co-workers might be impelled by the rising spirit of civil rights movement (the Weiquan movement) prevailing in Chinese society since the mid-2000s. He did not believe that the government would take a violent action against peaceful protestors at this moment; the optimism of “the Party won’t fire on people” is shared by many activists I interviewed. They perceive that the environment is very different from 1989.

Nevertheless, the church took a series of precautions for possible arrest and stalemate. According to similar experiences in other places, Pastor H had prepared to stay in a detention center for 15 days; the church had to prepare replacements and contingency plans in case of major co-workers were jailed. The decision was quickly exercised by church members and caught the city government by surprise. The "Outdoor Worship" continued for five months and encountered only small-scale harassments such as road blocks and constant surveillance. The campaign was ended by the Jeremiah Church buying another location with donations from other churches and moving in secretly. The city government did not have the chance to stop the move and has not forced them to leave since.

A unique feature of the Jeremiah Church strategy is its strategy of using low-profile confrontations. The church did not prepare an online newsletter or update its micro-blog
constantly to attract attention and sympathy as many urban churches do. It did not ask friendly churches to join the fight, except for their financial assistance and prayers. Its leadership intentionally or unintentionally kept its distance from overseas Christian communities; unlike Shouwang, which has many foreign-educated scholars and university professors, Jeremiah's members are mostly local residents. There was no intense struggle and furious confrontation during the five months. From the beginning to the end, the repressor and the civil rights "fighters" had no physical contact, and there were no "activists" fastening themselves to trees or throwing eggs or rocks at riot police. Quoting one of my Christian friends' words, "it is a boring case." For most residents of City H and human rights watchers, this was not a significant event since it was not on the news, and it was not even listed among the "major violations of religious freedom" in the annual report of some of the famous watch groups in the West.

The results of this campaign are ambivalent. Did the authorities back down or pretend it never happened? Is the result of moving into a new location a "victory"? To some degree, the indirect interference on the government’s side already saves some wiggle room for a peaceful resolution; officials can save face by interpreting the event as a civil dispute between landlord and renter, not between them and the church. The restrained activism of the church preserves the possibility that this face-saving technique will be effective. Why bother to prolong the confrontation after the church has given up the larger space and moved into a small one? Since no massive counter attack and international mobilization happened, it may be reasonable for city officials to call off the
attack when they realize that the "danger" of this transnational network is not as severe as they used to think. It is a tacit “win-win” situation when both sides can declare victory.

Nevertheless, the nature of the repression and the scale of the Jeremiah Church’s counter-action are no different from those in the Shouwang Church’s case. Pastor H represents a similar spirit and determination of activism to defend not only the church but also the common freedom of citizens to act based on their conscience. Pastor H believes that the core dispute between church and state is that the latter tries to stop the growing social space expansion by social groups such as churches, locally and transnationally, to share credit and influence in this public space. The Hong Kong Conference and the Lausanne Congress of World Evangelism are only two events which have triggered direct repression on the Jeremiah Church. Pastor H has repeatedly emphasized that the church is a part of the public space and has the responsibility to defend this space, but he disagreed with the Christian social theological standpoints that ask Christians to actively engage in sociopolitical movements to reshape this space. He believes this form of activism, either opposing or supporting the status quo, is exactly the path TSPM chosen and does not belongs to the House Church transition of disobedience:

_The growth of collaboration among churches locally and internationally is the natural development of the history; it is unstoppable. I tried to convince those officials that churches have no intention to oppose government's policy but these changes are inevitable.... If the government insists on policies and laws inconsistent with the opinions of 80 million Christians, the result is no Christian would follow them._

291 Pastor H, like many House Church leaders, received a phone call before Lausanne Conference which asked him not to attend the meeting.
Although the Jeremiah Church did not actually force government to back down, its continued survival secures the growth of Joined Prayer Meeting and the House Church network in City H. As I introduced in the review section, City H is a place full of hostile competition between underground churches and TSPM churches. The survey of other congregations in City H show similar patterns; although missionaries and activists come and go easily in this city, local churches restrain their outreach and collaboration efforts with outsiders due to security concerns. The survival of the existing Joined Prayer Meeting network is already an uneasy success, yet this network remains closed and keeps its distance from foreign advocacy networks for safety reasons. Unlike many House Church congregations in Province A opening their doors for foreign aid, the Jeremiah Church does not invite foreign missionaries or preachers and is reluctant to receive funding from overseas communities. Only a few foreign nationals, mostly ethnic Chinese, are allowed to participate in their activities because they can blend in easily.

4.4 City W: TSPM and Backdoor Listing

As stated before, TSPM congregations in City H execute a strict segregation policy and basically close their doors to foreign nationals and Christian groups except very few with approvals from high-level officials.\footnote{For example, when I asked to bring my class of study abroad students to visit a historical, Anglican tradition church in the city, the chief pastor politely refused and explained that the visit with foreign nationals would have to file official documents all the way to the provincial religious affairs office. He said, “Even if you are prepared to make the effort, the process would probably take two months.”} They are facing even higher level of restrictions than House Church groups since TSPM churches have registered locations and have to go under scrutiny frequently. In City W, the restrictions on registered groups...
are much looser, and people can see foreign students and nationals are attending regular services. My interviews have also shown that foreign funding and services can be provided to local churches in City W. The key reason for this relaxation is the organizational strength of TSPM leadership and especially the creation of a registered, semi-autonomous NGO (or GONGO) to broker foreign aid and personnel exchanges; a typical case of backdoor listing. The success of TSPM in the city convinces authorities that they do not need to worry too much about churches’ outreach and collaboration efforts with each other and even with foreigners.

Having a registered NGO is a difficult task in China; having a church-based NGO is closer to impossible. One estimation is that there are about three million NGO-like social organizations in China and only 1.5 percent of them are able to register with the government (Gao 2008). Official records show that less than 0.1% of them have religious backgrounds. The legal constraints on civil society development reflect its recent emergence as a development actor. The government requires a NGO or NPO to have two institutional sponsors before registering — one from local civil affairs offices under the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA) and the other one from the national associations or state agencies directly responsible for the group’s functional specialties. For example, a church-founded disability-care organization has to submit paperwork to MOCA and SARA to process registration, a so-called “two parent system.” MOCA and SARA officials would deliver this application to all the “in-law” offices and request relevant “Xitong” organs and GONGO organizations to evaluate the potential risks and benefits of

this decision. MOCA would ask its public security organ, organizational organ and the
China Disabled Persons Federation (CDPF; a GONGO with a vice-ministerial level of
privilege). SARA would counsel with the UFWD organ and CCC/TSPM regional
leadership. In short, if any office or individual in the process questions the necessity of
this approval, the application would never pass. For instance, the CDPF might object to
the proposal because it already has a similar program in the area. In addition, NGOs in
sensitive areas such as labor, environmental protection, religion, women rights, and legal
are often rejected.  

Until 2011, there were only 281 religious PRENUs that had successfully obtained
legal status. From existing limited reports and case studies, it is evident that the support
of related GONGOs plays a critical role in the process. Brown and Hu (2012) have
noticed that GONGOs function as networks to break through the state bans on cross-
regional collaboration and help to reduce the fragmentation and competition that might
hurt the development of civil society. The Twenty-First Century Education Research
Institute, for example, built a database of education organizations and series forums and
conferences to facilitate collaboration and capacity development. Some cities with
more prosperous grassroots activities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and
Chengdu, have built some “experimental zones” with one or few registered “breeder”

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294 Discussion of simplifying this process has been continued among NGO experts, scholars, and advocates since 2008. Many rumors indicate that there might be new wave of NGO/NPO laws coming to strengthen the regulation. On July 30, 2012 the Ministry of Civil Affairs published new regulations on the management of charitable foundations, but the NGO community is still unsure about the impact of this new law and how it may affect the operation of NGO/NPO in general. It seems to increase the strength of regulations by requiring all charities report details of the donations they receive and their expenditures. The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. Cited in http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/china.html
social groups to sponsor grassroots groups without going through formal approval processes. However, as the famous Chinese NGO expert, Dr. Kang Shoukuang (director of NPO Research Center at Renmin University) has pointed out, registered or unregistered, NGOs, NPO or PRNEU cannot operate without the government’s tolerance:

In fact, Chinese government controls all organizations. At least it controls them through a “bottom line” mechanism. It means as long as these third sector organizations do not challenge government or provoke confrontation, government would tolerate their behavior. However, once they are over the “line,” there would be severe punishment and even elimination of the organization. Therefore, the real “non-governmental,” “civil” organizations in China are extremely rare, or they never exist.296

City W has an influential GONGO, code-named Bright Light Foundation, which has been running in the city for two decades. It was one of the earliest religious social organizations permitted in China, and it has established a close working relationship with local universities, charity GONGOs, and the city government. Bright Light has established a “trusted brand” of Christian charity in that officials have little to worry about persons and projects it brings into the city. My interviewee told me that most of Bright Light’s activities do not need to be reported to religious affairs office, which is very rare in this over-regulated field. Its success has two important elements. First, the creation of this organization has received the approval of UFWD and its original goal is to channel foreign aid to registered churches under the trusted platform. Second, its operation skillfully blends religious motives into a non-religious discourse based mainly on philanthropism and volunteerism. For example, the English title and website has clear

296 Kang 2011: 11.
religious overtones, but its Chinese name and publication look nonreligious. Avoiding religious symbolism helps Bright Light to become involved in a very wide range of operations such as publications, disaster relief, AIDS, and orphanages, without provoking the worry that a foreign-founded Christian group would take too much credit from the government. Many staff members are non-Christians; the program director I interviewed has no religious affiliation but is “a friend to many Christians.” Most workers and volunteers are recruited from nearby universities and see their participation as social services. Churches inside City W and nearby areas are a secondary source of partners. Bright Light frequently organizes small-scale public activities with church members such as blood drives, donation solicitations, and services for local charity facilities.

Most importantly, Bright Light does not emphasize evangelism as other church-based NGOs do, which lowers the difficulty of convincing authorities that its outreach and collaboration projects have little intention to convert people to Christianity. Nevertheless, almost 90% of its financial resources are from religious advocacy groups from the United States and West Europe, which have the clear intention to promote evangelism. The self-restraint on propagation limits the scope of church-related collaboration. According to the information provided by Bright Light, only 20~30% of its resources are used on church-related social services.

Overall, the Bright Light Foundation promotes the space of activism in City W for TSPM and the whole Christian community. It does not mean that a social organization single-handedly supports progress in this city. By creating a registered, legal front of operation, Christian leaders can use this legal front to cover and develop activities not
permitted by current legal framework; for example, accepting foreign donations. It is a successful "backdoor listing" method used by policy entrepreneurs. They use the charity organization to create a positive attitude of the local officials toward Christians, and a valuable precedent of operating transnational collaboration legally. The precedent benefits not only registered groups but also unregistered groups. The surprisingly low level of religious persecution is no accident; especially the relative harmony in a city with hundreds of underground churches. According to the National Census, the number of grassroots NGOs in City W has grown 49% since 2001, and the proportion of religious NGOs in all registered groups is 1.5%; it is still ten times higher than the national average. My interviews with City W’s Christians show that few people sense hostility between registered and unregistered congregations.

Nonetheless, this top-down method of backdoor listing has its limitations. The Bright Light Foundation has little intention to promote cross-church collaboration; its resources will never be shared by unregistered congregations. While it expands space for transnational activism, the scope of this activism is very selective. Only mainstream Protestant denominations and their social charities are welcomed.

Incomplete "Internal Spiral"

In the context of these two cities, the transnational religious activism has no headquarters or center, but it is reasonable to set the beginning from overseas Chinese Protestant churches under traditional denominational traditions such as Baptist, Calvinism, Congregational, Lutheranism, Methodism, and Presbyterianism. Their
missionaries, mostly Americans and British, were deported from China in the 1950s, but many moved to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the United States and other pan-Pacific countries with significant numbers of Chinese population. After decades, the churches they built have become indigenized and full of different generations of immigrants from Mainland China. It is widely documented that religious organizations have played an important role in immigrant/diaspora communities (Ebaugh et al. 2002; Kokot et al. 2004; Tarrow 2005). Enthusiasts within these overseas Chinese congregations formed the first wave of transnational advocacy when China was re-opened to outsiders. They brought money, Bibles, knowledge about theology and church management, and personal services to the growing Chinese local churches.


298 Large denominations often have their own missionary agencies, such as the Lottie Moon Fund operated by Southern Baptist International Mission Board (IMB). Their associations or individual churches also support independent missionary agencies and media such as CMI (China Mission International), OMF International, GoodTV USA, and FEBC China Ministry (Radio and Online).
Their association with traditional denominations provides the opportunity to become embedded in Western rights discourse and practices. Local activists often utilize the human rights discourse they learn from outside. Some local activists became political dissidents and forced into exile and have become vocal critics of Chinese government and advocates of religious freedom, and then participate with and organize various NGOs that become a part of the global human rights campaign. The China Aid Association (CAA), located in Washington D.C., is one of the best-known examples. Its founder and president, Rev. Bob Fu (Fu Xiqiu), has become the key monitor of human rights violations and advocate for religious freedom in China since 1989. Its website is in both English and Chinese and provides first-hand information and latest conditions of political prisoners, which are often quoted by mainstream Western media. Its news and annual
reports are important sources for the U.S. Congressional report of human rights in China, and Rev. Fu is a frequent guest of congressional hearings about human rights in China.\footnote{299}

CAA’s connections with media and the Congress, on the one hand, make abuses in China harder for authorities to cover up. On the other hand, it puts most of the outside attention on house churches and few underground leaders. This pressure creates a dilemma for some local practitioners. When the international spotlight is on a specific church, it is almost impossible for local officials to relent. Since the first priority of the job is to prevent foreign infiltration, a career-wise official would not make a mistake of tolerating a seemingly foreigner-involved event that could be taken by his political enemies before the central government changed its policy.\footnote{300}

Most important of all, the transnational networks built by CAA, missionary NGOs, and local underground churches rarely contact TSPM, registered congregations, and other “legal” establishments. This biased strategy creates an incomplete "internal spiral" cycle because close to two-third to half of the Protestant population is excluded from the process. Not enough pressure has been put on religious officials and restrained their repressive behavior. In City W's experience shows that having registered churches on board of transnational collaboration is not enough. Registered and unregistered groups still not work together to push the government to give in. The "success" in City W is

\footnote{300}I didn’t have a chance to ask Beijing’s officials about their opinion regarding the Shouwang Church. But officials in other cities expressed their concerns of foreign influence, even though the action like Outdoor Worship is obviously local-driven. One told me “Don’t be naïve; there are spies in those underground groups.” He claimed that he has read restricted reports about the “Western spies” in China. The friend of this official has told me about the internal competition in the local ARA office. “It is very easy to be reported to the top,” he said.
merely a tolerance of government on transnational collaboration under a "legal" cover, which means government would still repress the House Church, and TSPM might still act hostilely toward the other group of Christians and tell on them when it sees necessary.

Figure 4.2. The Incomplete “Internal Spiral” Cycle in City W
CHAPTER FIVE
Pursuit of Religious Freedom without Basic Human Rights

5.1 The Formula for Success
5.2 Quiet Confrontations under Anti-Imperialism
5.3 City T: Protestant Activism from the Establishment
5.4 City S: "Everything is Possible"
5.5 Interim Conclusion: Empowerment from the Bottom Up

This chapter introduces the successful model of transnational religious advocacy networks in promoting the space of activism in China. In contrast to the previous two cities, progress made in these two places is created by a specific strategy of advocates and activists there. Under the iron fist of the Communist Party, political and social control in these two cities is no different from any other place in China; only registered facilities can perform public activities involving religious organizations, language, or ritual; participants of these activities are not allowed to receive any form of foreign sponsorship, especially from foreign organizations or individuals with religious affiliations. However, services and money from outside China flow into these places freely with little interruption. Its success is more than some well-connected clergymen realizing their personal goals or few church buildings would be funded. It indicates a breakdown of the most critical restriction on social activism in the past 60 years of communist rule — the "no foreigner allowed" taboo. Participants can now conduct transnational transactions that were forbidden in the past. Indeed, a limited number of non-advocacy NGOs, charities, and development funds have been allowed to operate in China for decades. Nevertheless, their roles are strictly limited as money-givers. Direct participation is rare.
and often unsuccessful.\footnote{The situation of USAID-funded programs China is a clear example of this “money only” restriction on advocacy-promotion efforts. Although foreign funding is generally welcomed and $275 million have been given to programs in China from 2001 to 2010, China still refuses USAID to open a permanent office in China and it can only supervise Chinese programs through its Bangkok office and deliver funding through US-based NGOs to their partner Chinese “NGOs,” which are mostly government or university-run agencies.\textsuperscript{301} Thomas Lum, "U.S.-Funded Assistance Programs in China," Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress, July 09 2010. Available at \url{http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a525030.pdf} (Accessed November 17, 2012).} With cautious arrangements and layers of interpersonal networks, local activists and international religious advocates in these two cities form an alliance, and use it to shelter in and develop a wide range of "illegal" activities; receiving foreign donations, delivering religious services, organizing training workshops, conducting charity activities, starting missionary projects, and propagating the values and norms of religious freedom that connect these people in the first place.

Most important of all, local activists act not only as “receivers” of transnational norm enterprise who support them with funding, discourse and skills of activism, but also they have a campaign to deliver norms to other places where freedom in social activism has not yet appeared. When national association, denominational formation, and media appearance are largely forbidden, Protestant activists watch, learn and mobilize through concealed networks. They directly support activists in other provinces and help them organize their own campaigns for broadening freedom. The gist of this activism is the fight for freedom of association, which is the foundation for all kinds of local activists to be organized, funded, and propagating and spreading their beliefs. Overall, their campaign is not yet successful since the Chinese government has not formally recognized in writing their rights to conduct these activities. Yet the obvious tolerance and self-restraint on the government side show these Christians' actions are fruitful in terms of

\textsuperscript{301} The situation of USAID-funded programs China is a clear example of this “money only” restriction on advocacy-promotion efforts. Although foreign funding is generally welcomed and $275 million have been given to programs in China from 2001 to 2010, China still refuses USAID to open a permanent office in China and it can only supervise Chinese programs through its Bangkok office and deliver funding through US-based NGOs to their partner Chinese “NGOs,” which are mostly government or university-run agencies. Thomas Lum, "U.S.-Funded Assistance Programs in China," Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress, July 09 2010. Available at \url{http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a525030.pdf} (Accessed November 17, 2012).
expanding the space of transnational activism formerly repressed by the authorities and ridiculed by the anti-imperialist ideology of the ruling party. For example, although the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) still forbids all cross-provincial missionary activities, a hundred more churches I visited, even registered ones, have more or less participated in underground missionary work in Sichuan Province since 2008. In fact, since in-province activities are often closely watched by authorities, many activists prefer to organize training, networking, and out-reaching activities outside their hometowns in order to avoid possible interference. Pretending to be tourists or business persons in today China is a relatively safer way to gather in groups without provoking suspicion.

5.1 The Formula for Success

The successful model presented in these cases has several distinct features that depart from other activist networks. First, as stated earlier, locals and foreigners are sharing this more egalitarian culture and working on a long-term relationship. Unlike conventional foreign NGO staffs who only pay short visits to target sites, stay in Western-standard hotels, and talk to only a few English-speaking Chinese co-workers, these transnational religious advocates live in the homes of church members, work side-by-side with local activists, and on many occasions directly service the entire congregation. Protestant

\[302\] NGO studies have long recognized this lack of respect and understanding of local culture and diversity, especially apparent in developmental aid (Lewis 1999, 2009), human rights (Hertel 2006), and humanitarian aid field (Walkup 1997; Hilhorst 2002). The most recent example is earthquake relief money has been used to build five-star hotels in Haiti because “…hotels are too rustic for international travelers [including the NGO, World Bank and USAID staff on mission to Haiti]…..” while millions of refugees still live in tents. Julie Lévesque, “Haiti: Humanitarian Aid for Earthquake Victims Used to Build Five Star
advocates and locals either have known each other for decades or have layers of interconnected friendship and partnership from projects, visits, exchanges, and training experience of the past. The egalitarian relationship is not only rooted in practitioners’ personal virtues or dedication but also comes from the hard lessons from the first generation of Protestant activism, which was more elitist, hierarchical and urban-based but failed disastrously 60 years ago. The unfavorable political reality in Communist-ruled China is forcing practitioners to act cautiously, respectfully, and far-more indigenized. On different occasions, leaders of the network told me they are “grateful” for the Communist Party’s repression: “without the harsh persecutions, we won’t go to the rural areas and probably would still stay in the cities; today countryside congregations are the birthplaces and strongholds of Chinese Christian revival.”

Second, these Protestant advocates act more neutral in relation to the “TSPM vs. House Church” feud and are willing to work with clergy in registered facilities when the opportunity is available to them. Foreign advocates used to work only with underground congregations because the legal restrictions effectively restrained members of registered churches and those congregations under TSPM label were being seen as the Judas, “renegade” group by overseas Christian communities due to their long-term cooperation with the atheist government regime. Nevertheless, advocates in foreign Christian communities, especially those who have worked with overseas Chinese congregations,

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with growing number of new members from China, have gradually realized that registered congregations are not all Judases.

In the practical level, foreign advocates work with TSPM clergy through two major methods: they are invited directly by higher-ranked TSPM leadership to work in ad hoc projects in TSPM facilities (e.g. teach a theological course in a sanctioned seminar), or they are invited by middle-ranked TSPM clergy with friends in house churches to deliver the invitation to the advocates who are committed to Chinese missions. The first method depends on how higher authorities evaluate the denominational and national background behind the foreign groups and also how the foreign groups judge working with registered facilities. In short, its success is determined by whether certain formal approval can be granted. The second method is more informal and basically running unauthorized, but requires no formal approval from the party’s United Front organ and therefore is much more common on the local level.

Third, a significant level of understanding and mutual tolerance has existed between underground and registered congregations in City T and City S. In a country where underground congregations have long been repressed by government agencies with TSPM being more or less involved in these persecutions for decades, the reconciliation in these two cities is puzzling. Through participant observation, I have traced the whole process of how quiet reconciliation efforts have begun and improved the relationship between two groups and witness not only from local activists but also foreign advocacy in this process; their doctrines, ideas, strategies, and financial resources which deeply affect reconciliation among Chinese church groups. It is noteworthy that without these
neutral foreign advocates to bridge the relationship, rival local congregations have little chance to collaborate by their own, and a biased foreign advocate may even worsen the relationship dramatically by siding and financing only one side.

In this chapter, I will use various housing issues, including both registered and unregistered congregations as examples to explain how a local leader can bring in forbidden foreign resources and make the whole transnational advocacy network possible and sustainable. Housing projects are the most common form of cooperation between foreign advocacy groups and locals because they often require a larger amount of financial support which locals cannot find from domestic resources. They also demand a complex legal, approval-required, and city-wide negotiation process that foreigners cannot achieve by themselves. The core difficulty is that a new church-related facility is an indication of Christian influence increasing and against the long-lasting state policy of restraining religion: the Party does not want the number of churches to grow because it indicates the failure of officials in controlling the religious population and the correctness of atheist doctrine. In addition, if any religious organization or funding agency with a religious background is involved in the building project, the case goes to the jurisdiction of the United Front organ of the Communist Party, which has a far higher authority than local civil officials. The safest way for local officials would be to decline all projects except the ones already consented from the top. The political sensitivity and rule-breaking nature of these projects make any little change such as building a new annex of

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304 The common standard is that churches should be established in their "original sites" designated during the missionary time before the 1950s, or believers can choose to gather in their own homes with no formal congregation. Pitman B. Potter, 2003 "Belief in control: Regulation of religion in China," *China quarterly* 174(1): 317-337. More detailed examples and literature about Chinese religious regulation can see Chapter 3.
a registered church or successful renting an office space for a house church; an encouraging success for the participants and a strong sign that the network of promoting religious freedom is at work.

Province B is the second tier sites of Christian mission in the first wave of international mission in the early 20th Century. They receive fewer foreign missions and much less influence compared to first tier cities like Beijing or Shanghai. This history gives them a special advantage: fewer unregistered congregations emerged in the late 1970s and therefore less government-church confrontation. Christians in general do not have strong grievances and feuds from the oppression in the 1980s than cities with traditionally strong underground Protestant movements such as in Anhui and Henan. While religious revival created a lot of tension between TSPM and house churches elsewhere, the situation here was much better. When the number of Christians reached the level that authorities have to worry about, the TSPM system ran successfully and was strong enough to negotiate, befriend, and provide resources to lure house church congregations into its cycle, with various level of success depending on the attitudes of leaders on both sides.

One of the important academic implications of these successful stories is the method of making these changes possible. In contrast with the conventional understanding that foreign advocates appear with irresistible resources and appealing ideas over existing norms and practices, the method demonstrated here entails more about carefully designed negotiation between local activists, willing to take the risk of breaking common local norms and practices, and a local establishment defending the status quo but desiring the
benefits the advocacy groups offer. When they work together to either cover or convince the Party to let go, with the foreign sponsor cooperating and not agitating, then the breakthrough has more chance to become reality.

5.2 Quiet Confrontations under Anti-Imperialism

The Protestant transnational network introduced here evolved out of one of the major American Protestant denominations popular in China before the 1950s. After the "Accusation Movement" waged by the Communist Party that led to the total expulsion of foreign nationals in 1951, this denomination moved its missions to nearby Pacific nations such as the Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea, waiting for the time to return to China. The Cold War and the continued military presence of the United States secured the survival of these missionary stations in this region, and the growth of missionary-built churches in Chinese refugees and exile communities there provided the personnel and initial connections necessary for the advocacy network to return to China when it became possible.

Of course, it may not be fair to link these missionaries to the U.S. Cold War foreign policy since they are not dictated by nor have influence on national policy. Yet it is evident in history that the Protestant missionary enterprise, mainly led by American, Canadian, and British nationals, was the main social instrument of the “Westernization” or “Americanization” agenda, which included funding and operating schools, universities, publishers, hospitals, charity and social organizations, and student and

305 Please refer to historical analysis in Chapter 3.
scholar exchange programs based on Western norms and standards. For example, since the late 19th century, missionary programs have systematically funded and channeled local elites to study in the mission schools and denominational colleges throughout the United States and hope they would return to home countries as full-time missionaries (Kramer 2009).306 This sociopolitical agenda of “making the world like us” (Bu 2003) could not survive the politically-fueled anti-imperialism in many post-colonial Asian areas without the physical appearance of U.S. military power and personnel including missionaries.307 In the early 1950s to 1960s, missionary posts became important channels to deliver aid from the United States, and locals went to Sunday services often for the scarce resources only foreigner-found churches could provide.308 In Taiwan for example,


308 The studies of the relationship between U.S. foreign policy and American Protestant missions are rare (most in Africa and Latin America) but they indicate a positive relationship between two parts. For example, Julie Hearn (2002) points out those American Evangelical missionaries act as “invisible NGOs”
Protestantism was often nicknamed "wheat flour religion" (Mian Fen Jiang) by locals because it was the major source of getting wheat flour provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in this rice-growing nation.\textsuperscript{309}

Consequently, both Protestant churches and American soldiers were symbols of the U.S. security commitment to countries under the threat of Communism in the Cold War era. The view that Protestantism was as an accomplice of U.S. power was widespread among Chinese political elites. This imperialist label on Protestantism directs Chinese policy toward Protestant Christians for the past 60 years.\textsuperscript{310} When extreme religious persecutions sharply decreased in the post-Cultural Revolution period, the anti-imperialist rule set in the 1950s is never removed. The breakthrough in Sino-US relations in the 1970s did not alter the impression that Protestantism presented before the Revolution and in the Cold War era, but the opening of China to the outside world since 1979 provides opportunities for Western missionaries to re-enter China through more informal ways; individual Protestant Christians entered China with their business, technician, or educational backgrounds and secretly conducted missionary work. Missionaries from

\textsuperscript{309} Since the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the United States started providing Taiwan with a significant amount of military, financial and material aid until 1965. The food aid went through USAID especially created deep cultural impacts on the lives of Taiwan's people and their views on Protestantism. Scholars still debate about the relationships between economic success of Asian Tigers and U.S. aid, but it is clear that the aid helps to stabilize the receiving societies and provides the foundation for the governments to pursue development and ultimately success (Chang 1965). For newer review of this debate, please see David H. Bearcea and Daniel C. Tirone 2010, "Foreign Aid Effectiveness and the Strategic Goals of Donor Governments," 72(3): 837-851. For pictures and articles about this period can see the 100 years anniversary website built by Taiwanese government: http://www.taiwan.gov.tw/friendship100/story_content.asp?code=C&citem=C04&lang=en (Accessed December 1, 2012).

\textsuperscript{310} It can be seen in all official religious policy and propaganda documents. Please see chapter 3.
these overseas Chinese churches especially represented some advantages over other Western missionaries in engaging local Chinese churches. For practical reasons of using Mandarin or Cantonese, they can easily blend in with locals. Considering the new economic development goals set up by the Communist Party in the reform era, these overseas Chinese are re-identified as part of the Chinese “brotherhood,” where the Chinese state has historical, ethnic, and institutional incentives to differentiate them from other “imperialist invaders.” For government officials, now there are “good” and “bad” Protestant advocates and the new goal is to use the good ones if they are willing to accommodate for developmental purposes.

Eventually, the attitude of the Chinese government toward Protestant missions began to show flexibility. On one hand, the nominal principles of Three Self (self-government, self-support, and self-propagation) have not been abandoned since stopping the “cultural invasion” to influence or control believers is still the core propriety of the Party. On other hand, the choice between “striking down counter-revolutionists and imperialists” and forming a “United Front” for economic development and stability has become very clear for officials in the frontline making the call. Without immediate or pressing evidence that outsiders are threats to the Party or their own career, toleration (choosing United Front strategy) is the first choice. Therefore, a transnational religious network could be allowed to conduct forbidden activities in the reform era when they demonstrate no physical threat to the existing Three Self platform. For example, foreigners should try to avoid establishing permanent branches or spreading anti-Three Self/Party views; to show their funding organizations or denominations supported this collaboration, had no track record
of radical ideology or behavior incompatible with TSPM's theology (e.g. polygamy or emphasis of eschatology). No participants of the network have been reported by Three-Self clergy or local officials for either personal misconduct or legal reasons; and the local community indeed has needs and willingness to receive foreign assistant.

If these general criteria are met, then foreign advocates can enter under their own risk and the network of transnational collaboration can obtain an informal recognition and perform activities without interference in the name of the greater good. Once foreigners and their resources are allowed in, substantial changes will happen. Local church leaders can allow foreign advocates and their ideas of forming a transnational, cross-factional network, and this network would bring in material benefits that both believers and local officials could appreciate. After years of development and more projects being executed without formal permission as before, the network began to break a bigger taboo in China: broader freedom of association, propagation, and evangelism that was already recognized as a common norm in liberal democracies but not yet realized in this socialist nation. The success of this transnational advocacy network is to operate an autonomous social movement outside the Party's jurisdiction; its success indicates winning the substantial space of freedom for its participants and activism representing their core values: freedom for not only freedom of worship but also organizing, collaborating, and propagating without governmental censorship.

The two key conditions of successful transnational religious activism, foreign advocates working with local religious establishment and local establishment opening door to Christian population in need, are necessary but not sufficient factors for
promoting progress on freedom. They are necessary for Protestant Christians to work together and organize a transnational campaign for common goals, but it is obvious that the participants in this transnational campaign are facing a strong state, producing a rigid religious and civil affair policy with decisive effects on the freedom of all campaigners. However, the most fascinated finding of my fieldwork in Province B is that despite the unfavorable conditions, the strategic choices of participants, especially those made by activists in the establishment, led to a policy change that free Christians from anti-imperialist agenda limiting their freedom. The change is realized by the quiet confrontation between the Party's policy and the advocacy networks including not just advocates but also local officials, legal churches, and underground congregations who share the common interests of opposing the policy. In a nutshell, religious policy set by the central government is not shackled, but substantial religious freedom, broadly defined as not only individual freedom of worship but also, more critically, the freedoms of association, propagation, and outreach, is obtained by groups participating in this transnational collaboration when the three favorable conditions suggest the local officials do not need to enforce their repressive policy and crack down on the transnational collaboration.

Local activists and local officials evading state policy for specially designated benefits is nothing new to Chinese policy-making literature (Mertha 2008, 2010; Wright 2010; Montinola, Qian, Weingast 1996; and Parris 1993). The idea of “policy entrepreneurs” (Kingdon 1995) directing state policy change is that local activists can challenge a state policy (e.g. building a dam in an environmentally sensitive area) by
pulling national or international media and/or officials holding opposite interests to the policy (e.g. officials in environment administration) to trigger a new round of policy debate, which is usually unavailable in authoritarian politics. Mertha (2008) records that local businessmen have successfully forced central authorities to change their regulatory policy by joining forces with media attention and international pressure. In *China's Water Warriors* (2010), he finds anti-dam activists using the conflict of interests between different administrative departments to advance their agenda. However, the method used by transnational religious activists is different from policy entrepreneurs of pushing business regulation reform or environment protection; religious activists do not want to attract attention from media and central government because the "original sin" of imperialism has been put on them and deter them from appealing for attention. Their grievance with local governments about housing, registration, arrested members and other issues possess no concern for government-censored media and high-ranking officials to care about. Policy entrepreneurs depends on the favoritism provided by national media or a high-ranking government official who pay extra attention to the grievance between activists and local governments, while my Protestant cases show that entrepreneurship could happen even if central authorities hold no interest in the agenda of local activists.

In addition, central officials are the creators and stakeholder of the policy in question; local officials often have little motivation to interference church's operation or arrest a believer unless they feel that they are required by the policy to do so. This central-driven form of repression is very different from the mode of contention in
business and environmental issues, where local governments and their self-interests are often the main resources of confrontation. In the literature on China Studies, provincial and factional interests are often portrayed as the sources of obstacles because they complicate the decision-making process and mix special interests into the policy consideration, which should make any proposed reform or challenge more difficult (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1990; Wright 2010). The constant power struggle between elites and dominant yet fragmented bureaucracy contribute to a structure of authority "in which consensus building is central, and a policy process that is protracted, disjointed, and incremental." My observation in Province B supports this "fragmented authoritarianism" thesis but suggests that local authorities and their interests may not always be the obstacle of policy changes or decelerator of reform. When central elites are reluctant to loosen restrictions on transnational advocacy, local officials open the door and take some risk of their careers because unlike harassing and persecuting business and environmental activists may protect their vital interests, harassing and persecuting church members protect no interest but create trouble.

In contrast to Chinese social policy literature that assumes change coming from some form of pluralism rooted in political institutions, I base my explanation on the risk-taking nature of some local officials who see not enforcing state religious policy and sometime breaking it is necessary; controlling religious population is difficult for understaffed ethnic and religious affairs offices and trying to going after law-binding citizens for their faith is risky and may radicalize the usually docile group. Not mention allowing churches

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to develop may bring profits and various resources to local communities. This kind of risk-taking-for-profit behavior has been well-documented in the issue areas related to economic reform: decentralization of economic authorities have been seen as a gold standard to ensure growth-driven political reform (Shirk 1993; Montinola, Qian, and Weingast 1996), to release local comparative advantages (Lin, Cai, and Li 2003), to promote institutional efficiency (Qian and Weingast 1997) and reward local entrepreneurship in innovation (Parris 1993). The critical question here is: have officials adopted this decentralization principle in dealing with religious activists? In other words, can provinces or cities have flexibility to interpret state religious policy and develop their own differentiation social strategies to accommodate their own development?

5.3 City T: Protestant Activism from the Establishment

The answer from my fieldwork is positive, although the risk-taking propensity of officials varies significantly across provincial and city lines. For example, the Central Government's policy authorization toward Protestant missions in City W in Province A should be not much different from City T in Province B, since they are at the same administrative level, the same geographic region, and a similar level of revenue contribution. However, the religious affairs officials in these two places show significantly different attitudes toward local churches and their transnational collaboration.

For example, TSPM congregations in City W enjoy much more freedom than their registered counterparts in City T in operating their organizations, while the underground
congregations receive a totally opposite treatment in the two cities. The "one county/city, one church" policy is strictly enforced in City T but not City W, which makes City T, a multi-million population metropolitan area with an estimated 100,000 Christians, with only two registered churches. The second registered church is only allowed to build because it is reported as an annex to a theological seminary and the registration status is still a hot issue for TSPM leadership there.\textsuperscript{312}

The consequence of this rigid religious policy is more than the usual number of "meeting points" in this city without proper supervision and financial support. Meeting points have no legal status, cannot obtain members over 30, and legally cannot hire pastoral staff and rent property. There are dozens of meeting points with two registered churches and obtaining limited pastoral support from them, but the demands from a growing Christian population (booming economic growth of the city bringing migrant workers, students, professionals from other provinces and rural areas), puts a lot of pressure on clergy and religious affairs office, yet there is no sign of changing policy.

Limited Interference and Quiet Repression

Since the local TSPM system has been forced to stop growing and is overwhelmed by the demands in the Christian community, there are reportedly a hundred more meeting points unregistered and operating underground. They are not the traditional "house churches" because many are independent, self-reliant, and almost never connected to

\textsuperscript{312} The chief pastor of the church is the same person as the dean of the seminar, but the religious affairs office has tried for many years to remove him from the position because they believed he "did too much" for the community. As I finished the interview in 2011, the dean was forced to give up the title of chief pastor but remains active in the church. Interview No. 77. April 18, 2011.
popular house church systems developed from the Henan and Anhui Provinces and rarely interact with outside Christians. In addition, they are not persecuted or harassed by TSPM clergy and local officials as frequent as house churches in other cities. Some of the unregistered churches are even run by graduates and certificated staff from officially sanctioned seminars or training workshops and tolerated by the establishment. Leaders of these "house churches" do not have strong hostility to the registration system and the establishment of TSPM due to this relatively peaceful history between two sides.

For instance, there is a 200 person "house church," with the code name Shining Star, operating near a university campus in the city. The leader is a TSPM licensed pastor and maintains a close relationship with one of the two registered churches, although the connection is kept in private. The church is developed out of a set of very successful meeting points supervised by the pastor when he was an intern of a registered church. The church opening in 2007 received certain attention with few police visits, but was never in serious confrontation or harassment happened to similar urban house churches in Shanghai, Beijing, and Chengdu. Without any official permission or license, Shining Star obtained its status as an urban, white-collar church and conducted a series of unauthorized transnational activities including inviting and receiving sponsorship and training from foreign congregations and missionaries. The pastor constantly visits

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313 Interview No. 78. April 20, 2011.
314 Ibid. The interviewee refused to identify the amount of financial support received from foreign churches or denominations, and only recognized the exchanges are very frequent. However, from the interior layout, forms of service, and theological stands of the church, it is evident that the leadership has received a significant amount of foreign influence. From the participant observation experience I have in the field, all transnational exchanges, even a hour-long day visit, involve a certain amount of financial sponsorship because it is a common social norm that foreign visitors pay all the boarding, lodging, travel expenses and more such as a "gift" or offerings to local churches; and Chinese visitors' travel expenses are often
foreign churches and vice versa, and signs of strong foreign influence and sponsorship are obvious in this local house church. Most important of all, there is never an intervention from authorities on transnational collaboration, which is very unique when most urban house churches have been warned or stopped by authorities for their transnational engagement.\textsuperscript{315}

However, there are restrictions and "quiet" repressions on its development as well as on other house churches. The double standard of authorities on registered churches and unregistered churches are apparent and all kinds of "red lines" are applied to particularly unregistered congregations. Similar to Christians in other Chinese cities, they cannot operate any public outreach activities involving religious symbols and meanings, such as giving out flyers or pamphlets in a street corner, making Christmas performances in the park, or trying to recruit people from work places or universities. Registered churches also have difficulties in getting approval for these activities, but at least their requests will not be turned down due to a lack of registered, legal status. Unregistered congregations also face great restrictions on their daily activities such as their location of Sunday services, number of people allowed to participate, and working under the constant uncertainty that any day police may clamp down on uncensored publications, unlicensed compensated or directly paid by foreign agencies. The amount of money involved could range from a few thousands RMBs to a number enough for a building project. The unequal duties reflect the difference in economic status between Chinese Christians in general and the mission-sending societies. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that the more foreign exchanges a church has, the more money it receives from the outside.

\textsuperscript{315} For example, the series of "outdoor worship" happened in major cities and the confrontation between government and house church leaders about attending the World Christian Conference in 2010. These incidents are discussed in Chapter 4.
speakers, unlawful collection of offerings, or "neighbors' complaints about noises."316

*Shining Star* is an exception in terms of setting up a normal Western-style church (open
door to the community, hanging signs or banners of churches publicly, and having
regular services and meetings involving more than 30 people) in a commercial building.
Because the pastor of *Shining Star* is licensed, he can show his pastor ID to district police
who come to visit and call his friends in registered churches to help him establish
creditability, though his church has no official registration and approval. Other house
churches are still forced to operate at a small scale, but in general, direct confrontation
between authorities and church members has been rare since the 1990s.

Cross-Group Collaboration and "Team Switching" in City T

In general, City T is a place where registered churches, approved meeting points, and
well-connected congregations (e.g. *Shining Star*) enjoy a relatively higher level of
freedom because of their legal status. They especially enjoy more policy flexibility than
others in terms of accepting forbidden foreign sponsorship. Foreign advocacy groups can
connect with them and provide funding and services with little interference. Foreign
advocacy groups can reach the local Christian community through these officially

316 It is the most common difficulty and the reason for police to come to all the house churches I visited in
China. Since they cannot meet in public and it is almost impossible to rent a larger room from hotels or
restaurants for weekly gathering without being questioned "having a unregistered church," house churches
have to meet in dozens of residential units belonging to the members, depending on the size of the church.
Therefore the friction between residents and church goers become common for issues such as elevator
usage, noises, parking...etc. In addition, the "neighborhood watchers" or "neighborhood committees" were
common social control mechanism set up in every corner of the city since Mao's period and almost every
residential community and street block has this kind of organization that is responsible for managing things
from garbage disposal to crime monitoring. The members of these organizations are often old guards from
retired government workers or party members, who usually hold a strong hostility to Christianity due to
years of anti-religious education. The sometimes become problems for house churches and meeting points
to survive because they may call in the police.
sanctioned groups and use their leaders as a backdoor to interact with local officials and TSPM leadership, who they cannot directly access due to the *Three-Self* policy. This is a clear example of the "backdoor listing" mechanism I defined in Chapter 2 explaining how forbidden transactions can become possible under the current religious policy. Forbidden religious freedom cannot be granted suddenly and illegal transnational operation cannot become legal overnight because rapid change of policy hurts government's legitimacy, and frontline officials worry that they may open the door too wide that will cost their career when the superiors or their career competitors question their judgment. An easy solution is to tolerate what religious activists are doing but demand them to partner with an informally sanctioned "backdoor" organization or facility, such as a registered church or a theological seminary. Yet the sanctioned status is granted as an exception than a norm; if foreign involvement through the platform becomes a liability, officials can deny their responsibility by blaming the missed judgment on the civilian collaborators. It is also almost impossible for a new comer to register their organization directly in City T because the permitted number of legal churches is already higher than the state policy allowed; and religious affairs officials are closely watching their activities and trying to limit their growth by complicating the legal process and enforcing informal quotas on existing congregations.

However, the general religious freedom here is much better than most of Chinese cities. Many of my interviewees agreed that City T has "one of the strongest civil society bodies in China."\textsuperscript{317} Christian bookstores, grass-roots organizations, and unregistered

\textsuperscript{317} Interview No. 76. April 10, 2011.
"meeting points" are running semi-publically and mostly without any trouble. Compared to other places, religious regulations here are loosely enforced and transnational sponsorship are freely to come into the city. With these two advantages, why is the general freedom of association, Christian organizations' ability to outreach and development not as good as cities like Wenzhou or Guangzhou? For example, why is it that Christians here cannot even pressure authorities to grant more registered churches, as Christians in other places have done?

The weakness in the second mechanism, majority alliance, (collaboration between registered and unregistered congregations) provides some explanation. The Christian community in City T is strong but divided. Cross-group collaboration exists in City T but strongly opposed by some local leaders. There are two major forces hampering collaboration between the two sides. First, historical grievances between leaders cannot be resolved easily. As a place with significant number of believers before 1949, many Christian leaders were persecuted and forced to leave or dissolved their congregations because of the Three Self Patriotic Movement. They came back and rebuilt congregations after the 1980s and there is little chance they will work with TSPM because of past betrayals and denunciations. Second, the leadership of TSPM is divided by the issue of house churches and the power struggle for the limited number of positions government allows them. Unlike Christians in Wenzhou where people switch sides and often befriend each other, some high-ranking TSPM leaders hold strong, hostile attitudes toward unregistered churches and refuse to recognize the existence of these non-TSPM congregations. For instance, I almost upset a high-ranking TSPM pastor during an
interview when I mentioned the term "house church" in front of him. Another senior pastor, on the contrary, dropped a hint to me and stopped me from destroys the interview. He talked proudly about his more indiscriminate attitude toward house churches in our private conversation. From my interview with a third pastor, it is clear that the previous two leaders represent two rival factions in TSPM with two separate registered churches and the competition has continued for a decade.\footnote{In fact, the "AWOL" pastor, who established \emph{Shining Star} church, is a formal student of the pro-house church pastor. He has been greatly criticized by other TSPM pastors for his tolerance on the behavior and his policy of accepting people with house church background to work for him. Interview No. 79. April 20, 2011.}

It should be noted that the career paths of clergymen in house churches and officially sanctioned system are often two parallel lines. "Switching teams" for career clergy is not only difficult but almost a taboo. The unspoken norm is that once you are connected to one side, either serving in one type of church or participating in a training program sponsored by one side, you will be labeled as a "house church" or "Three-Self" man/woman and never be accepted by the other. The rule in general is strictly enforced down to the lowest level of leadership in each church such as a Bible study group leader.\footnote{It is similar to the denominational gap between churches in the West, although the gap is not only from the theological differences separating denominations but also the political views on TSPM, the history of persecutions of Christians, and the Communist Party.} In other interviews outside Province B, pastors and seminar graduates from officially sanctioned institutes are never able to be hired by house churches and forbidden to do so, while privately-trained clergymen are never recognized or hired by churches in TSPM side. The norm is more loosely enforced in City T than in any city in Province A. I talked to several staffs in one of the registered churches and find they have certain house church background. One gentleman used to be the "delivery man" for house church

\begin{itemize}
\item[318] In fact, the "AWOL" pastor, who established \emph{Shining Star} church, is a formal student of the pro-house church pastor. He has been greatly criticized by other TSPM pastors for his tolerance on the behavior and his policy of accepting people with house church background to work for him. Interview No. 79. April 20, 2011.
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\end{itemize}
systems to transport bibles and other uncensored publications to other provinces from
printing facilities in Guangdong or smuggled in by missionary agencies in the 1990s; the
church still hires him despite of his "bad background." This kind of cross-group hiring
is never observed in Beijing, Shanghai, or cities I visited in Province A.

Nevertheless, the connection or sympathy with house churches can mean trouble to
TSPM leaders, and people who are willing to conciliate are taking personal risks. A
pastor from a rival faction may report the pro-house church pastor to the religious affairs
office and he may lose the trust and favor of the authorities. An example is a formal
clergy in TSPM headquarter in the city, who has studied in a private theological institute
in Los Angeles area since 2009. He used to work for a registered church but the chief
pastor refused to approve his request to get an advanced degree. He felt that he had no
choice but leave the church and go abroad secretly because of the rigid restrictions and
limited opportunities inside TSPM system. Yet his action had severe repercussions: his
foreign-issued degree without consent from TSPM leadership (and also informal approval
from local religious affairs office) indicates betrayal so he may never find a job in
registered churches. He also expressed a concern that house churches would also refuse
his application because of his past affiliation with the registered church. Team switching
for him is a reality but the price is very high.

320 "Bad background" or "bad element" (huai cheng-fen) was used in Mao's China to describe a person who
is a property owner, intellectual, or serving in KMT government or army, or has family members who
possess these identities. This kind of people used to be seen as a public enemy or accomplice of the old
regime that needed to be re-educated or at least separated from any public service. A person who serves in
the TSPM facility should want to keep their past in secret but this gentleman is open about his house church
service experience, which implies that the rivalry of two systems of churches is not as serious as in other
locations. Interview No. 79. April 20, 2011.
321 Interview No. 3. December 30, 2009.
Indoor Negotiations and Quiet “Activism” of the Theological Seminary

Housing is less of a problem for registered congregations than it is for unregistered congregations. Compared to house churches, leaders of TSPM obtain land and permission relatively easier. They can ask TSPM officials to negotiate with local administrators about returning old properties formerly owned by foreign mission-built churches, or bargain for a piece of land in the new zoning project with a lower than market price, or sometimes even for free. The problem is to secure funding for construction. Two main reasons make funding more difficult than for house churches. First, their regular offerings are too little because Tenth Offering is discouraged by the high leadership and the religious affairs officials. According to the unspoken rule, churches can only establish "donation boxes" in some places near entrances but not pass around plates or call for offerings during services because the latter method represents some level of compulsion. Second, legally, they cannot receive outside aid according to the "self-reliance" principle in the Three-Self policy and repeated stated in various religious regulations. Therefore, rule-binding, risk-averse clergy of registered churches have good reasons to avoid financially difficult projects and reject good will from the outside.

However, some registered clergy have bigger ambitions than others and more willing to take some risks. Innovation happens and some leaders are willing to find a way

322 Because receiving foreign aid is very sensitive for registered congregations, I will use two anonymous cities as the example to illustrate how they overcome the restrictions set by political institutions. The information used here are from my filed notes and all names and locations are confidential. When following foreign missionary groups visiting TSPM congregations, the “must-have” activity is to visit the proposed or progressive building projects of the local congregations. It is a good opportunity to understand how TSPM congregations deal with their housing issues.
to obtain foreign sponsorship for their projects. They can do so because of their unique institutional advantages. A senior TSPM pastor with years of experience and strong personal connections can manage a risk such as angry religious affairs officials more easily. In September 14, 2010, I was in a 200-student theology institute. The Dean of the institute showed a blueprint and a color-printed brochure to the visitors: “My old friends, I don’t see you as an outsider so I will be straight with you. This is the plan for our new campus and we will be able to offer admission to five hundred more students in the future.” He added, “They [Administration of Religious Affairs] have approved the land usage and only thing we need is the RMB xxxx for construction. We need all the funding we can get.”

The major characteristic of City T is the strong and active TSPM theological seminary. Its leadership shows a high level of openness, which is unique in the TSPM system. The seminary openly welcomes students from provinces outside its parish, and even students recommended by unregistered congregations. It was a bold move at a time when government agencies had total power over all religious decisions. The State Administration of Religious Affairs demands that each Chinese region have only one seminary and each theological seminary could only accept students from the neighboring five to six provinces. Consequently, all seminaries in China were overwhelmed by enthusiastic students from local churches, but very few dared to break the unspoken "no outsider" rule set by the State ARA. The rule is seen by forward-looking leaders like the

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323 It is from my participant observation in Province B. The details of the location and participants are confidential.
seminary dean as the major reason why TSPM never has enough clergy for its vast and growing parishes. They know some form of activism is necessary.

Welcoming more "illegal" students indicate more financial responsibility and State ARA or TSPM would not pay for the additional board, lodging, and classroom space. The Dean and the Chairman of TSPM, two of the highest rank church leaders in City T, told me the same story of quiet "activism" they adopted to solve their problems. They know they have to challenge some old practices and even laws in order to meet their goals. In the early 1990s, when school and parishes were overwhelmed by the rapid growth of Christianity with a lack of funding, they saw house churches were able to overcome some of the problems because of the help of foreign advocacy groups in finance and training. The dean contacted one of his friends in the house church movement and set up a meeting with foreign advocates. The contact was a dangerous act because it violated the TSPM's self reliance doctrine and the leadership of registered church was often seen by foreign Christian communities as being an accomplice in the harsh religious repression in the Mao's period. In addition, he needed to convince local officials that those foreigners and their help were not only safe for the regime but also necessary to the local community, which ultimately is good for the local government.

The act of challenging old practices is a form of activism, not negotiation, because the way the dean and others persuade officials is not only about presenting material needs or senses; it is a persistent struggle motivated by the firm belief that "we will never give up" and the unjust and unfair restraints over churches must end someday. What churches and foreign advocacy groups offer to economic development in general or officials'
personal benefits is minute; however, the threat of non-cooperation in the Christian community is immense. No religious affairs official wants to have troubles from a clergy who has hundreds or ten thousand followers behind them, especially those clergy whose government says they are representing religious freedom and the legitimate entity of Chinese Christians. They tie officials' hands with their own words as human rights advocates have often done to repressive governments (Keck and Sinkinkink 1998); they also tie officials' hands with the institutions they have created to control religion. Since the Party has granted TSPM with legitimacy and organizations, it is harder for local officials to say no to their requests.

"Good" Foreign Advocacy in Action

According to the dean's testimony and interviews on other long-term participants of this small activism to usher in foreign advocacy, there are three basic steps in this decade-long process of pushing for change. The process is consistent with my theory of transnational religious advocacy and similar stories can be observed in places with successful transnational collaboration. First, a group of foreign advocates, missionaries, aid workers, or regular educators with missionary purposes, shows friendly responses to TSPM's request and promises to visit registered facilities. Second, TSPM clergy introduce the outside visitors to the local establishment through informal ways such as a causal lunch or an accidental visit by local officials in schools, churches, orphanages or other locations the foreigners promise to work with. After causal handshakes and
nodding, local officials will evaluate the foreigners and their organizations by these informal visits and the personal impression they observe during the initial exchanges.

The reason to keep everything informal is critical because if something unexpected happens, officials can deny acknowledgment of the transnational collaboration and refuse responsibility. The second reason to keep the approval process informal is because there is nothing to approve; the transaction is illegal right from the beginning and officials are passively, to some degree forced to recognize the change of practice due to the unilateral behavior of the senior pastors who initiate the challenge. The senior pastor of a registered church often has been in the establishment longer than anyone else; he has a large crowd, years of experience, and better connections to higher authorities, which a junior religious affairs official should note if he or she wants to manage Christianity well with less trouble. Once I asked the dean how they can commit these apparent illegal activities. He said, “We tell ARA what they need to know, and they won’t bother to approve or disapprove our projects because they don’t want to get in trouble.”

Officials may also verify the authenticity of an aid group by referring to the group's denomination background. Mainline American denominations, such as the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Episcopal Church, and Baptist Church are often perceived by Chinese officials as better sources of foreign aid because they see

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324 In an authoritarian system, the power of a person can be more easily identified by the respect that others pay to him than the titles he holds. The dean of the theological seminary, for example, has no government title and rank, but he has received official-like treatment and benefits (e.g. housing and an official car), and can participate in the highest level of religious affairs meetings in the province due to the informal authority the TSPM-led system gives him. As the highest and most senior member of the TSPM in the province, his views and interests are valued by the Party and especially the United Front organ because they need him to operate and control the TSPM churches. Of course, it is an unstable relationship because the Party can remove him if it decides to do so.
these denominations as conservative and generally respect the principle of secularism, which indicates their actions are usually less radical and political.\textsuperscript{325} It is clear from my interviews and observation that Chinese officials and TSPM leaders know or care little about the theological or institutional features of these foreign denominations, but they have paid close attention to their political stands such as the degree of political participation of the churches and their members in elections and political movements.\textsuperscript{326}

Third, carefully planned transactions will be executed and foreign advocates will gradually have more opportunities to engage in more activities and be invited to participate in bigger local projects based on feedbacks from the transactions. At the beginning, there may be a one-day trip including visits to charity organizations or sightseeing. If foreign advocates show interest in increasing their involvement and the officials feel satisfied about the evaluation, then further projects will be planned and they will not need any approval because mutual trust has been established and the officials do not want to have any record of involvement. This informal supervision melts away when more and more transnational collaboration happens and becomes an accepted norm. From my fieldwork in City T, the ten years of transactions have established quite an impressive credibility for the participants of this quiet religious freedom advocacy: the foreign

\textsuperscript{325} The Presbyterian Church is one exception in the mainline Protestant denominations. Chinese officials are hostile to this denomination mainly because its Taiwanese churches have been deeply involved in democratic and human rights movements since the 1970s and still strongly support the Taiwanese independent movement now. For the Presbyterian Church's engagement in this part of the history, please see Rubinstein, Murray, 2001, "The Presbyterian Church in the Formation of Taiwan’s Democratic Society, 1945-2001," \textit{The American Asian review} 19(4): 63-97; Christine L. Lin, "The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and the Advocacy of Local Autonomy." Sino-Platonic Papers, 92 (January, 1999).

\textsuperscript{326} For example, I have often been asked by TSPM pastors and religious affairs officials about my denominational background and, with almost no exception, they respond to my answer as "oh, yes, I know some people from your denomination are doing good work in nearby cities," or "your people are okay; your church is not so radical."
advocacy group has been able to deliver Sunday services, teach training seminars, organize missionary and charity work, and deliver money directly to churches or the selected aid group. One senior pastor of the foreign denomination has been invited to chair the first vocation school the TSPM plans to open.

5.4 City S: "Everything is Possible"

City S is a place where TSPM churches are actively harboring illegal foreign advocacy groups (through the backdoor listing mechanism) and also fostering cross-group collaboration with unregistered churches (majority alliance mechanism). Registered and unregistered churches often work together and share resources provided by foreign advocacy groups. This domestic collaboration strengthens the effectiveness of transnational advocacy and eventually forms a network of religious freedom activism spreading not only internationally but also nationally, connecting to already widespread house church movement. From my observation, the core mission of the network has spread over at least three provinces in Southern China and many policy breakthroughs such as building permanent mission sites, Christian schools, missionary seminaries and many other forbidden outreach activities have been achieved or planned by the participants. It is an uneasy achievement done by collaboration between TSPM clergy, house church leaders, and transnational advocacy groups.
Cross-Group Collaboration and "Registered" House Churches in City S

City S is a one-hour train ride from City T and is the third largest city in the province. Its head TSPM pastor (and also chairperson of the city TSPM) is a graduate from the TSPM seminary in City T and the first in the city to get official permission to study abroad, which makes him popular in the system. The head pastor brings local unregistered congregations, registered churches and outside advocacy groups into a working network of friendship. The relationship between TSPM and unregistered churches improved even faster than in City T. One of the key reasons is that the head TSPM pastor grew up in an unregistered house church, where his mother was among the first generation creators of house church congregations in the 1970s. His “bad background” as a son of house church leader did not affect his education and career due to the innovative policy set by the theological seminary mentioned previously. After he took the leadership position in the late 1990s and finished his advanced degree in the 2000s, funding and services from outside flowed frequently into City T under his protection. Almost all congregations in City T joined TSPM, or in other words, house churches gain legal status through putting on TSPM labels, connections, and resources. “We have a very small house church population now, and they mostly are people from outside” the pastor says. The TSPM system in City T has three registered churches, 80 more registered meeting points, and many more alliance churches or meeting points in nearby villages and districts. The head pastor runs from church to church to negotiate deals, mitigate disputes, handle lawsuits and legal work, and help distribute outside-funded services to local communities. Although arguments, division and disputes exist,
TSPM system in City S is not as divided as in City T and registered churches are working more as a group than in other cities.

Compared to other cities, it is much easier for unregistered congregations to obtain legal status and transfer into legal churches here. The church-to-population ratio in City S is three times higher than in City T, which indicates TSPM here is more successful in terms of fighting off state restrictions on building new churches.\textsuperscript{327} The main problem is that the city does not have enough clergy to administrate and pastor these growing congregations; graduates from the seminar in City T are still too few to satisfy the needs. Therefore, foreign-sponsored services, especially training local lay workers to serve in congregations, are not only desired but also made possible here.

From every indicator I can find in City S, religious freedom is higher than any other city I visited. An impressive story happened during my field trip. When some activity became too sensitive and attracted criticism from above in City T, they moved the activity to City S. As I was told in the visit, "\textit{There are too many informers \[in the City T\'s TSPM\].}" I witnessed them move a ten-person missionary group from churches in Chicago from City T to City S due to a safety warning from friends in the government. The pastor told me "\textit{This is my town and I know everyone...if they ask, my friends in the office will back me up.}"\textsuperscript{328}

\textsuperscript{327} The excuse the pastor used to convince authorities to build new churches is the lack of sufficient public transition in City S. Believers cannot travel long distance here to attend Sunday service so they need more churches and meeting points in order to worship. Of course, it is an excuse because there are three registered, full-scale churches, not meeting points, in the city and it violates the rule of "one city, one church." It is an achievement of TSPM clergy in the past ten years.

\textsuperscript{328} Interview # 101. August 14, 2011.
"Good" Religious Affairs Officials

The key to the success of the pastor is the relationship with local officials. From my interviews with several church leaders in Province A and B, the quality of religious affairs officials, including their educational, professional and career background, is an important factor in determining what their initial attitude toward Christianity is, and how difficult they may be in accepting foreign advocacy groups in their jurisdiction and work without formal approval. Officials with a friendly attitude toward religious advocacy often come from the background of better education, higher respect for their profession, and younger career bureaucrats who are promoted locally and plan to stay at the local level for longer time.

Relatively, religious affairs officials are in a career path requiring specific knowledge, experience and training on religions, ethnics, and religious organizations, and hiring agencies often set up high standards of recruitment and promotion. They need to identify problems and potential threats before they break up, and are tough enough to carry out unpopular policies when facing public resistance. For example, Division 2 of the United Front Work Department (in charge of religious affairs) has only one opening in 2013 and has 16 qualified people applying for the position. However, the situation is very different at the provincial level, where jobs and promotion are offered to Party cadre and loyalists first. At the local level, civil and religious affairs system has been seen as

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330 Literature of public administration has found that even though post-Mao reform has tried to move party and personal influence away from government agencies in the 1990s, the new provision of Civil Service Law in 2005 ironically enforces the importance of party loyalty in decision of promotion and policy-
the cold but safe place for people who do not have strong career ambitions because it does not provide resourceful positions with perks and better chances of promotion, while the work load is relatively higher than other civil affairs jobs. People working in offices sanctioning business licenses have better opportunities to get bribes and gifts from companies with little political risk, while dealing with the religious crowd brings nothing but trouble when things go wrong. The office usually has to deal with only handful of registered religious facilities and dozens of religious leaders due to limited size of the work force; they usually do not directly contact the mass of every religion until serious violations or rule-breaking happens and they have to lead a police raid.331

The typical arrangement of a government agency on religion in the city level includes two divisions under the Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs (DERA; Min Zong Ban or 民宗局): ethnic affairs division is in charge of issues involving ethnic minorities and the religious division is responsible for all organizations and population in five major religions with a branch to handle anti-cult tasks. The religious division often includes two or three specialized offices depending on the work load in the districts. The division of labor often follows the following format: Office 1 is responsible for Protestantism and Catholicism, Office 2 for the other three mainline religions (Buddhism, 


331 There are exceptions, of course. In more progressive provinces such as Guangdong and Fujian, where religious communities are relatively strong and often connecting with local governance and providing necessary social services, the civil and religious affairs offices are more responsive and have counters and staffs directly accept people's petitions and requests. The other exception is in the ethnically sensitive regions such as Tibet and Xinjing, where civil and religious offices are very powerful and possess more resources and staffs to actively engage religious communities to prevent ethnic riots and maintain the crowd controlled. Please see Zhidong Hao, 2012, "Sovereignty, Ethnicity, and Culture: the Tibetan issue in an institutionalist perspective," 21(73): 131-147.
Islam, and Dao), and Office 3 for cult and new religions. Each office has one chief officer and two to three supporting staff. In City S, the three people in Office 1 are in charge of about 200,000 Christians and hundreds of registered and unregistered congregations. It is reasonable for them to refuse any request to add more registered churches because they have to be responsible for their registration, legal issues, and regular auditing and reporting tasks under such limited manpower.

Unlike the State Administration of Religious Affairs where staff are recruited from elite students recommended by Party organs in universities or through the national civil service exam, many DERA officials are from the pool of low quality personnel, such as retired/de-mobilized military officers or individuals with a troubled history who have been dumped into the office because no other office will accept them. The Party keeps these low-quality officials because they are either loyalists who need to be rewarded or their firing might turn into an embarrassment for the government. Nevertheless, these officials have little chance of promotion, little respect for their profession, and no intention of making any effort to improve the quality of their service. Pastors often joke about when they walked into the religious affairs office and saw those extremely bossy and arrogant bosses showing their other side: they were playing mahjong (a popular Chinese gambling table game) in office hours with their shirts off.

332 The division of labor varies depending on location, and Office 1 is always responsible for the most important religious affairs tasks in the city. For example, Chengdu City in Sichuan Province puts Islam in Office 2 in the ethnic division, not religious division because it has relatively larger Muslim population than most first-tier and second tier cities, but it is still smallest compared to other religions. In cities of Xinjiang Province where Islamic believers are the mass majority of the population, Office 1 is responsible for Muslim and Office 2 is in charge of other religions. Chengdu city government website: http://www.cdmzzj.gov.cn/; Xinjiang government website: http://www.xjmzw.gov.cn/.
Due to their low self-esteem and lack of professionalism, this kind of officials often respond to requests and challenge from activists in a more ideological, repressive or authoritarian fashion. They are hardliners of the Party's religious policy because they do not know any better and do not want to understand the nuances and flexibility existing in the Party's various goals. They often use the Party's demand for stability and religious harmony to gain personal authority and prestige. Pastors reported that they were constantly yelled at, pointed fingers at, and sometimes threatened for not being cooperative enough. Local religious leaders, especially in registered facilities, are often treated as subordinates by these officials, and institutionally, sometimes they do rely on the DERA to make policy decisions in favor of their organizations (e.g. funding and housing) and repress underground congregations and other foreign competitors (cracking down on uncensored missions).

In City S, the dynamic between religious affairs officials and religious leaders is very different. Local recruits from local colleges are in the positions and hold a more open attitude toward religion and some of them maintain good personal relationships with church clergy. They embrace less ideological views on whether the city should accept foreign influence. They realize that the office needs the cooperation of TSPM clergy to make their job easier, and with the help of friendly pastors, the risk of illegal activities conducted by foreigners is manageable. When they do not have the need to establish personal authority and make an example out of disobedient clergy as the previously mentioned low-quality officials, they can evaluate the entry of foreign advocates, aid workers, and researchers in a more practical fashion. For example, one top religious
official agreed to accept my interview because "I am curious about what foreign scholars are thinking about us," He said.\textsuperscript{333}

Freedom of Association: Breakthroughs in Cross-Province Activities

The mutual trust between local officials, foreign advocates, and TSPM leaders is evident in City S and their long-term relationship creates a network of Protestant activism for other cities and relations outside their region. They directly support activists in other provinces and help them organize their own campaign for increased freedom. The core of this activism is the fight for freedom of association, which is the foundation for all kinds of local activists to be organized, funded, and to propagate and spread their beliefs.

An example of the achievement of this network is the underground cross-province missionary and charity work sponsored by local registered churches. TSPM churches used to be limited by the principles of \textit{Three Self} and were reluctant to participate in any kind of mission or outside city lines activities because these activities would eventually step into other TSPM church's territories. Encouraged by foreign advocates and house churches, TSPM congregations in City S participate in this transnational network and have begun to show interest and strengths in cross-province missions and charities.

The first strength is their ability to contact and prevent the TSPM system in the target city from intervening or even reporting the uncensored projects to authorities. Because City S's pastors have a personal network built by graduates from the same theological seminary, they can easily talk to the chair of TSPM in the target city and visit

\textsuperscript{333} Interview # 98. April 8, 2011.
the registered churches to greet (da zhao hu) local Christian leaders and introduce outside activists to them. There is no formal regulation or law to forbid TSPM pastors from conducting services or activities outside their parishes, but it is seen as a common courtesy that recognition or at least tolerance of the resident TSPM is necessary, especially leaders of registered churches directly responsible to the religious affairs offices who can call in police if they feel threatened. Outside activists can directly contact the local establishment to build their own relationship, but it is evident that the process through the existing network is much more effective and time-saving.

For example, I visited a county badly hit by the earthquake which killed an estimated 68,000 and displaced 4.8 million people in Sichuan in 2008. The county had about 20 disaster relief teams sponsored mostly by house churches and religious organizations from several provinces and overseas Christian communities. 80% of them were forced to leave in the first month of the earthquake and only five stationed for more than a year.334 Only two remain functional when I visited there in 2010 are one Texas-based Protestant NGO, who has received national media coverage and is therefore

334 Because of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the Sichuan government began to clean up volunteer organizations, asking all unregistered organizations, which means all foreign-sponsored NGOs to leave the province. Dr. Ming Hu from the Center on Philanthropy in Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis operated a community development project and observed that the number of active NGOs and independent volunteer organizations in Sichuan reduced from 300 to 50 or so one year after the outbreak of the earthquake. His number does not include numerous small-scale operations sponsored by non-Sichuan Chinese churches. Although observers often agree that Sichuan earthquake is the "weakening call of Chinese social organizations," relevant research is still scarce and reliable numbers about NGO or social organizations participating in this event do not exist. Ming Hu and Jiangan Zhu, "Community Reconstruction after the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake: A Reflection on Participatory Development Theories" Center on Philanthropy in Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, retrieved in January 14, 2013 in http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/files/event_resources/communityreconstructionandparticipatorydevelopmentminghu-jiangangzhu.pdf Also Shawn Shieh and Guosheng Deng, 2011, "An Emerging Civil Society: The Impact of the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake on Grass-roots Associations in China," The China Journal 65: 181-194.
tolerated by local government, and the one is supported by several TSPM congregations in Province B. The joint missionary/charity team, sponsored by the transnational network I described previously, has stayed longest in Sichuan after the provincial government announced the infamous eviction order in 2010. During my visit, the pastor from City S quickly identified friends and foes within the local TSPM system and explained to me how we should be careful about their power struggle and pointed me to the person who would take me in for an interview.

Without this kind of local knowledge, zealous outside activists would easily run into trouble or get trapped in endless bureaucratic processes that may delay the work. A widely-told story within the community of aid workers is about a refugee camp built by a charity NGO founded by overseas Chinese Christians. The camp was a great success and attracted a thousand people. However, a fatal mistake was made by organizers when church volunteers began to deliver the Gospel and tried to convert people to Christianity. The incident was reported to local authorities and the camp was taken over by the Chinese Red Cross. Some church volunteers turned into underground missions and tried to establish congregations as they did in their home cities. However, most were evicted from the region or forced to move from place to place because local TSPM and police were working together to identify and expel these groups. I have visited five missionary stations in the region and only one of them does not have some form of

335 Since the organization is still working in the location and revealing its name could add some complications, all names involved in this visit are anonymous.
336 The name of this organization is anonymous due to the request of my interviewees.
337 The camp is funded by a missionary organization based in the United States. Another explanation is some local officials were jealous about their success and do not want disaster relief credit given to outsiders.
recognition from the local TSPM and the group suffers from a loss of members due to constantly moving and hiding.

The second strength of TSPM-involved work is dealing with authorities by pushing legal and institutional advantages. After years of struggles and fights with local officials, leaders of TSPM become experts in playing "an edge ball" (ca bian qiu; a risky table tennis strategy that a ball hits on the very edge of the opponent’s side and wins a point). Similar to the pastor of Shining Star, who can use his pastor’s certificate to deny interference from authorities, the title of registered, openly-operated church can be a useful tool where he can mobilize church members, neighbors, local business and other social organizations for various purposes from covering up the traces of uncensored activities to providing protection for foreign advocates.

During my observation in City S, I followed the chief pastor of a registered church side-by-side and watched how he handled daily and sensitive activities. I saw how the pastor arranged stays for foreign advocates and activists from other provinces. He skillfully managed potential risks by using different connections he possessed. He showed his credentials to make hotel reservations and left accounts information of the church when booking a space for friends from registered facilities; he asked members of his church who operate businesses to process the orders of board and lodging for uncensored foreigners and outsiders. For example, I and several other pastors from Taiwan stayed in a restaurant run by a church member, who is just next door to a police

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338 Chinese hotel owners are required by law to report foreign guests and fax the copies of their passports to local police stations right away. In small towns or non-tourist sites where foreigners are uncommon, checking into hotels means the identity of foreigners will automatically attract attention from authorities.
station and no one was suspicious of our appearance. His credibility and personal friendship has secured the trust of local officials, but there is always a chance that someone else along the way might report the unusual persons or activities to authorities for various reasons. Although he may be able to deal with the consequence of an activity being exposed when the police chief calls his cell, his intuition reveals that this space of freedom is still fragile and needs great skills to maintain.339

5.5 Interim Conclusion: Empowerment from the Bottom Up

In summary, the activism beginning in City S and City T demonstrate a boomerang process that starts from local activists to empower foreign advocates in pressuring religious freedom agenda, which in return brings more resources and chances to expand their influence beyond their hometown (Figure 5.1). Without their knowledge, dedication, and bravery to break the rules set by the authorities, there is little chance foreigners' money can flow in and nor their ideas become reality.

This process provides an alternative model to what Keck and Sikkink (1998) described in their work of transnational advocacy network. The old model indicates locals have little capacity to oppose the repressive system so they need the empowerment, substantial and moral power from the outside to jump start their activism. However, evidence here suggests that activism begins with local plans of inviting outside help because it is rule-breaking behavior with potentially dire consequences. The invitation

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339 Another similar example is when I stayed in his church, I was free to participate in all of his activities, went anywhere he went, and visited all his guests. However, one day he asked to stay in my room because a provincial level official was visiting the church and "it might be okay for him to see you, but we don't want to make thing too complicated."
from an officially sanctioned group is especially critical because members of the group have veto power to disrupt transnational collaboration and also advantages to protect the transaction. Local clergy affiliated with TSPM can help foreign advocacy groups gain access and temporary permission to operate in China; in return foreigners provide funding, training, and ideas from the outside which broaden their agenda and bring them into a cross-provincial network of religious activism. This transnational collaboration eventually helps to expand the participants' freedom of association because the old norms, in the names of self-reliance, self-governance, and self-propagation as a tool to constrain the development of Protestant churches, have essentially been broken, at least in City S and to some degree in City T as well. By leveraging the key position in the government-censored establishment and theological seminary, advocates can transfer resources to both registered and unregistered churches. While progress is still limited; there is still no formal recognition from the government that churches' rights will be respected so most transactions still have to keep out of the public eye, the bond between two kinds of churches is groundbreaking. The willingness of foreign advocates to accept registered churches and the bravery of the leaders of registered facilities to embrace people from house churches are key mechanisms of the success there.

Foreigners and locals share the common goal of promoting larger space for churches' social and outreach activities, and are not afraid to challenge existing regulations if necessary. They both believe that religious freedom is not only about the right to worship within the boundaries set up by authorities. They make the case that believers should have the freedom to open their congregations to welcome non-believers,
participate in community activities, and set up missions for charity and other needs. Particularly, local activists act no longer as receivers of foreign advocacy that passively absorb ideas, methods, and discourse of religious freedom from outside; they teach foreigners how things work in their communities and protect them from dangers that could trigger repression. Purposely or unintentionally facilitated by the environment, the relationship between foreigners and locals is much more equal and dramatically different from the missionary and Westernization campaigns from the 19th Century until the 1950s, where locals were merely lay workers of resourceful foreign agencies. This time the direction of empowerment is from the bottom up.

Figure 5.1 The Alternative Boomerang Cycle
6.1 A Glance at Social Activism in Nine Provincial Regions
6.2 Domestic Comparison: Catholic and Protestant Transnational Networks
6.3 International Comparison: Transnational Christian Networks in Vietnam
6.4 Conclusion: Quiet Confrontation and Unspoken Progress

Previous chapters have illustrated the process of how religious activists, especially those who have some form of affiliation with officially sanctioned religious facilities such as receiving a seminary education, can facilitate transnational activism by helping their foreign sponsors deal with authorities and complex local environments. Two mechanisms, sponsorship from foreign groups to registered churches and friendly gestures from registered churches to unregistered churches, have been identified by the comparison of four metropolitan regions in China. Each city region has different levels of these two kinds of collaboration; one exists between foreign groups and government-sanctioned facilities, and another persists between locals from sanctioned and unsanctioned churches. Evidence here is consistent with my expectation that Protestant groups obtain the highest level of religious freedom only in cities with a high level of both kinds of collaboration. Most importantly, by pair comparison, one city is not so different from another one in terms of its societal, economic, and political conditions, and therefore varying levels of freedom strongly suggests that the variation in two key mechanisms, the closeness of relationship produced by the strategic choices of
participants, is essential to the improvement or deterioration of religious freedom in these locations. In short, City T’s better record of religious freedom, which includes a wide range of transnational activities that cannot be done in other places, is the result of a successful advocacy strategy adopted by Protestant groups in the past two decades.

This finding is inspiring and counterintuitive because observers used to think progress of freedom could not happen in a country like China; at least not before its leadership decides to begin meaningful political reform. In Chinese cities, how much freedom a Protestant group can enjoy clearly is not fixed or dictated by the goodwill of the government or the shift of government policy on Christianity. Indeed, officials have the power to choose between toleration and repression depending on their interpretation of the religious freedom doctrine granted in constitutional and guiding documents. This state-determined explanation is seemingly true for Chinese Protestants when the Constitution and religious regulations are all written by Communist ideologues who see Protestant organizations as a cultural front for Western imperialists. There is particularly little reason for the state to grant permission for foreign Protestant organizations to aid local churches since the Three-Self principles clearly forbid them to do so.

However, the growth of transnational Protestant activism in the past few decades shows that this view is largely wrong. When certain conditions are met, Protestant activists are able to keep the repressive regime at bay because they have propagated the idea of religious freedom as an integrated part of regular social activities that will benefit all. They also see through the tough discourse of the state and realize that officials have little to gain but a lot to lose by using violence on them. In many occasions, Protestants
can conduct prohibited activities as long as no one reports them to higher authorities or they can prove to authorities that they are too costly to be stopped. When a network of complotters this goal is formed, religious freedom is largely respected, at least for the people and groups in this network of religious freedom activism.

My direct observations in these cities and other places support this network-based explanation of advancing religious freedom. The remaining questions are: how prevailing is this mode of transnational activism in other locations? How well can the theory derived from this Protestant transnational network explain variations of freedom in other regions? Can it be used in understanding other forms of activism, outside Protestantism or outside China? This chapter provides some answers to these questions through examining the transnational religious networks, including Protestant and Catholic networks revealed in recent literature. The chapter also compares Protestant activism in China with activism in Vietnam, which attracts academic attention because of the constant repression on the Christian minority and the strong international assistance that has been given to Vietnamese Christian groups. These comparisons demonstrate the strength and limitation of my theory and shed light on the future direction of this inquiry.

6.1 A Glance at Social Activism in Nine Provincial Regions

In order to answer these questions, I designed a cross-province phone survey targeting Protestant leaders in randomly selected 41 prefecture areas in nine provincial regions in the more industrial Eastern side of China, which has the larger Christian population and the most foreign involvement. The questionnaires were standardized from
my face-to-face interviews and asked leaders to provide information about their operation, as well as assessments of their relationships to foreign organizations, other churches, and the authorities. The goal was to seek stronger evidence of the correlation between the two key mechanisms and religious freedom. Unfortunately, the survey was stopped due to unexpected difficulty from national tension after the so-called "Chinese Jasmine Revolution," an Internet movement mimicking the Arab Jasmine Revolution in September 2011. Most religious leaders refused to answer the questionnaires because they believed that timing was too sensitive to talk about their foreign connections and relationships to the establishment. Although the survey is not complete, the limited responses support my basic observation in four cities.

First, they did accept personal visits and casual conversation with interviewers. They stopped talking when a formal survey was presented to them. It should be noted that the trustworthiness or authenticity of the interviewers would appear to not be the reason for rejection, as the interviewers are Chinese Christians who obtained leader's phone numbers from personal networks of friends, colleagues, and relatives. The agency I worked with is a grassroots NGO that has operations across China and has a good reputation among Christians. Interviewees could trust interviewers, but were still afraid to release critical information about their organization relations. Their fear and worry indicates that their religious freedom—not as an individual, but as an organization—is under great restraint.

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One example is a church leader from Anhui. He knew the interviewer personally through working together in a Christian publisher a few years ago and communicated with him regularly through email and by phone. He began with a supportive attitude, expressing strong enthusiasm about taking the survey and introducing us to other Christian leaders. However, after the questionnaires were sent out and a few of his friends had seen them, he called my interviewer and said, “Do you and your scholar friend really want to do this? These questions are too sensitive to talk about at this point.” It should be noted that interviews done before September 2011 rarely faced this kind of rejection.

Second, the refusal also echoes my observation that the main obstacle of religious freedom comes not only from government policy but also from the complex relationships within Christian community. During my in-person investigation, the importance of personal reference was proven to be the key to a successful interview. Surveyed persons would check an interviewer’s personal and organizational background thoroughly before answering any questions. If the interviewer had a house church background and was introduced by a referee from a house church network he or she knew about, the conversation more likely would be granted. On the contrary, in front of registered church leaders, a person with a house church background would be shut down almost instantly or politely asked out. In five provinces I have visited, the sanctioned label (TSPM or house church) often dictates the trustworthiness and acceptance of a person in the field and also defines the line between foes and friends. Nonetheless, interviewers with strong references were still being rejected.
One possible reason is the transparency issue of church operation. Foreign aid and other financial issues are sensitive and church leaders treat them as top secret, not only because the government wants to know but also because competitors inside and outside the church may use this information in a power struggle. For example, China Aid, a human rights watch group based in Washington, D.C., has called attention to the “rising religious repression on house churches in China” and accused the Chinese government of being involved in a planned, new wave of religious repression against unregistered congregations since 2012. At least one of the five cases China Aid reported happened because of financial disputes inside the church, with no sign of a staged government intervention. The financial dispute triggered government intervention, with Christians in dispute inviting officials to come to their aid. Two factions inside an open church (a church under the supervision of the TSPM but not formally registered) had a dispute over a repair contract and one side reported the case to the foreign NGO as “religious repression” because they lost to the other side in the power battle. The case became politically sensitive because the contractor reported the case to local officials and demanded leaders of the TSPM to settle the debt. TSPM clergy and religious affairs officials tried to seize the church property by force to pay the contractor—not a rare practice in Chinese society over financial disputes. Some local officials have expressed their tiredness about dealing with complaints and accusations from one Christian group to another. One told me in private that “we do not really want to deal with illegal

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transnational activity such as a foreign missionary in town...but if someone calls us, we have to do something.”

The Positive Impact of Registered Social Groups?

My theory and cases point out the essentiality of foreign advocacy groups to ally with registered social groups; it is proved to be critical for foreigners to obtain legal status and institutional leverage from registered groups to protect their fragile activism. An important question not yet answered by this research is how “helpful” are other registered social groups. Can they provide shelter and protection for advocates as registered Protestant groups do, or are they merely hired thugs by the state to oppress activists and advocates? Outside observers often see these government-censored groups as propaganda tools or as the remaining legacy of collectivism that have little legitimacy and social influence today. As I mentioned in chapter 1, Moisés Naím, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, called these government-operated non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) “Democracy's Dangerous Impostors.”342 If critics are right, we should be seeing GONGOs rise against other unregistered social groups and push activists and advocates into underground movements, a more confrontational form of activism. If my theory is accurate, we might see GONGOs grow hand in hand with unregistered groups and help realize their agenda in a less radical fashion. Although further research on non-Protestant groups is needed, preliminary

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evidence here suggests that GONGOs in China are growing and prosperous in areas with less confrontational social activism.\textsuperscript{343}

**Figure 6.1. Political Prisoners and GONGOs**

Note: The nine areas are sorted by the weighted number of political prisoners. The numbers are weighted by the figures of Guangdong Province, which has the largest population (set as 100). Political prisoners’ numbers are from the PPD database, retrieved on September 27, 2011. Shanghai and Beijing are provincial cities that enjoy the same administrative power and privileges as provinces but not their population. So, weighting them by Guangdong makes the comparison more realistic. GONGO employment is the number of people employed by social organizations (the Chinese term for NGOs), non-enterprise units run by NGOs (non-profits), and foundations. Source: *China Statistical Yearbook 2010*, National Bureau of Statistics of China, Beijing, Republic of People’s China. [http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/yearlydata/](http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/yearlydata/).

Figure 6.1 shows a negative trend for the relationship between the capacity of registered social groups (the number of employees of all formally registered NGOs and non-profit foundations) and radical political activism (the number of political prisoners). In the provincial areas where GONGOs have more employees, fewer people

\textsuperscript{343}For more information on Chinese NGOs and their recent growth, see Katherine Morton, 2005, “The Emergence of NGOs in China and Their Transnational Linkages: Implications for Domestic Reform,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 59(4): 519-532.
have turned to political activism or have been jailed for their conscience (all numbers have been weighted by the most populated province, Guangdong). If the number of political prisoners in each area can be seen as a valid indicator for the level of contention between the state and underground activism, the comparison reveals an interesting spatial variation of Chinese social activism nationwide: areas with a higher number of registered social groups may also have a lower number of people needed to engage in radical political confrontation. There is no way we can establish a causal relationship from such a small number of cases, but the trend questions the popular contemptuous view on registered groups and indicates that more academic attention on them is necessary.

This spatial variation is consistent with my observation of Protestant activism. The most Christian-populated areas (Henan and Anhui have the most Protestant Christians) are located in the lower half of the figure and indeed have relatively better church-state relationships. Henan used to have many reported incidents of church-state confrontations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but these confrontations have become rare in recent years. Shanghai and Beijing, where the capacities of registered social groups are very low, surprisingly, have the highest level of radical activism and the worst church-state relationships. Shanghai and Beijing are also the places with the worst collaboration between underground and registered social groups, which all my interviewees have confirmed. Foreign Protestant advocacy groups often arrive and operate in these two cities without the consent and cooperation of registered churches. Churches are

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344 Only 9 of 21 provincial areas were chosen because they have a significant number of Christians and more ethnic homogeneity.
competition with each for resources and believers. It is reasonable to expect that there is a higher level religious repression in both places.

Dancing with the Devi?

More research is needed to discover the roles and impacts of these registered social groups, but the notion of highlighting them will definitely attract criticism. I know many of my friends in advocacy organizations would be unhappy about my conclusion. Religious studies experts and religious rights practitioners have debates about how to define the TSPM. Is it a party front, a Chinese-style denomination, or a social organization with a heavy government burden? My theory does not try to defend the TSPM or other government-sanctioned social groups in any way, but I did discover that some TSPM leaders are much more open-minded and hold more pragmatic attitudes toward foreign advocates and underground congregations than other registered groups. The reasons for these differences need to be elaborated at length.

Not all TSPM leaders are fake Christians or runners for the government, especially when our attention moves from Beijing and Shanghai to the more peripheral areas, where clergymen’s performances are evaluated by their clientele rather than their supervisors. After talking to many local TSPM clergymen, I was surprised to find that the national TSPM has very little power over them and the real power lies below the provincial level.

345 For example, American Southern Baptist missionary and Mission Board director Britt Towery has been criticized for his positive attitude and reports regarding TSPM. In his 1990 book, Churches of China, he mentioned "In many Christian publications, the Three-Self Movement leaders have been blamed for putting Christians in jail. Knowing some of these men personally, I find this very difficult to believe." Towery, 1990, *Churches of China: Taking Root Downward, Bearing Fruit Upward* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press): 118.
Money is the key reason for this dispersal of power. Except for the big-city TSPM, which owns properties and profit-making businesses, the only reliable financial resource is the money from selling Bibles, which is monopolized by local TSPM bookstores. Bible publishing in China is financed, ironically, by the United Bible Societies (UBS) and other foreign religious NGOs mainly based in the Great Britain and the United States.$^{346}$

Nevertheless, the Bible selling revenue, 5RMB per copy or 100,000RMB per year in a 20,000 member parish—while not trivial—is only enough to support administrative functions, a registered church with handful of staff, in the regional headquarters. Others have to rely on other sources. Take the career path of a junior clergy, for example. After a theology student graduates from a state-censored seminar, the provincial/prefectural TSPM office may pay him 100 to 400RMB ($15-$60USD) a month for his service in a local establishment, but the money is far below the clergy’s actual need. Because the TSPM is extremely short on clerical staff, a recently graduated student may have to serve a whole county area. To pay for his/her travel and other expenses, the student has no choice but to depend on offerings from regular churchgoers, which means more attention is paid to people’s needs than the Party’s policy.$^{347}$ The choice between “government

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$^{346}$The Chinese government claims that the TSPM is the model of self-reliance in Chinese religion; however, since no governmental funding has been available for the TSPM since the 1980s and demanding a tenth offering is not encouraged in TSPM doctrine, foreign money, especially through Bible selling, became the key financial source. For each Bible sold, the local office can get 5RMB. It is a significant amount of money for a church that has little other income. The printing operation is done by the printing corporation owned by the Amity Foundation located in Nanjing. The TSPM owns the copyright of the Chinese translation (translated by the help of UBS) and has the monopoly power of selling Bibles. Copies from other organizations or foreign publishers are treated as illicit copies and confiscated by police or ASA if found.

$^{347}$In addition to money, the most powerful tool of the TSPM is ordination. In practice, a license co-signed by the provincial ARA and the TSPM is an effective protective amulet to deter police and other harassment. But a popular clergy can operate congregations effectively without this piece of paper. So my interviewees
“running dog” and “God’s faithful servant” is obvious. This environment gives the student or low-ranking clergy incentive to work with well-intended foreign advocacy groups, especially those who are introduced by trusted friends and teachers in provincial/prefectural offices.

Therefore my theory is an improvement on existing literature because it emphasizes the nuances between the fully integrated state religious control agency (the high leadership of the TSPM) and registered congregations (open churches with regular believers). It is false to treat the whole registered group as a unified state control machine. For advancing the religious freedom agenda, some transnational Protestant advocates have used this semi-non-state actor, the registered churches, as a “bridge” or a “front” to collaborate with local officials to successfully bypass the legal restrictions set by central government. Recent literature has found similar conclusions in other issue areas (Hertel 2006; Mertha 2004; Tsai 2007; and Shieh 2009). Fragmentation of the authoritarianism has been identified as the source of political opportunity in authoritarian states, where locals can manipulate and leverage it with the central authorities. However, these new studies do not address the complicated dynamics between registered and unregistered social groups, which have been shown by my research to be essential to the success of transnational Protestant activism in China.

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348 Many studies on Chinese environmental NGOs have found that cooperation from Chinese environmental GONGOs is helpful and essential. Fengshi Wu, 2002, “New Partners or Old Brothers? GONGOs in Transnational Environmental Advocacy in China, *China Environment Series 5*: 45-58.
6.2 Domestic Comparison: Catholic and Protestant Transnational Networks

When I conducted an interview with Protestant activists, it came to my attention that Buddhists and Catholics have their own registered and underground networks and are fighting for their freedom as well. They all have their transnational ties to overseas faith-based groups and receive funding, training, services, and internationally accepted norms from outside that sometimes provoke interference and persecution from the authority. There are constant reports of Catholic clergy being threatened or arrested because they refused to give up their loyalty to the Vatican.349 There are incidents of Buddhist temples being seized by local governments for tourism or sold to private developers without the consent of the monks; it has been reported by human rights watch groups that senior monks have been taken away by police because they had memorial services for victims of the Tiananmen Square massacre.350

The Chinese government has used almost identical strategies of sponsoring sanctioned groups as it does on Protestants to monitor and restrain Buddhists and Catholics, yet these containment strategies seem to be much more successful on Buddhists and Catholics than on Protestants. Both Buddhists (non-Tibetan) and Catholics have no known nationwide advocacy networks; fewer activists from both religions are arrested according to existing records. Disobedience and confrontation happened mostly


within registered organizations. In the past six years, there have been no Buddhist activist reported arrested case and only 22 reported cases of Catholic believers arrested. In the past two decades, Buddhist and Catholic political prisoners are only 0.2% and 2%, respectively, of the total Chinese citizens who were jailed for consensus. Limited by space, this section discusses Catholic groups only.

Table 6.2. Religious Affiliation of Chinese Political Prisoners (1989-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist (Mahayana)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guanyin Famin</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic (registered)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic (unregistered)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic (unspecific)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian (unspecific)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant (registered)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant (unregistered)</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant (unspecific)</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Lightning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shouters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South China Church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan Buddhist</td>
<td>1701</td>
<td>38.65</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>34.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan Buddhist (Gelug)</td>
<td>1041</td>
<td>23.65</td>
<td>1210</td>
<td>21.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan Buddhist (Nyingma)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan Buddhist (Sakya)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>922</td>
<td>20.95</td>
<td>1279</td>
<td>23.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falun Gong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi Guan Dao (Daoism)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4401</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>5229</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA) is designed to be the same kind of control mechanism as the TSPM is for Protestants. It began with a few Chinese low-ranked clergy who supported the Communist revolution and was secretly sponsored by the Chinese Communist Party in the late 1940s. Almost identical to what happened to Protestants, non-Chinese and “anti-revolutionary” Catholic clergymen and staff were purged out of their churches and social organizations by a series of “accusation movements” led by these “patriotic” Catholics sponsored by the new Communist regime. With the help of the Korean War and Mao’s anti-imperialist campaigns, the new leadership of the CPCA quickly seized the monopoly of the Chinese Catholic Church in 1957; the victory eventually turned sour when Catholicism and other religions were banned in the 1960s.\(^{351}\)

In the reform era, the comeback of the CPCA and the struggle between sanctioned and unsanctioned clerical factions were very similar to that of the Chinese Protestants, although the anti-imperialist legacy has a stronger latent effect on Catholics than

\(^{351}\) Jie 2006: 34-37.
Protestants for an obvious reason: the Roman Catholic Church always acts as a persistent, unified, and even authentic resource of authority behind Catholicism. The same state policy goal, self-governance, self-reliance, and self-propagation, has never been fully realized with the Chinese Catholic Church because the spiritual connection between Chinese Catholics and the Pope has never been destroyed. Similar to how most Tibetan Buddhists still secretly hold the Dalai Lama as their highest spiritual authority even under close surveillance and severe persecutions from the secular king, Chinese Catholic lay people and believers still hold onto their traditions and value system. Yet sacrifice and comprise are unavoidable. Since 1957, the CPCA has filled high leadership positions without the approval of the Vatican, and underground congregations have begun to form, pretend to cooperate with new rulers, and confront the CPCA and the government quietly.  

Table 6.3. Registered and Unregistered Catholic Churches: 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Registered Catholic(CPCA)</th>
<th>Underground Catholic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>6,000,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishops</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priests</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monasteries</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monastery students (male)</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beijing’s *Three-Self* doctrine applies not only to Protestant groups but also to Catholics; ordination becomes the center of confrontation between Catholics and the state. From 1981 to 2002, old Chinese bishops ordained 82 bishops secretly, with informal consent from the Vatican. CPCA member churches ordained around 86 bishops with the blessing of the Chinese government; some of them sought the Vatican’s consent afterward and 25 of them did not obtain post-approval from the Vatican. When I interviewed TSPM leadership in 2010, it was during the time that Joseph Guo Jincai, a deputy head of the CPCA and a Catholic representative to the Chinese National Congress, ordained himself as Bishop of Chengdu (or Bishop of Dioceses Geholensis in the Roman Catholic book) in Hebei Province. The event developed into a series of international human rights incidents when the CPCA had to “kidnap” several bishops to perform the ordination ceremony with the help of police and religious affairs officials. There were 10 ordinations in 2010 alone without papal approval and the “kidnapping”

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scheme reportedly reappeared again in 2011 in Shantou, Guangdong Province. I asked a CPCA priest about this incident and he simply said: “We know who’s the true leader of the Church, but ‘situation is stronger than men.’”

Unlike the TSPM, which is an alien object created from a vacuum and forcefully applied on loosely connected Protestant groups, the CPCA is a transformation of an existing, coherent power hierarchy; the significant change mostly happens to the high-ranked leadership who are calling the shots. While many high-ranked foreign nationals were forced to leave in the 1950s, the remaining Chinese clergymen substantially benefited from the situation because they all got promoted. The victory of Communism helped to realize the indigenization goal of the Catholic Church that had been discussed, but not advanced as much as those of Protestant groups since the 1930s. In the beginning, the indigenization of the Chinese Catholic Church and the nationalization of its prosperities gained high public support because the Church was involved in the unpopular anti-communist campaigns and was openly against the new ruler of China, who swore to reform the nation and win back national dignity. The CPCA’s takeover of Church leadership received little resistance inside and outside the Church; a few bishops

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356 The nomination was sent to the Vatican for approval according to an informal consensus between two nations since 2006, yet Pope Benedict XVI disagreed with Guo’s candidacy. The Chinese government or the CPCA decided that they did not want to wait any more and the consensus of “dual recognition” lasting for five years was broken. Ruth Gledhill, “Catholic Church in China plans more ‘illicit’ ordinations of bishops,” The Times, July 2011, <Available at www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article3103700.ece> (accessed April 21, 2013).

357 “Situation is stronger than men” (xing shi bi ren qiang) is an old Chinese proverb about survival wisdom that a wise man has to give up his principle or hide the righteousness sometimes because evil is too powerful. As a member of the official church, he could not openly criticize the high leadership, but he made it clear that most Chinese Catholics have no say on the decision and they question the legitimacy of such arbitrary action. Interview No.80, December 13, 2010.

358 In 1948, 17 out of 20 Chinese archbishops were foreign nationals; only 21 out of 143 bishops were Chinese. Jie: 26; 287.
refused to cooperate and ended up in jail. When religions again become legal in 1982, the CPCA had little trouble regaining its previous glory: within 10 years, 3900 churches were returned by the government to the CPCA and it obtained 4 million members, higher than its peak level (3.5 million) in 1949.  

Nevertheless, its success is unmatched with the Protestants’ success. The most optimistic estimation of Protestants is only 0.7 million in 1949; that number reached 3 million in 1982 and the number of believers under registered TSPM churches was already reaching 5 million in 1991. The reasons for this difference between Catholics and Protestants require another investigation but the organizational strengths of registered Christian churches are understandable based on my knowledge of registered religious organizations; they are self-reliant social entities and much more than the pawns of the Communist Party. After years of repression and forced isolation from their former international hosts, they are now well-trimmed survivalists and are capable of propagating and growing without support from state and foreign sponsors. The organizational improvement is much greater in Protestant groups. They used to operate in small groups and rarely cooperated; now, two strong organizational centers (the TSPM and house churches) exist. More than once, my Chinese Christian friends have told me they are grateful for the harsh repression they suffered in the past. “Good or bad, government repression in practice forced us to get rid of some bad components in the

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359 Ibid.: 134.
church,” one house church leader said.\footnote{He referred to relying on large church operations and using the church building as a symbol of Christian identity and solidarity. Interview No.22, December 29, 2010.} It is possible that the creation of the TSPM, a controversial and unprecedented framework of in-group collaboration, is one of the reasons that contributed to the rapid growth of the Protestant population compared to that of the Catholics.

Does my theory of transnational religious activism apply to Catholics? Evidence suggests that the lack of transnational collaboration and in-group collaboration indeed are critical to the struggle of Catholic activism, especially the failure of Chinese Catholics to challenge existing law and practice. For the CPCA, transnational collaboration is not only troubling but also illicit because of the patriotic doctrine, while for underground Catholics, transnationalism is the only acceptable resource of legitimacy because of the papalism they have held onto for more than a century. Furthermore, neither side believes that they have the option to move away from the current divided church framework; they both claim they are still “one Catholic Church” and their sovereignty reaches other spectrums of the community. This fundamental clash prevents meaningful collaboration from happening and the two sides are almost always stepping on each other’s toes. When a clergyman promotes Catholicism in the community well and attracts many new believers, his success will become an insult to one side instantly because the recognition of his achievement will bring up the issue of papalism. The result is the lack of motivation for both internal and external collaboration in the whole Catholic community because both sides are so reluctant to make any move that would provoke a change of the status quo. The deadlock causes the Chinese Catholic Church’s slow development in the
post-reform era but also reveals the undeniable power of transnational religious advocacy; the symbolism and moral authority of the Vatican are almost able to balance the institutional and coercive power of the CPCA and the state behind it. The Pope’s condemnation is so powerful that in the past 30 years, only a handful of Chinese Bishops have been ordained without his blessing. The number of “illegal ordinations” is also declining in the recent decade, as China has become an undeniable global power. As my theory has indicated, two kinds of collaboration, a transnational one between the Vatican and the CPCA and an internal one between the CPCA and underground Catholics, are the keys to understanding this transnational Catholic activism.

6.3 International Comparison: Transnational Christian Networks in Vietnam

Vietnam has many similarities with China: a single-party system, a doctrinaire Communist ideology, and booming economic growth due to state policy changes since 1986. Although Vietnam has been seen as a “softer” authoritarian state than China (Abrami et al. 2008, London 2009), its political constraints on society, especially its policy toward transnational religious groups, has shown comparable characteristics to China’s, such as strict legal restrictions of all organizational aspects of six legally recognized religions. Opposition is most severe among Protestants and Catholics who have strong foreign connections, ethnic concentration, and unique organizational development in this nation. The review of the current literature of Vietnam shows that my
theory is capable of explaining the variation of success between these transnational religious groups.362

Very little academic work is on Vietnam’s Christians but interest has been growing since the opening of the state (the glasnost-like policy called *Doi Moi*; Renovation), to international society and the normalization of Vietnam-U.S diplomatic relations; a process demonstrates a similar features as the Chinese “Reform and Opening” began a decade earlier.363 The attention has been on ethnic minority groups in rural areas where Evangelical missions and Protestant churches have a significant presence. The situation of Vietnamese Protestants relies on the reports of Evangelical missionaries who work in the region. It is estimated that ethnic minorities make up three-fourths of the total Protestants. According to an assessment in 2000, the Protestant population numbered between 600,000 and 700,000; they are less than 10% of the whole Christian population (Catholics are around 8 million) and 1% of the total Vietnamese population, but Protestants increased four-fold since the end of the Vietnam War, and 80% of new believers are minorities from 20 of the 54 officially recognized minority language groups,

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especially in Hmong, one of the largest of the northwestern hill tribes adjacent to China and Lao.\textsuperscript{364}

In the 1970s, the United States government recruited fighters from Hmong to combat communists in Lao and Northern Vietnam, especially along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the main supply line from the North to communist rebels in the South. After communists took over Lao and unified Vietnam in 1975, the Hmong people became the target of retaliation and many fled the region. Similar to Chinese Protestant refugees after the civil war who escaped and survived with foreign missionaries in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia waiting for the time of return, Hmong refugee communities in Cold War alliance countries such as France, Thailand, and the United States were also quickly evangelized and became the critical connections to those still under communist rule. The largest Hmong diaspora community is located in the United States with around 260,000 people in 2010.\textsuperscript{365}

The Hmong people’s close relationship to Protestantism is related to the growing attention of American Evangelical missions and American national interests in Southeast Asia since the twentieth century. Protestant Christianity started reaching the population as early as 1911, when Pastor Robert Jaffray began his mission in Vietnam, yet missionary attempts in the past one hundred years accomplished very little until the rapid conversion happened among minorities in the 1990s. In the North before the revolution, there were only a few hundred Protestants in the 1950s. In 1989, Hmong Christians in Vietnam were


only about a few families but the number jumped in 2000 to around 150,000 to 250,000, 36% of the Hmong population in the four resident provinces.\(^{366}\) It has been suspected by the Vietnamese government and many observers that the United States, its generous aid projects and the accompanying missionary work, is behind this success. However, Vietnamese anthropologist Tam Ngo documented the process and concluded that it is a series of transnational collaborations of marginalized minority communities, consistent American Asian radio missions, and returning Hmong American missionaries with unique cultural expertise that contributed to the rapid growth of Evangelical Protestantism since the end of the 1980s.\(^{367}\) This series of collaborations reveal comparable features as Chinese Protestant activism.

Vietnamese “Legal Churches” and “House Churches”

The transnational collaborations began when radio programs broadcasted by the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), a U.S. evangelical radio ministry based in the Philippines since the 1950s, targeting “unreachable” populations living in Southeast Asia and Southern China. The radio missionaries skillfully transferred the Western version of the Gospel into the Hmong’s context. One popular story told is a personage called Vaj Tswv or Vàng Chù, who would “come to save the Hmong from their suffering life, and bring happiness, wealth, prosperity, and eventually a righteous Kingdom for the


Hmong.”\textsuperscript{368} In Hmong language, \textit{Vaj Tswv} represents a messianic meaning of “the King” and also contains an ethnicity-central message of “Miêu Voọng Xuất Thê” (Hmong’s King is coming or “Miao Wang Chu Shi” in Chinese)—in ancient folklore, a Hmong king would come to defeat Chinese Han oppressors to restore the old kingdom.\textsuperscript{369} The \textit{Vaj Tswv} message is very accessible and a powerful bonding agent for the Hmong’s identity, which has been alienated with the surrounding Han and Vietnamese civilizations for centuries and has been politically persecuted by the Vietnamese government, who despise Hmong Christians as “rice converts” who took in a foreign faith for material benefits and who give way to the American peaceful evolution scheme.\textsuperscript{370} When audience letters and other positive responses from the Hmong and other minority regions came back to missionary agencies and donor communities, transnational advocacy groups began to advertise and promote Vietnam missions and more funding and recourses become available to go to these areas.\textsuperscript{371} The prevailing poverty and human rights reports about mistreated minorities also increased the sense of urgency there.

For example, almost every American denomination I contacted has missionaries or sponsored missionaries in Vietnamese minority regions. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is one of the most eager advocates of Protestantism in Vietnam. There

\textsuperscript{368} Ngo is a West-trained scholar who received a college degree in Vietnam. Her family worked in the Hmong community with a foreign aid agency for decades. Her close observations of the conflict interests and biases of religious advocacies, human rights watch groups, charity agencies, and multiple governments involved in Hmong issues are very insightful. \textit{Ibid.}: 6-9.


\textsuperscript{370} Ngo, 2011: 4, 9.

\textsuperscript{371} According to my interview of FEBC’s Taipei headquarter, audience letters, missionary reports, and direct investigation are three of the major means to assess the effectiveness of their programs. Since many Hmong audience are illiterate, missionary reports and occasionally direct visits become the major ways of connecting with the Vietnamese audience.
are around 90 congregations, most of which are legacies of pre-1975 missionary work, in a dozen cities across the country, but there was no formal organizational connection among them. In 2008, a Baptist national confederation was formed in Ho Chi Minh City and it is legally registered under the state Religious Affairs Committee. The collaboration and mutual understanding between government officials and the SBC is manifest: government officials attended the opening ceremony of the Vietnamese Baptist Convention (VBC) held in one of the oldest Baptist churches in Vietnam and congratulated the achievement of their American guests. In return, American Evangelists phrased the wisdom and right choices made by their socialist hosts: “We’re here to recognize and celebrate the progress of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. We commend the government leadership of your country,” said SBC’s International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin in the celebration gathering.

Eventually, two kinds of Protestant churches emerged in Vietnam: a very small number of government-sanctioned, legal churches in cities that mainly serve expatriates, Vietnamese American missionaries and returnees, and rising urban white-collar workers (the Baptist Church has only 5000 members nationwide). They often have little trouble obtaining government recognition. The second kind has a larger number of “illegal” congregations concentrated in rural, minority regions; they receive no formal recognition but are the object of mistrust and persecutions that are common to see in Hmong, Montagnard, and other minorities’ regions.

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To control the unsanctioned, illegal transnational collaboration in the North, the Vietnamese government adopted a series of steps beginning in the late 1990s. Anti-Christian campaigns were applied to minority communities to force believers to give up their faith. Reportedly the government made Hmong Christians watch the destruction of their own homes to intimidate these new converts and mandated that villagers attend re-education seminars in order to “...reduce the number of villages, families, and individuals who follow Christianity illegally.” The Vietnamese government refuses to recognize minorities’ Christian faith and house church congregations as a part of the legal Christianity protected by the Constitution, despite the fact that the government-sanctioned Evangelical Church of Vietnam had issued certificates of acceptances to 981 minority congregations before 2005. A secret policy bulletin, later called Plan 184 by human rights watch groups, revealed a systematic plan to force minorities to abandon Christianity. The direct result is the constant report of massive human rights violation of minorities’ rights in Hmong and the Montagnard Highlands.

Since 2001, more than 350 Montagnards have been sentenced to long prison sentences on vaguely defined national security charges for their involvement in public protests and unregistered house churches considered subversive by the government, or for trying to flee to Cambodia to seek asylum. They include Dega

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374 There were Party and government documents, so-called Plan 184, leaked to the public in 2001 that described an anti-Christian campaign in the Bảo Thắng and Bắc Hà districts in Lao Cai Province. Ngô, Ibid.: 9-10.
376 Freedom House was the first to reveal the Plan 184 policy to the West and a similar document leak in 2005 also confirms the existence of such policy. Ibid.
church activists as well as Montagnard Christians who do not describe themselves as followers of Dega Protestantism, including pastors, house church leaders, and land rights activists. ("Montagnard Christians in Vietnam," Human Rights Watch Report, March 2011: 2, 3)

After years of lobbying by Hmong and Montagnard Americans, religious freedom advocates, and human rights watch groups, the United States, the UN, and the European Union began to pressure the Vietnamese government on minority’s issues.377 To avoid criticism, the government moved to more dedicated procedures and legal restrictions to accomplish its goal.378 The government announced the Ordinance on Belief and Religion in 2004 as the basic guideline of religious management and swore to protect the basic legal rights of Christians in administrative orders.379 Similar to the Chinese Regulation of Religious Affairs, also made public in 2004, the discourse of religious freedom retains the essence of corporatism and anti-imperialism. The Vietnamese document insists that Protestantism is part of the scheme of the peaceful evolution of “the American Empire and unnamed allies, the goal of which is to fight against the revolution.” Although the new doctrine seems to tolerate the Christian belief in principle, the government believes


379 Include the Decree number 22, issued by the National Government on March 1st, 2005, and Instruction number 01 by the Prime Minister on February the 4th, 2005, which both specifically mention authorities at all levels to implement the Ordinance to manage Protestant Christianity. Ngo: 10.
that in practice minorities must be “mobilized and persuaded to return to their traditional beliefs.”

Since 2006, the Vietnamese government has financed research teams, backed up by police and officials from the central and district governments, to conduct door-to-door investigation to categorize minority Christians. The purpose is believed to be to complete a comprehensive database of minority Christians and to help to apply a person-based registration system to turn house churches into registered congregations. The rule is that only registered persons on the list can attend church gatherings. In essence, the government controls who can or cannot be on the list and therefore in the church; it is said to protect non-believers and young people under 14 from being converted.

Spiral Model in Vietnam?

Besides harsh repression on minority Christians, it is apparent that Vietnamese Christians in majority community enjoy a much higher level of freedom than Chinese Christians in terms of engaging foreign advocacy groups. They decided to adopt a more conventional approach of activism, a method that has been summarized by Keck and Sikkink (1998) as a spiral model: locals deliver their grievance to international NGOs and put pressure on norm-violating governments by “naming and shaming” campaigns.

With the pressure backed up by powerful state governments and international organizations, “naming and shaming” can result in signing, ratification, and socialization

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380 Ngo: 12.
381 Ngo: 12.
382 A more detailed discussion is in Chapter 2.
of international norms of freedom and eventually improve the conditions of locals who propose those claims; a “boomerang” process of transnational activism starts from local activists, is amplified by foreigners, and ends at the target local community.

Vietnamese Christians are like the Chinese who have no freedoms of church planting, public preaching, and literature distribution and all organizational activities require government approval; however, most members of the established, registered congregations do not necessarily disagree with these restrictions. Andrew Wells-Dang, an American scholar and long-term NGO practitioner in Vietnam, observed that “non-evangelical Protestants and Catholics are generally content with a ‘theology of presence’ in which overt, traditional mission activity is not only unnecessary but seen as disrespectful to people of other religious traditions.”383

The biggest established Christian group is the Vietnamese Catholic Church. Catholics in Vietnam particularly receive relative better treatment and are content with the status quo in general because of their significant presence in the country since the seventeenth century. Catholicism is now the second largest religion in Vietnam.384 Observers also have found that the religious policy toward Catholic Church is greatly influenced not by its local conditions but by international relations, especially its relationship to China. For example, many suspect that the decision to refuse Pope John Paul II’s visit in 2004 was because China has not resolved its sovereign dispute with the

383 Wells-Dang, 2007: 441.

However, the Vietnamese Communist Party does not penetrate and contain churches as thoroughly as its Chinese counterpart does. Disobedience is common even in the high leadership of registered churches. Their relative autonomy provides the social space necessary for the spiral model to emerge. For example, Father Nguyen Van Ly, leader of a registered Catholic church, wrote to a U.S. government official, European Union officials, and international media about religious freedom violations, which resulted in a 15-year prison sentence. Rev. Phung Quang Huyen and Rev. Au Quang Vinh, president and general secretary of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, wrote open letters to the Vietnamese Prime Minister, foreign governments, and the media on behalf of Hmong Christians to protest the violation of their religious freedom.\footnote{“Vietnamese Churches Boldly Standing Up to Abuses,” Compass Direct, November 2005. \texttt{<http://www.christianity.com/print/1364258/>} (Accessed May 3, 2013).}

In addition, different from the environment in China, international NGOs can go into local communities and gather information without much interference. For example, an investigation team of Human Rights Watch went into the Highlands, interviewed one hundred victims, and published a comprehensive report in 2002.\footnote{“Repression of Montagnards: Conflict Over Land and Religion in Vietnam’s Central Highlands.” Human Rights Watch 2002; cited in Lewis 2004: 6.} The pictures of armed soldiers and police breaking up Christian prayers and burning churches became powerful “shaming and naming” weapons for the international advocacy network.
The religious policy and practice of Vietnam show very similar patterns to those of China with distinct features related to international power status and domestic ethnic lines. Repression of Christian minorities reveals the same corporatist and anti-imperialist overtones that dominate the national politics since revolution. Yet the weak international status of Vietnam gives the majority of Christians more advantage to confront authorities because foreign advocates can enter and they can gather international pressure more effectively. As I observed in China, the division between registered and underground congregations is critical, although in Vietnam the line is complicated by ethnic and geographic differences. Freedom of religion is mostly violated in minority regions. Yet registered churches and temples in urban regions still become vital sources of freedom activism that constantly express support for victims of religious repression and provide activists bases for broader social agenda.

**6.4 Conclusion: Quiet Confrontation and Unspoken Progress**

In sum, there have been two lines of development in the past 60 years in China: religious freedom discourse based on the *Three-Self Patriotic Movement* and transnational collaboration in terms of the treatment of underground missions. Chinese religious freedom policy is based on the core agenda of protecting the freedom of government-sanctioned groups and oppressing unsanctioned groups. The legal status of local groups has become the key standard for local enforcement agencies to address international engagement. Consequently, accepting foreign donations and services becomes a battleground between the state and churches, a place of quite confrontations
resulted from the biased religious freedom policy. When all local participants, both registered and unregistered, can recognize the benefits of evading this restriction and decide to work together, the chance of advancing their freedom become higher.

Chinese society has changed dramatically in the past 30 years, even though the central authority is largely unchanged. Protestant Christians as well as other religious groups have become vital social forces that cannot be easily ignored. The CCP refuses to recognize unregistered congregations and follows old practices to repress their growth. This strategy is ineffective, because the freedom offered by registration is limited, and the price of violent crackdowns becomes higher each day. Especially for clergy in registered groups, the existing religious freedom policy is unfair, because they cannot accept foreign aid and service, while unregistered churches are almost always “free” to do so. Therefore, they quietly accept foreign donations and services and openly violate the state policy, while local officials are fully aware of this development. This increasing disobedience from registered churches and the bold violation from unregistered congregations are two major sources of growing transnational Protestant activism.

Because of the increasing incidents of disobedience without the state’s direct interference in the past decade, it is reasonable to argue that the government shows great tolerance to the growing religious engagement and activism, although this tolerance varies significantly across groups and locations. Overall, Dahl’s thesis of opposition shows insight about this variation: before 1979, there was little incentive for the regime to tolerate any potential opposition since the cost of repression was close to zero due to total submission and the weak, dependent, and divided features of Christian enterprises.
After 1979, when Protestant activism was no longer trivial and discredited by the anti-imperialist discourse, sponsored and inspired by international engagement, tolerance on the government side is forced to appear.

However, power or structural thesis cannot explain the variation of their success in different locations well. Repression sometimes happens in the locations with strongest Protestant congregations, while progress is made possible in places with few Christians. Strategic choices of advocate groups are critical to explain the variation. Departing from conventional criticism made by human rights lawyers and religious freedom activists, this dissertation shows that the major predicament of religious freedom is not the government’s failure to meet its constitutional duties. On the contrary, the Chinese Communist Party takes the Constitution and its legal promises seriously, and frontline officials especially take them to heart; enforcement of the law contaminated by anti-imperialist discourse hurts activists and limits international engagement. The Constitution was created by the Chinese Communist Party with no opposition – many administrative decrees and regulations were made to reflect and strengthen the ideological and political viewpoints of the discourse. The rigid interpretation and despotic political structure means that officials cannot deviate far from the Constitution and key policy documents: religious freedom as people’s right to be free from religion has been fully institutionalized and created confrontations between the state and believers.

Nevertheless, fully executing these decrees and regulations is virtually impossible under the current circumstances. Unregistered congregations have become three times larger than registered churches. Frontline officials must be flexible and selective in
enforcing regulations and registrations. Therefore, progress can occur more easily when activists confront frontline officials by using the established legal language (e.g. religious freedom in Chinese Constitution and *Three-Self* doctrine) and satisfying the minimum legal requirements (registered or facilitate with registered organizations).

These confrontations between Protestants and the state, in private and in public, deserve attention. The center of the struggle is the fight to gain more space for independent social organizations rejected by the Party’s old habit of anti-imperialism. Social organizations in China all face tough restrictions for a similar reason: outside engagement is defined as threatening by the state; therefore, officials often act hostile to carry out these tasks. Cases of international religious activism shed light on how the transformation of the imperialism-sensitive discourse can become possible and sometimes useful for protecting advocacy. The confrontations between the old and new interpretations of religious discourse also provide insights into why Protestant churches have become one of the important social forces. The future of this form of religious international activism deserves further attention from students of human rights, international engagement, and transnational advocacy.

Looking Forward

The complex relations between local churches, foreign advocacy groups, and the government represent a challenge to social science research. The challenge reminds us of two fundamental questions about studying transnational religious activism. First, is the problem really about religion (i.e., cultural rights), or is it a part of a broader agenda of
concerning political reform (civil and political rights)? Religious freedom, conventionally defined as the freedom of expressing one’s culturally based values, is quite inadequate to capture the situation in a post-colonial and pre-democratic society. In China, ordinary citizens indeed have the freedom of choosing and expressing their preferred faith; no one forces seminar attendants or worshippers to abandon or alter their beliefs. Yet the trouble comes when they try to organize their activities outside the state-censored boundaries: in my observed case in Province B, the Administration of Religious Affairs granted campus, or in the Shouwang Church case, their own homes.\(^\text{388}\) It seems that their freedom to associate and their ability to collaborate as a social group are violated, not their religious beliefs. As a government official has said, “It is not about the money or the office space; it is a matter of if the church is willing to fully cooperate with the leadership of government.”\(^\text{389}\) It is unmistakable that the issue of religious freedom in China is an overlooked political issue, and deserves interdisciplinary studies beyond the angle of religion.

The second question is related to the tacit legacy of anti-colonialism. The government officially prohibits any kind of transnational collaboration and has denounced Christianity as “\textit{a foreign religion coming to China on cannon balls}.”\(^\text{390}\) This anti-colonialist doctrine is the cornerstone of control over Christian groups. Although most of Chinese society today has been opened up through technological innovation,

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\(^{388}\) In the past two years alone, there have been at least six incidents of outdoor worship in this country, while public protest remains politically sensitive and strictly forbidden.

\(^{389}\) Interview No. 120.

\(^{390}\) Words from Ye, Xiao Wen, the former Administrator of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, the top Chinese religious affairs official, in an interview by PBS. “Canon ball” implies that Christianity is supported and propagated by Western imperial powers.
Many Chinese Protestant congregations have given in to this anti-colonial system: registered congregations under the TSPM occupy an estimated one-half to one-third of the total Protestant population, but they receive harsh criticism from Christian communities worldwide.\footnote{This political absorption creates two contradictory but both unrealistic assessments: Chinese Protestants are “free” as long as they are working under the legal framework, or they are harshly oppressed by "traitors" in registered groups for putting the Party’s interests before everything else.} While I do not ignore the abuses, grievances and injustice happened in the history, the positive impacts of these registered groups are overlooked and demand careful scrutiny. Having a great number of registered congregations is a constraint but also an opportunity for Chinese Christians. I find that the development of Protestant advocacy groups in China accentuates the human rights dilemma highlighted by critics such as Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui (2007): benign outside-in assistance can fail to matter where needed most.\footnote{In places where foreign assistance is easy to obtain and underground churches are greatly benefited by it, the level of overall repression is actually higher. In places where foreign assistance is limited and registered churches are dominant, religious}
freedom is more respected because a foreign-local alliance could shelter the activities more easily. The key empirical contribution of this project is to demonstrate that Protestant groups can advance their freedoms of association and organization through collaboration with open-minded local officials and well-respected leaders of registered churches, the “selling-out” but willing-to-share-their-privileges people. This uneasy alliance resists the interference from above, eases the unhealthy competition between local congregations, and fosters an environment for unregistered and registered alike to thrive. Most important of all, this collaboration is more likely to succeed with more equalitarian, self-constraint, and less biased foreign advocacy groups. They have to aid the otherwise feeble registered groups with resources and therefore prevent foreign assistance becoming the excuse for a central government crackdown.

In short, the kernel of this alternative approach to the rights of association is to work from the inside of the repressive political institutions: the regime’s weakest spot is in its newly absorbed component, the registered churches. Literature of transnational activism has put little attention on religious rights groups, foreign and domestic, which have fought for similar principles for decades, even when their motivations vary. Western observers especially hold a detested attitude toward the state-censored groups and have blind favor toward the undergrounds, while the reality is far more complex than “Caesar vs. God.” Understanding how the Chinese government deals with religious advocacy groups presents a new idea of advancing human rights in similar political settings. It may be an alternative solution to the human rights dilemma. After all, when the fire is starting from one’s own kitchen, it is harder to point a finger at one’s neighbors.
How far can this quiet, from-the-bottom, and from-the-inside activism go? Is this form of activism unique to Chinese transnational activism, or is it just a temporary phase due to difficult conditions? More studies are needed but my theory shows its potential to understand the success and failure of transnational religious activism in a post-colonial society in China (and maybe Vietnam): for both Protestants and Catholics, pointing figures at foreign conspiracy is an effective weapon for the government to quiet these dissidents. Effective transnational religious activism can only be achieved when participants are aware of this unique challenge and skillfully alliance with groups already have the legitimacy to overcome legal and anti-colonial challenges.
References


