
HUMAN RIGHTS INTERVENTIONS
Resistance Under Communist China
Religious Protesters, Advocates and Opportunists
RAY WANG
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Human Rights Interventions

The traditional human rights frame creates a paradigm by which the duty bearer's (state) and rights holder's (civil society organizations) interests collide over the limits of enjoyment and enforcement. The series departs from the paradigm by centering peripheral yet powerful actors that agitate for intervention and influence in the (re)shaping of rights discourse in the midst of grave insecurities. The series privileges a call and response between theoretical inquiry and empirical investigation as contributors critically assess human rights interventions mediated by spatial, temporal, geopolitical and other dimensions. An interdisciplinary dialogue is key as the editors encourage multiple approaches such as law and society, political economy, historiography, legal ethnography, feminist security studies, and multi-media.

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Ray Wang
Graduate Institute of East Asian Studies
National Chengchi University
Taipei City, Taiwan

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Preface

Can people from outside help locals challenge existing laws and practices in a hostile territory? This book tries to answer this question by looking at a group of people who are collaborating across borders to expand the space of challenging unjust laws and practices that restrain their constitutional rights. The case of religion in China, mainly Christianity and a few comparisons with other religions, was chosen here because China provides one of the hardest challenges to our existing methods of transnational activism: a long-lasting, nuclear-armed, economically prosperous, culturally anti-West, ideologically atheist, and technologically advanced authoritarian regime. Thus some seemingly impossible progress there deserves our full attention.

People have seen how effectively the Chinese Communist Party has cracked down on transnational religious activist campaigns sponsored by Falun Gong, the exiled Tibetan government, and the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, various religious advocacy groups from Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United States, and elsewhere enter China each year to fund new religious sites, provide charity services, and promote evangelism, despite the fact that the Party has stated that no Chinese religious facility is allowed to receive any form of foreign support. In particular, the exceptional success of some Buddhist, Taoist, and Protestant networks in certain parts of China was highly unexpected. Why is one group in one city "free" to promote its agenda and deliver forbidden empowerment, while the same group cannot conduct such activities in another geographically, economically, and, most importantly, politically similar location? How has

transnational religious activism even survived in such a harsh authoritarian environment as China?

The question becomes even more intriguing now, when Chinese Communist Party leader Xi Jinping has been cracking down on activists and critics in the media, the Internet, and civil society in the past four years and removed term limits in February 2018. Under his direction, a revised version of the Religious Affairs Regulations came into force on February 1, 2018, enforcing even tighter control of religious propagation, exchanges, and cross-border collaboration. I believe that understanding the uneasy 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, overemphasizing conventional protesting, which is always repressed by this type of regime. My research suggests that activists and advocates in strong authoritarian environments need to win the cooperation of "opportunist groups," the legally registered social entities, in order to establish a space to advocate for social change. This is because political leaders are suspicious of both change and the organizations promoting it, and countries like China have adopted policies to sponsor certain non-advocacy social organizations to monitor and compete with others.

The argument animating this book is based on an approach centered on case studies. I conducted more than 150 interviews and personal observations over five years. I witnessed directly how activists dealt with government repression, organized silent disobedience, and managed complicated relations with foreign advocates. The fieldwork includes participant observations in major cities, which provided critical details for tracing the causal mechanisms of successful activism. The earlier findings of this project regarding Protestant activism were written in a journal article published by the *Journal of Scientific Studies of Religion* in January 2018. With updated Catholic, Taoist, and Buddhist cases, the latest statistics, and comparison between China and Vietnam, this book provides firsthand information and the most comprehensive understandings of the issue for readers.

Knowing what activists should and should not do is critical to both practitioners and scholars. Foreign advocacy groups and their sponsors need to understand the delicate competition between legally registered groups and the "underground" groups created by China's policies. When foreigners only help underground social organizations—i.e., the "house church" congregations in this context—such one-sided empowerment

triggers greater repression, because not only does the aid violate ruling Party policy, the strategy also provokes government-sponsored elites to align with the Party and, in many cases, to call on the police to arrest their fellow Christians. In contrast, when foreigners choose to fund legal groups (e.g., registered Protestant churches), this choice creates both an incentive for the two kinds of churches to work together and a policy dilemma for the Party, since it still needs the legal churches and cannot easily crush them. Therefore, progress may occur in places where participants take such delicate competition and policy dilemmas into consideration and use them to their advantage.

Current academic attention to such topics is growing but still limited. There are many books on the market that talk about international activism fighting for human rights, including religious freedom; there is an even larger quantity of religious studies publications discussing various faiths and their vision of human rights. Exciting new books come out each year about religions in China, such as Carsten T. Vala's *The Politics of Protestant Churches and the Party-State in China* (2017) and Yang Fenggang's *Atlas of Religion in China: Social and Geographical Contexts* (2018). However, there is a vacuum in the middle pertaining to the subject of transnational religious activism; in addition, there is almost no quality, book-length study on the political aspects of transnational religious activism, with a few exceptions such as Clifford Bob's *Global Right Wing* (2012).

This book will fill that vacuum and bridge the unhealthy gap between the comparative politics and international relations (IR) landscapes. Unexpected cases and counterintuitive stories often become popular references in area study/comparative politics classrooms, but are relatively unknown to IR readers. Two examples are Lily Tsai's book on how local "solidarity groups" (2007) provided accountability without democracy, and Andrew Mertha's book on "water warriors" (2008), who fought for environmental protection without organized activism. Jessica Teets' *Civil Society under Authoritarianism* (2014) and Chen Xi's *Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism in China* (2011) are important recent works on Chinese social activism and cover some domestic aspects of my work, but their studies skip or merely skim the surface of the booming religious and transnational scenes and, therefore, are disconnected from the theoretic dialogue of global activism.

Conceptually, Sabrina Zajak's *Transnational Activism, Global Labor Governance, and China* (2017) and Stephen Noakes' *The Advocacy Trap: Transnational Activism and State Power in China* (2018) are closest to

this work and present the newest accounts of transnational activism in China, although religion is not their focus. Noakes talks about Falun Gong and the Tibetan independence movement, but he emphasizes their interaction with the Chinese state and the West, and he believes that both transnational religious advocacy networks have failed. Comparatists tend to focus on some features of national/international politics and do not address the complicated domestic dynamics among social actors, such as registered, unregistered, and foreign advocacy groups, which my research has shown are essential to the success of transnational Protestant, Buddhist, and Taoist activism in China.

IR students who read Thomas Risse, Kathryn Sikkink, and Stephen C. Ropp's influential works *The Power of Human Rights* (1999) and *The Persistent Power of Human Rights* (2013) will also benefit from this book. Their greatest challenge will be from "the endtimes of human rights" (Hopgood, 2013) or "authoritarian resilience" (Nathan, 2003) scholarship, whose popularity is growing through the rise of Russian, Chinese, and other non-liberal political worldviews in the past decade. From my perspective, the deteriorated human rights conditions in these societies are not equivalent to the "end" of the human rights paradigm or the "resilience" of their repressive methods. The difficulties and challenges in front of us call for a new look at our paradigm, especially in terms of how we can go beyond a movement-centered view of activism, where the spotlight is only shed on glamorous foreign advocacy groups and high-profile activists playing a "David vs. Goliath" show.

The importance of religious cases rests on the fact that the same political repression is upon secular civil society groups as well. Today authoritarian leaders do not just arrest activists, journalists, and lawyers who criticize their behavior and policies; they train, fund, and foster their own supply of activists, journalists, and lawyers, whom I term "opportunists," to compete with previous opponents and become "dangerous imposters," as famous human rights critic Moisés Naím called them. Nonetheless, my cases reveal a counterintuitive feature of these "imposters," opposite to the conventional "black vs. white" view within civil society advocacy. Just like my cases of sanctioned Protestant churches, these government-sponsored groups and individuals are more than proxies of the regime. My work shows that there are ways to minimize their harm and facilitate them for the better good. These are the dark places that the current human rights paradigm calls "tactical concessions" (Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999), but the actual processes of how dictators and perpetrators are able

to rally supporters and resist the real concession remain understudied and underspecified. Through my case work on Chinese religious activism, more light will be shed upon those dark places.

This book also contributes to the scholarly literature on Chinese state–religion relations (Ashiwa & Wank, 2009; Kindopp, 2004; Marsh, 2011; Vala, 2012; Vala & O'Brien, 2007; Wright & Zimmerman-Liu, 2013, 2015; Yang, 2006, 2008) by bringing overlooked transnationalism back into the discussion: there is wide recognition of an unspoken consensus of cosmopolitanism among Protestant activists—the respect, desire, and pursuit of broader individual freedoms. People in this vast transnational network of religious activism act like "rooted cosmopolitans," to use the term employed by Mitchell Cohen and Sydney Tarrow; they began as ordinary participants such as businesspeople, investors, English teachers, charity workers, or just plain tourists, but the deep connection, sympathy, and understanding of the people they serve transform them into mobilizers, entrepreneurs, and "reformers," and their plural loyalties and resources create valuable opportunities for change. Those who stay in China have to cover up their religious and foreign identities. They blend into regular business and social transactions and can hardly be singled out and criticized by anti-imperial and anti-religious discourse, because they keep a low profile and aid their cause when the opportunity arises.

Nonetheless, while informality or some level of secrecy is necessary, it is not the real mechanism for their survival and possible success, because the repressive regime almost always finds out what is going on. The literature used to focus on large, secular international Christian groups such as The Salvation Army or World Vision International working on developmental projects, but the rule-abiding nature of these groups prevents them from seeking alternatives and weakens their ability to go beyond permitted roles. The power of transnational religious advocacy is its ability to encourage an advanced form of "everyday resistance," activists and believers working together to defy unjust regulations and restrictions on their everyday practices such as presenting religious symbols, keeping unregistered congregations going, harboring foreign missionaries, and developing underground cross-border networks and organizations. By focusing on groups working directly on the most common and major law-violating behavior in China—cross-border mission-related activities—two mechanisms, backdoor listing and minority–majority alliance, have been shown to contribute to a more successful result.

Overall, the evidence has demonstrated that when activists choose the right transnational strategies and local alliances, a powerless social group can expand its freedom and social space to engage in a broader social agenda, even under strict authoritarian rule. By providing details on the reasoning, mechanisms, and cases, and also elaborating on comparisons between religions, cities, and China and Vietnam, I hope that my readers can see there is hope in advancing not just religious freedom, but also other dimensions of human rights in similar authoritarian contexts—something much needed in these times.

Taipei City, Taiwan Ray Wang

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

On a rainy afternoon, I met Mr. Chen Yuan-Zhang (pseudonym) in a rural town of Sichuan Province.[1] I was attending a wedding officiated by a foreign missionary, organized by an underground congregation, and supported by registered churches from other Chinese provinces. It was a very unusual mix of people in a chaotic situation due to the weather and the sensitivity of the gathering, especially when I realized that the bride and groom had first to go to a registered church for a "pretend" marriage ceremony and then return to participate in the "real" ceremony. Mr. Chen was introduced by his family as a local charity activist. Chen became well known in the circle of aid workers after the 2008 earthquakes, because his unique background distinguished him from other activists. He was a Communist Party member and a well-respected local official in the financial sector. People saw him as the "go-to" guy for advice on how best to survive in this chaotic and repressive environment.

After two visits and a long interview, I learned a story of activism that would be repeated by others throughout my fieldwork in China. The story departs from the typical patterns and theories of success in transnational activist networks that are prominent in mainstream Western scholarly literature. Mr. Chen was baptized as a Protestant Christian after returning from a business trip to the United States, and his grassroots organization shelters underground religious activity. He talked about human rights and activism in a pragmatic way. "You have to fight for rights carefully and never cross the 'red line' of the Party," he said. Mr. Chen was frustrated

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with my questions regarding progress in 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 win protection by passing new laws that are designed to control us." I mentioned the campaigns of overseas human rights groups that aim to help Chinese activists. "I understand their concerns," he insisted, "but their involvement would only complicate things here" (Interview No. 44).

The story of transnational activism being told here differs from those of prominent human rights and transnational activism paradigms, which describe local activists as either passively empowered by outside advocates or aggressively "marketing" their grievances to Western media and organizations for their intervention (Bob, 2005). Clifford Bob defines transnational activism as "sustained and substantial transfers of money, materiel, and knowledge by a foreign non-governmental organization (NGO) or NGO network to a challenger, as well as provision of publicity, advocacy, and lobbying on its behalf." In contrast to this view, I saw an alternative approach to transnational activism that involves innovative local "challengers" helping to *market their foreign NGO sponsors to people in power*. Local activists help this fragile advocacy network by providing information and connections, while brokering acquiescence from pragmatic local officials. In return, the advocacy network provides funding and services. Most importantly, the advocacy network provides globally recognized knowledge and norms, which make the local leaders allied with them seem legitimate to their own constituency. Several months after the interview, Mr. Chen's charity organization obtained official approval and was registered, despite the fact that he and his followers had clashed with riot police and religious officials many times. His low profile and "respect-the-red line" strategy had paid off.

The work of Chen Yuan-Zhang and other activists and organizations examined in this project sheds light on the unique conundrum that activists confront in an authoritarian state. Transnational networks provide assistance to local activists, but their appearance and efforts also increase the risk of local collaborators becoming victims of political repression. This dilemma is particularly exacerbated in places like China, where foreign intervention is readily stigmatized for various ideological and political reasons. In many cases, it is the activists who have affiliated themselves with political institutions who know best. The red line Chen referred to typically includes a "No Foreigners Allowed" rule.[2] Although Mr. Chen is well aware of the Party's opinion about foreign intervention, his organization openly receives

donations from overseas charity organizations. He knows foreign missionaries are forbidden to work in China, yet he maintains contact with them and assists them in their work. This red line, therefore, seems to vary from case to case, but it is clear for Mr. Chen that there are ways to work around it without sacrificing the key principles of religious freedom. He is friendly with the establishment, but disobeys its leadership and evades the rules when he considers that his principles and beliefs may be at risk. Although his facilities have been surrounded and attacked by riot police a couple of times, he would never call attention to this repression by alerting the foreign media or rights advocates. Individuals like Mr. Chen are part of a locally based, transnational activism that practices deliberate but not confrontational disobedience in response to state-sponsored repression of religious and other social freedoms.

The critical difference distinguishing the approach of activists like Mr. Chen from that outlined in accounts by scholars is that Chinese "challengers" are facing a geopolitically strong, repressive, and resolute state, and this environment demands an alternative advocacy strategy. The champions of human rights advocacy theory, Keck and Sikkink (1998), admit that the conventional human rights method does not work against strong violators like China, because it has no vulnerability that can be leveraged by activists. Yet international human rights watch groups continue to exert pressure on the Chinese government, despite the fact that their actions have very little positive effect. In some cases, people have been subjected to detention and monitoring due to the constant intervention and questioning of foreign groups. One famous example is the second arrest of political dissident Wei Jingsheng in April 1994. It is widely believed that his arrest was related to the growing clamor from human rights critics in the United States.[3]

For economic development, dictators need the money, materiel, and knowledge provided by foreign social entities such as NGOs or international NGO (INGO) networks. However, activists in strong authoritarian states are often aware that publicity, advocacy, and the lobbying efforts of foreigners can do tremendous damage to their cause. This unwanted publicity and pressure can undermine the work of activists, because the repressive state can and will punish locals for bringing outside criticism. Furthermore, the uninvited criticism can alienate their own constituencies, because years of patriotic and anti-imperialist education have made people suspicious of the motives of foreign interventionists. However, as shown by religious groups discussed in this book, the social space for a

different kind of activism—one that is more locally based and focuses on behind-the-scenes negotiation rather than direct confrontation, and favors a slower, yet perhaps more fruitful activism—is something for which both foreigners and locals can fight. Local activists can provide services to transnational networks, and they can lobby, advocate, and win the trust of newcomers to the local community. A good understanding of this alternative form of transnational activism brings insights to the existing literature of political opposition and secular activism.

1.1 Argument in Brief: Marketing Activism under Authoritarianism

Not all illegal Christian churches or uninvited missionaries are repressed in China, and some improve their level of freedom despite past grievances with the government. What factors contribute to this variation in the responses of an authoritarian state to transnational religious activism? This project responds to this question via the stories of those like Chen Yuan-Zhang and other Chinese and overseas activists who work for religious freedom. Transnational activists have been involved in many political transformations in former socialist nations (Leitzel, 2003) and military juntas in Latin America (Risse-Kappen, Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999), but scholars often consider transnational activism in strong authoritarian environments like China's to be ineffective due to its nuclear power status, strong economic performance, non-liberal culture, isolation from international society, and/or "authoritarian resilience" (Dickson, 2003, 2007; Nathan, 2003; Shambaugh, 2008; Wright, 2010; Yang, 2004). Transnational activism is not very effective on issues that do not involve bodily harm to individuals and equal opportunity of legal rights (Keck & Sikkink, 1998); its effectiveness is greatly limited by the threat it poses to national cohesion and integrity and to societal openness to outside criticism (Risse-Kappen et al., 1999). In this work, I present evidence to support a different, more optimistic assessment of transnational activism in the context of a strong authoritarian state. I argue that *by building a local network that includes government-sponsored social groups, transnational activists can push a strong authoritarian regime to incorporate basic freedoms and thereby build a space for their activism, even if the society is closed to outside criticism and the state ridicules such advocacy with anti-imperialist accusations.*

Chinese authoritarianism provides a strong test of this argument, because it has been referred to as a glass ceiling with respect to what transnational activists can accomplish (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Charles Tilly cites China and Iran as examples of "high-capacity undemocratic regimes" because of their strong institutions for monitoring dissidents and their use of violence against them, which leave very small civic spaces for the expression of contention (Tilly, 2003, p. 47). Understanding how some transnational religious activists have won concessions from Chinese officials and toleration toward their obvious rule-breaking can shed light on how other activists can broaden the 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 are high (Dahl, 1971). This work puts Dahl's logic to the test in a strong nondemocratic setting. Promoting public opposition or organized activism is possible in this environment, argues this theory, when disobedience to an official rule occurs in such a way that activists can reshape the cost–benefit calculation of the parties involved and make self-restraint a better option for officials than repression. In other words, a sustainable network of opposition is possible even in an authoritarian state when activists can successfully increase the benefit of toleration or the costs of crackdown.

This work 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 that the strengthening of activism depends on rousing the spirit, awareness, and solidarity of opposition through direct confrontation with repressive regimes, the explanations provided here focus on how transnational religious activists can build a transnational network of disobedience that can survive in an environment where there is no visible political opposition available with which activists can ally or consolidate, 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 ensure that the operation of a network for transferring money, materiel, and knowledge in and out of the country is basically tolerated and is not crushed before it can develop.

Two strategies can contribute to this result. The first involves seeking collaboration with, or at least recognition from, a government-sponsored social group. The second is to form an alliance with the strongest social

group in a target location to gain access to local officials. The most effective weapon for these activists in defending their transnational network is not lawsuits, street protests, media exposure, or the "naming and shaming" approaches commonly used by Western social activists and NGOs (Lake & Wong, 2007). These strategies have proved to be unrealistic when basic freedoms of expression, movement, and association are extremely limited (Cai, 2010).

The alternative strategy utilized by Chinese religious activists is to work from *within* the system, and to know who is able and willing to recognize the network's basic freedom of association when it is vulnerable, because no activism can survive if the authoritarian regime intends to stop the flow of information, funding, and personnel. Therefore, their success in promoting activism depends on the practitioners building strategic alliances in two key strategic relationships: (1) between foreign advocacy groups and local officials; and (2) between two local communities, registered and unregistered religious groups.

In the first relationship, this alternative perspective sees transnational activism as a process of well-connected local activists helping outsiders to adapt and survive in a harsh authoritarian environment. This analysis contrasts not only with the "boomerang" pattern articulated by Keck and Sikkink, but also with Clifford Bob's characterization of transnational activism as featuring a dynamic in which needy locals compete with each other for attention and funding from wealthy foreign NGOs (Bob, 2005). Locals are selective in seeking foreign donors, because only a few such donors have the opportunity to win the acquiescence of local officials. For local activists to "market" a foreign-sponsored program, an aid worker, or a missionary to a domestic constituency, the foreign group behind the proposal must present itself as being cooperative with the local officials who are directly responsible for the decision to use repressive force. Local officials often have a long-standing hostility and prejudice toward foreigners of certain national and denominational backgrounds, because people with these backgrounds have been portrayed as "helpers of imperialism" in patriotic education.

Although the official policy of the Communist Party of China (CCP) claims impartiality toward all religions and sects, its preferences are evident. The backgrounds of some foreign groups, such as Catholic charities or missionary groups sent by the Vatican, will be rejected outright in the current political atmosphere due to the diplomatic feud between Beijing and the Vatican with respect to church leadership. For example, textbooks

like *The Army's Reader of Ethnic and Religious Knowledge* (部隊民族宗教知識讀本) tells its readers that Chinese Catholics began an "anti-imperial movement whose purpose is to transform Catholicism in China from a tool of imperial invasion to an independent enterprise of Chinese Catholics" (People's Relations Office, 2004). Protestants, especially American Protestant denominations like the Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist Churches, are not considered to be as politically sensitive as the Presbyterian Church.

However, this attitude is not necessarily a given, because there is no document from the CCP signifying its preferences with respect to foreign religious sects or denominations. Rather, it is officials' personal interpretation of dogmatic policy guidelines that have evolved after years of career experience.[4] Although the Chinese political system is good at mass political re-education and indoctrination programs, which are designed to ensure that everyone understands and supports the dogmatic doctrines of the Party (Solomon, 1971), a great policy space still exists within this dogmatic party-state system, because dominant doctrines, from Mao's "united front work" (統一戰線) to Deng's "reform and opening-up," demand flexible interpretation of friend and foe in order to maximize the Party's interests under varying socio-eco-political considerations (Groot, 2004). The fundamental question for all foreign advocates is: Can they comprehend those complex considerations and choose the right strategy to maximize their own likelihood of success?

Indeed, there are hardline officials who are always hostile toward foreigners, especially those who have had a previous career in the military or security services and been reassigned to their positions from outside the administrative ranking system. However, there are officials who have been locally promoted and have remained in the administrative system throughout their careers. My fieldwork suggests that locally promoted officials are more likely to be approachable and more open to certain proposals regarding change. They do not resemble the promotion-minded officials transferred from other places, who are extra cautious about taking risks. Locally promoted officials also stay in their hometowns long enough to know who might oppose or support these proposals; this local knowledge is critical when proposals are politically sensitive.

Therefore, to build a transnational activist network, local activists have provided alternative information to these pragmatic officials and tried 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.[5] The track record of the foreign group's operation in other nations may also be part of the evaluation. For example, as already noted, the label "Presbyterian Church" is very sensitive for many Chinese officials, because the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) was deeply involved in anti-authoritarian and independence movements from the 1970s to 1990s (Lin, 1999; Rubinstein, 1998, 2006). Frontline officials know very little about any nuances among individual Presbyterian missionaries, the PCT, and global Presbyterian churches. For their own career securities, officials have a strong incentive either to block funding and personnel sponsored by all Presbyterians, or simply to evict all missionaries from Taiwan.[6]

However, many individual Presbyterian missionaries continue to work in China, and missionaries from Taiwan along with missionary groups from other countries have become the backbone of transnational Protestant activism.[7] Their ongoing work in China shows that establishing spaces for religious freedom is possible, despite repressive official attitudes and policies. Activists cannot choose who will be in charge of civil and religious affairs, but they can establish tacit alliances with local establishments and then pragmatic officials. I have witnessed activists holding meetings in a location 10 hours' drive from their hometown because "it is safer in that place" due to the protection given by local religious establishments.[8]

1.2 Religious Protesters, Advocates, and Opportunists

One of the key sources of "help" activists might receive is via the latent relationship between two kinds of local groups: one that has received sponsorship and legal recognition from the regime (referred to here as "opportunists"), and the other that is independent but "illegal," in that it operates without official permission (referred to here as "protestors"). People in power choose an existing social group to support or establish a new one to expand the social base, promote a certain political agenda, and influence or control a target community. These groups could go their separate ways, but when external advocates become involved, with either opportunists or protesters, the situation becomes complicated.

Even with their government sponsorship, opportunists cannot directly affect the policies of government officials since they are not true interest groups, as described by the theory of corporatism (Wiarda, 1997). Instead, their influence in the target religious community, the largely "untamed,"

uncontrolled population (wherein may be the protestors), may profoundly affect how officials respond to them. Since the very reason for granting sponsorship is to influence and manage an untamed religious population, an increase in the number of independent protestor groups represents a serious problem to the sponsored opportunists and therefore the regime. It is reasonable, then, to expect that the regime would try to, or be invited to, repress these potential protestors to maintain the status of the opportunists. The regime would also be more likely to repress the foreign supporter of these protestors to help the opportunists. In other words, we should expect higher levels of repression when the relative number of opportunists is smaller than the number of protestors, and when the protestors receive more foreign support than the opportunists. Following the same logic, we can expect that officials may be more willing to show tolerance when opportunist groups develop well and even obtain foreign support on their own. Evidence of these situations is presented in the cases discussed in Chaps. 5, 6, and 7.

Many authoritarian and post-authoritarian societies experience this kind of latent competition between sponsored and non-sponsored social groups related to various issues. In the 1980s, a political rivalry developed between Tunisia's Tunisian Human Rights League (Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme or LTDH), the internationally well-respected human rights organization and key representative of the opposition movement, and the Association for the Defence of Human Rights and Public Liberties (ADDHLP), the association founded by President Ben Ali to counterbalance the growing influence of the LTDH (Gränzer, 1999, p. 127). In post-Soviet Russia, the All-Russian National Scouting Organization (ARNSO) returned from its exile of the 1920s, supported by the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) from the West, and competed with the Nashi—a nationalist, pro-Putin youth organization—to fill the void left by the 1990s dismantling of the Soviet Pioneers. In post-reform China, there is ongoing cooperation and competition between government-sponsored associations and independent NGOs in almost every issue area. For example, there are the Friends of Nature (FON), the first and the biggest green NGO in China, which has attracted many foreign donors, and the All-China Environment Federation (ACEF), a "non-governmental" association established by the Chinese government that claims to represent "all" Chinese environmental NGOs.

Critics from the West often view these government-sponsored groups with skepticism and have created a special term to describe them:

GONGOs—that is, government-organized non-governmental organizations. Moisés Naím, the director of *Foreign Affairs* and former director of the National Endowment of Democracy (NED), warns that these "dangerous impostors" threaten NGO enterprise (Naim, 2007). Nevertheless, GONGOs are important players in the government's attitude toward foreign NGOs for two reasons. First, the acceptance of or vouching for a foreign connection by a GONGO is seen as a heuristic, and signals that the government need not concern itself with outside intervention and criticism. Second, non-cooperation and rejection by a GONGO may spoil any chances for transnational collaboration, and they may report foreign NGOs and their local collaborators to the authorities. Eventually, in this case, officials will demand that foreigners choose between leaving the country and transferring their resources to a GONGO. In 2008, millions of disaster victims awaited humanitarian relief after earthquakes struck China and Cyclone Nargis (a hurricane) caused devastation in Myanmar. The governments of both countries delayed relief efforts by requiring that donations and materials be processed by government-approved agencies. GONGO-like humanitarian organizations such as the Chinese and Myanmar Red Cross Societies were strongly criticized for their lack of transparency, low efficiency, and alleged corruption.[9]

Nevertheless, whether or not they are impostors, resources could not reach victims without acceptance or being vouched for by these GONGOs, which are essentially institutionalized "veto groups" in the bargaining process that occurs between international and domestic players (Mo, 1994). The difference between these authoritarian veto groups and their counterparts in democracies is that they are politically powerful because they are backed by decisive regimes rather than temporary electoral outcomes.[10] For both foreign advocates and local protestors, effectively managing their relationships with these veto groups is essential.

Distinguishing between "real" NGOs and GONGOs creates a unique challenge for foreign advocates who are trying to gain entry to and operate in an authoritarian state. Not every group from the "sending end" will consent to operate within the confines of this form of censorship that requires registration and formal permission. It is natural for a foreign organization to want to choose local partners on their own terms and to select those that clearly hold similar values. In three previous cases, TLDH, ARSO, and FON—and no other government-sponsored organizations—received funding and moral support from their transnational counterparts in the United Kingdom and the United States. Clifford Bob (2005) has

pointed out that foreign NGOs often choose 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." Religious freedom hardliners such as evangelical Protestants from the United States also tend to consider that providing aid to Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM)–affiliated churches, for example, represents a betrayal of their beliefs; they would be more willing to help unsponsored, underground congregations.[11] Since aid and services are often sent to non-sponsored protestor groups, the relationships between rival local groups can be marked by jealousy, competition, and even sabotage. When outside aid and personnel support (foreign or otherwise) flow to an underground church operation in a given city, the leader of a nearby registered church would instantly feel threatened and resent anyone affiliated with that unsanctioned connection. The pastor of the registered church described in the opening paragraph threatened newlywed couples in this manner: "You had better come to my place to get married first," he told them, "or else."

A newlywed couple from Sichuan were lay workers in an unregistered congregation outside the Sichuan area and performed unsanctioned mission work in the city. As such, holding their wedding ceremony in the registered church was seen as a necessary and "respectful" gesture to the local authorities. Almost all my interviewees in this study stated that their main troubles in recent years have not been only from the government. The "church vs. state" clash had become less of a concern from the mid-1990s and into the early 2010s, before Xi Jinping took power in 2012. Instead, many arrests and instances of harassment originated in their own communities: neighbors or landlords reporting noise or other residential disturbances, religious officials appearing and questioning them about violation of codes and registration-related issues, and harassment or reports made by registered churches against the "illegal operations" of unregistered churches such as sheltering foreign missionaries.

The threat is very real when registered organizations can claim a monopoly on certain practices assigned formally or informally by governmental agencies. This monopoly extends beyond religious affairs. For example, the Chinese government has assigned legal duties to various GONGO organizations, ranging from professional associations such as the All China Lawyers Association (ACLA) to human rights advocacy groups such as the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and the China

Society for Human Rights Studies (CSHRS).[12] The success of any activism in opposition to this monopoly is unlikely, but not impossible. Officials do not want to take full responsibility for tolerating social activism, but cracking down hard is also politically risky. Yongshun Cai (2010) studied apolitical protests and uprisings that occurred between 1979 and 2010 and found that external support, sometimes even media exposure, significantly helped the protestors to defend their rights. Activists must show resilience in their advocacy to risk-averse officials and demonstrate that repressing them will be too costly or eventually prove ineffective.[13] Borrowing Mr. Chen's words, "they have to know we will never give up." His peaceful resilience in response to riot police in the past has demonstrated his determination and the potential costs of crackdown, while never overtly humiliating the authorities. Overseas advocates cannot show this kind of resilience to the authorities; they will be deported before they have the chance to make a scene. In a strong authoritarian environment, the essence of transnational activism must be at the local level, where meaningful resistance can become possible.

Consequently, collaboration between opportunists and protestors, or at least a certain level of acquiescence from the leaders on the opportunist side, is critical for the survival of a transnational religious network. Whether the proposed aid will be shared by a majority of the community is a critical test of this collaboration, because sharing forbidden aid is a strong sign of disobedience and steps over the "No Foreigners" red line. I find that in places where foreign advocates provide aid to an unregistered protestor group, such as a Protestant house church congregation, the chances are slim of this support being shared with the local community. The key reason for this is that the leaders of registered, opportunist churches, under the administration of the TSPM and China Christian Council, often called the TSPM Church by the Protestant population, have stronger incentives to report the illegal activities of house churches because the TSPM-affiliated churches are opportunists, and often worry about the strong presence of their counterparts. In a nation where the conversion of non-believers (i.e., public propagation and evangelism) is seen as illegal by the authorities, congregations must compete with each other for believers within the Christian community. TSPM congregations are at a particular disadvantage, because their recruiting activities are bound by governmental approval. The inability to propagate their faith freely has been a key reason for congregations refusing to join the TSPM. When TSPM clergy

see unregistered congregations grow unrestrictedly and even receive funding from foreigners, hard feelings inevitably result.

Although it is never expressed overtly in official documents, the policy of "no outside-of-church propagation" is clear and well recognized by every Christian leader. The unspoken rule is that as long as propagation activities occur within government-approved facilities, which means church buildings that have existed since before 1949 or have gained approval from the religious affairs agency (one town is allowed to have just one church), then the activity is deemed acceptable. For example, I once walked with a TSPM church leader in a Southern Chinese city. He carried an unmarked, very heavy bag with a dozen bibles inside. I offered my free hands to take few of these bibles and lighten his burden, but he refused and said: "I cannot let people see you carry bibles on the street!" Carrying religious symbols, flyers, or publications in public can be interpreted to be outside-of-church propagation and subject to punishment. However, the gravity of this kind of violation varies significantly across cities and provinces.

In addition, TSPM clergy have some institutional advantages to protect themselves from the consequences of government crackdown. They may inform the authorities of ongoing collaboration even if they also benefit from the aid provided. If the police come and question them, government-certified clergy have credentials to show and strings they can pull and, therefore, they suffer relatively less than those who are unregistered when punishment is doled out. Specifically, in a city in which house churches have more members than the TSPM Church, an advocacy group that aids only a larger unsponsored group may invite severe persecution not only because of the legal church's sense of relative deprivation, but also because the authorities themselves are patrons of the registered group. On many occasions, registered groups call the police to arrest those who are participating in "illicit religious activities," whereas police officers themselves have little incentive to intervene in such small-scale transnational collaborations.[14]

In contrast, foreign advocates who have skillfully allied themselves with registered facilities have expanded their range of freedoms faster than other groups, because they do not provoke competition. Most importantly, the clergy of registered churches can help to ease the tension and suspicion of the authorities and promote official tolerance of "illicit" collaborations between locals and foreigners. The TSPM Church's collaboration 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 registered groups like TSPM congregations is a logical choice, and increases the chances that aid will be shared by both registered and unregistered congregations. Although this is rare in China, I have seen it with my own eyes.

From the foregoing discussion, we can arrive at a counterintuitive conclusion regarding transnational activism. That is, directly helping the weak and needy is not always the best strategy in a strong authoritarian environment, because the target populations are vulnerable not only to political repression, but also to the influence of social competition. Chinese Christians know this reality all too well and are therefore selective about accepting foreign "empowerment." In this book, I report 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 seem at first. In some cases, the aid of foreign donors is valued, but must not be spoken of by local participants. Foreign support is not universally welcomed by locals, because the physical presence of outsiders may draw suspicion from officials and stir discontent among rival local groups. Leaders of opportunist religious groups do not like outsiders working inside their parishes without their acquiescence; when they sense competition, they might call in the police. While protestor groups do not have this kind of institutional backup, they can publicize rivalries in overseas Christian and secular human rights communities.[15] An inexperienced foreign advocate may become trapped in such a feud and pay a 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 learn the rules" (Interview No. 2).

In all these complex interactions, it is evident that the relationship with political institutions is the most critical factor in any effort to limit state-sponsored repression. Although Christians cannot join the CCP, many opportunist leaders have become members of various levels of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the political participation platform under the supervision of the United Front Department of the CCP. Some "open" church leaders (not registered but not opposed to registering under the TSPM) have been appointed, or are in the process of being recruited into local Christian associations or related organizations. An open-church leader once showed me the dozens of "titles" he has printed on his business card. He said all the titles provide him with noth-

ing but the obligation to attend many meetings with officials and other church leaders (Interview No. 8). The CPPCC or its associated positions give church leaders a channel for understanding the current policy of the Party and the opportunities available to exploit it.

In Mr. Chen's case, his relationship to the establishment is clearly more valuable to him than his connection to outside advocates, although the latter represent his major source of funding. The difference has to do with his awareness of the risks he takes in collaborating with foreigners. For activists in a strong authoritarian state, challenging repressive practices means risking their lives. This risk is much higher for local participants than foreign advocates (Bob, 2005, p. 4). 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 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? In my interactions with participants in the field, they routinely expressed 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 such collaboration. A functional network of activists can only be established after these trust issues have been resolved; otherwise, officials may decide to strike out at any foreigner-associated program on sight.

Robert Dahl (1971) 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 remain illegal in China, some religious groups, including all three major religions in the country, have successfully recruited foreign missionaries and received funding without being punished. The mechanisms of this successful outcome deserve attention.

1.3 Methods and Mechanisms

Before developing this point further, it is important to remind readers that structural factors such as the growth of the middle class, leadership changes, and globalization are relevant, but less significant than the tolerance-inducing efforts of religious activists in this process. For reflecting the centrality and ambiguity of the state in regulating transna-

tional religious activism, I adopt the "strategic-relational approach" (SRA) developed by Jessop (2008). Bob Jessop, a British sociologist scholar on state theory, developed the idea from neo-Marxist Nicros Poulantzas that the 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 (Jessop, 2008, pp. 1–6). It is a relational process where the state shapes politics as the "art of the possible," while other forces struggle over state power and reshape the state's apparatuses and practices. In other words, the state is also socially embedded. 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 the nation's political institutions. The change of leadership and the switch from authoritarianism to a more responsive management style had been expected by some journalists and observers of Chinese politics to be the indications of better treatment of religious activist groups. Different people in a position of power, from Mao to Deng, from Jing to Hu, and from Hu to Xi, have distinct mindsets about transnational religions and might treat them distinctly. This may hold some truth, but it also leaves many unanswered questions. If Party leadership is the key factor explaining the growing tolerance of religious activism, observers should see a nationwide pattern of openness consistent with the shift of leadership, but this has not happened.

For example, the basic rule of "No Foreigners" in religion has not been changed since the 1950s and the same party continues to rule the nation with minor progress. The frustration over the rigidity creates what famous China expert Lucian W. Pye (1990) calls "erratic state, frustrated society" syndrome: the higher the hope outsiders have of certain signs of reform from the government, the higher the disappointment people get in reality. Moreover, the state seems to have exerted more, rather than less, control over various civil liberties under the current "sinicization" policy by Xi Jinping.

To understand this unexpected social progress without civil society or organized opposition, my research began with a year of participant observation in anonymous locations in China from 2010 through 2011, after which I identified four cities in two neighboring provinces that had similar socioeconomic features but different levels of religious freedom. I updated and verified my findings in five additional trips to other provinces from 2012 to 2017. During these trips, I witnessed directly how activists dealt with government repression, organized silent disobedience, and managed

their complicated relations with foreign advocates. This fieldwork involved 150 face-to-face interviews, including those with leaders of registered and unregistered religious organizations, grassroots activists, staff of religious establishments, university faculty, and provincial and local officials. In particular, I followed missionaries around during the course of their activities and conducted participant observation research in major Chinese cities, which provided critical details for tracing the causal mechanisms of successful activism.

To simplify these complex interactions, based on my fieldwork on transnational Christian activism in China, I inductively identified two mechanisms that increase the costs and difficulties of governmental repression. The first mechanism of increasing the costs associated with repression is *backdoor listing*. Originally, the concept of backdoor listing was used to describe the strategy utilized by transnational corporations to enter a market, in which they buy a legally registered local company as a front, because it is impossible for a foreign corporation to obtain a license in the short term (Blayney, 2001). In the context of Christianity, backdoor listing occurs when foreign advocacy groups provide aid to registered facilities, when the ultimate goal is to help Christian communities overall. Transnational activism that is established on or working with a legitimate entity is less likely to be repressed because the legality of its front company, no matter how nominal, makes it difficult for authorities to discover violations, and also provides an excuse for open-minded officials to give a green light to transnational activism without admitting that any official rule has been broken.

For example, the German-based NGO Transparency International allies itself with law and public administration professors in China and has established its first Chinese office within Tsinghua University (Liu, 2011). Through various "backdoor" exchanges, consultations, and dialogues brokered by Chinese academics and experts, Transparency International has persuaded the Chinese government to adopt the concepts and procedures that it has developed in conducting its own research on corruption, and in 2010 published an official transparency and anti-corruption report. Similar approaches have been recognized in a wide range of China-related studies (Hirono, 2008; Ma, 2005; Xie, 2009).

Activists must sell their ideas not just to foreign advocate groups, but also to potential local collaborators, especially those with government connections. Advocacy groups can rarely control how they will be perceived by the authorities, but they can work to improve the persuasion

process, for example by establishing or borrowing a legal front to operate as a "backdoor" access to institutional benefits such as name recognition and legal protection. A social organization from the United States would face more suspicion than a similar group from Scandinavia or Singapore, for instance, because diplomatic tensions have been increasing since the US government initiated its "human rights diplomacy" campaign in the 1990s. It would also be much easier for Chinese coworkers or foreign nationals recruited from large overseas Chinese communities in places like Taiwan, South Korea, or Hong Kong to achieve official tolerance than it would their Western sponsors.

The second mechanism is a *minority–majority alliance*. It is better for foreign advocates to work with a local group that is relatively locally strong and popular, whereby 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 the aid it receives with others, which therefore decreases the possibility that some dissatisfied "spoilers" may call in the police, which has been a common source of repression this past decade.[16] Each Chinese city and town has a different level of tension between its registered and unregistered groups due to their long and unique history of religious repression and competition. Foreign advocates cannot alter this relationship, but they can try to adapt to this environment, first by not escalating the competition and hostility between the groups. Aiding an unregistered group in a highly confrontational and divided Protestant community, for example, will only increase the sense of competition with the registered groups. Foreign donors can select locations where the existing level of collaboration is higher or at least is not confrontational. Doing so may make the provision of aid less likely to be reported to the authorities and increase the likelihood of sharing between groups.

If my alternative theory of transnational activism is correct, we should observe that a backdoor listing and minority–majority alliance have occurred in successful cases of aid collaboration, in which advocates and activists "freely" deliver and share their received aid with fellow churches to promote evangelical and other religious agendas. Backdoor listings and minority–majority alliances should lower the likelihood of government repression of a transnational religious network, but their effectiveness depends on there being an existing relationship between the registered and unregistered groups in a local Protestant community.

In this study, I paid special attention to four types of behavior associated with the mechanisms of backdoor listing and minority–majority alliance:

Table 1.1 Mechanisms and observable implications: four basic scenarios

		Backdoor listing strategy	
		No backdoor listing (aid unregistered)	*Backdoor listing (aid registered)*
Minority–majority alliance: aid sharing between registered/unregistered	*Low*	Type 1 "Highest Repression" City H	Type 3 "Low Repression" City T
	High	Type 2 "Moderate Repression" City W	Type 4 "Lowest Repression" City S

(1) foreigners are able to break the law and deliver forbidden services and funds to locals; (2) locals share the aid received; (3) officials watch, but do nothing; and (4) there are observable cross-province outreach activities. Not every Protestant community meets the preconditions that enable backdoor listing and minority–majority alliance to work. Therefore, the levels of success in promoting transnational activism from low to high are as follows (see also Table 1.1):

1. *Type 1*: Aid-related collaboration sponsored by transnational advocates is very likely to encounter government repression if the aid is received by unregistered churches and there is no sharing or collaboration between the two groups. A crackdown might occur when a backdoor listing fails and the registered group reports the collaboration to authorities.
2. *Type 2*: The likelihood of the transnational aid-related collaboration being tolerated by the government is low if the aid is received by an unregistered church but a minority–majority alliance is formed by the sharing of aid between the registered and unregistered groups.
3. *Type 3*: The likelihood of the transnational aid-related collaboration being tolerated by the government is moderate if the aid is received by a registered church but aid-related collaboration between registered and unregistered groups does not occur and no minority–majority alliance is formed.
4. *Type 4*: The likelihood of transnational aid-related collaboration being tolerated by the government is high if the foreign aid is given to registered churches via a backdoor listing strategy and the aided group is willing to share that aid with the unregistered group, and to form an alliance against possible government interference.

1.3.1 Contributions to the Literature

Important insights about transnational activism are gained by paying attention to these two mechanisms. First, while help from foreign agencies is generally welcomed and empowering, foreign agencies are not central to these operations. Rather, local Chinese groups will determine when and whether it is wise to accept foreign aid/involvement. Chinese Christian groups, registered and unregistered, realized long ago that their natural allies are not resourceful foreign organizations, since foreigners are vulnerable to anti-imperialist discourse and their support is often unreliable. Locals must find a way to protect those foreigners and market their proposals as being beneficial and harmless to the country, while the proposed action may in fact represent a break with the old practice and force the authorities to consent to a new norm.

Recent literature has begun to address bottom-up, locally based, non-Western activism in its discussion of the "dark side" of international campaigns (Mutua, 2009; O'Neill, 2005), the "blocking efforts" of local actors to international norms (Hertel, 2006), and the "evolution" of transnational activism (Rodio & Schmitz, 2010). However, there are few real-world alternatives to current internationally led enterprises. As an unintended consequence, the restraint of foreign advocates in China may provide a possible avenue for more balanced transnational cooperation in the future.

Additionally, advocacy networks in an authoritarian setting must be cautious about the range of their activism, and participants must work hard to avoid being seen as "transnational." In other words, unlike their counterparts in democratic societies, activists in China must try not only to avoid the language of internationalism, but also to limit the scope of their operations. While their actions are clearly associated with a wide range of civil and political rights, from freedom of speech to the socioeconomic rights of poor and marginalized populations (Tsai, L., 2007b), very few local religious advocates or activists frame their issues beyond the legal rights of individual citizens in accordance with the Chinese constitution.

In fact, the essence of their fight involves their organizations' right of association and assembly, a much more dangerous demand in this type of government environment. The absence of a global framework or a broader demand for civil and political rights is a careful choice by these participants. Differing from their German or American counterparts, religious advocates and activists in China face a much more closed society that has

been subject to decades of atheist and anti-imperialist education against foreign-imported religions. Nevertheless, the absence of global issue frameworks does not prevent these advocacy networks from working globally and collaborating often to challenge the religious regulation of Chinese Christians.

Chinese Protestant activism provides a more useful example of transnational activism because of its special attention to the legacy of China's imperialism. Unlike their nineteenth-century predecessors, who were aided by international forces that often overshadowed their local partners, foreign Protestant groups today not only must rely heavily on their local associates, but must also avoid being seen as part of the old system. Localization is not just a framing issue for foreign-born Protestant denominations; it has been realized and practiced in large Chinese communities in Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Canada, and the United States (Koschorke, Lugwig, & Delgabo, 2007, pp. 89–95). Since Protestant groups have become important agents of the promotion of human rights in these parts of the world (Im, 2006; Rubinstein, 2006), their members have become natural allies of activists fighting for broader freedoms and rights in China (Lerner, 2006; Witte & van de Vyver, 1996). Many Chinese political dissidents are Christians or turn to Christianity after being persecuted by the authorities. Frequently, religious persecution and political repression by the same party transforms two fights into one (Inboden & Inboden, 2009; Wright & Zimmerman-Liu, 2013).

A well-known religious and political activist, Yu Jie, is a popular Chinese author who became a devout Christian in 2003 and co-founded an underground Protestant church in Beijing. Since then, he has been involved in many human rights cases and has written a memoir and books about his jailed friend, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo. Before and after Yu was exiled in 2012, Christian and non-Christian supporters in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and North America helped publish his 30 or more banned books.

Although not every Protestant advocate or political dissident agrees with Yu Jie's publicized strategy, a widely recognized although unspoken consensus has arisen in support of cosmopolitanism—the respect for, desire for, and pursuit of broader individual freedoms. People in this vast transnational network of religious activism act like "rooted cosmopolitans," to use the term employed by Mitchell Cohen (1992) and Sydney Tarrow (2005). They began as ordinary participants such as businesspeople, investors, English teachers, charity workers, or simple tourists, but their deep

connection with, sympathy for, and understanding of the people they serve have transformed them into mobilizers, entrepreneurs, and "reformers" whose plural loyalties and resources create valuable opportunities for change (Tarrow, 2005). Those who stay in China must hide their religious and foreign identities. By blending into regular business and social transactions, they rarely become subjected to anti-imperial and anti-religious discourse or persecution because they keep a low profile, only emerging to support their cause when the occasion arises.[17]

The findings from this project are relevant to three groups represented in the literature and challenge the 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 based on the institutional fit. In an authoritarian environment, the choice of partners has significant consequences and will affect the very likelihood of entry. Therefore, advocates who select a government-sponsored partner can have better chances of survival. Government-sponsored groups can provide insight regarding the possible reaction of the government and even market the proposal to open-minded officials. These groups are also sufficiently strong and locally well respected, which makes them confident enough to open their doors and share the aid they are given with other practitioners without any concern about a possible "spoiler."

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

In addition, the current understanding of NGO activism is mainly based on the theories and practices of NGOs and INGOs 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 a few

determined hardliners have tried to resist this transformation by propagating a siege mentality and increasing the levels of repression (Pye, 1990). More than 20 years later, these determined hardliners still stand and many post-authoritarian nations are becoming nations in crisis. The causes of these setbacks may be locally rooted, but the failed strategies of Western advocacy networks must also bear some of the blame. In the edited volume of Mendelson and Glenn (2002), the practitioners of INGOs and transnational networks in post-communist nations are described as having often ignored local entrepreneurs and the well-established customs of 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 & Glenn, 2002, p. 3)

This kind of introspection regarding the imposition of Western ideas and practices on developing nations is common, and the phrases "inside-out" and "bottom-up" are routinely emphasized by practitioners, scholars, and policy-makers. Nevertheless, without careful comparison between failed and working models in the field, respecting local cultures and entrepreneurship remains a vague principle. In fact, respecting established customs and failed activism may be two sides of one coin. Studying transnational religious networks provides examples of both success and failure that are critical in the task of differentiating between the mechanisms that sustain 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 must be overcome by missionary, educational, humanitarian, human rights, and many global civil society groups (Kaldor, 2003) before they start working in target nations. A cautious authoritarian government can simply outlaw involvement of all foreign-based programs in local groups, as it has in China, and it is reasonable to believe that this law will be effective if the repressive state really puts effort into enforcing it. How then, under such circumstances, have some networks been able to establish spaces of freedom?

One explanation, highlighted by the findings of this project, is that religious activism is not unintentional civil disobedience (Thoreau, 1992, p. 233). It is a purposeful, deliberate project in which participants carefully

evaluate the risks and costs of disobedience and exercise their plans accordingly. Their actions are not a reluctant response to state repression or a cry for help when it is already too late. On the contrary, this is a planned campaign in which participants are united by similar ideas and norms, but not in formal organizations because forming any visible organization or coalition, especially with foreign money, is too risky under authoritarian rule. Like advocates in civil rights movements, those who engage in purposeful disobedience know that their moral principles are their strength and their repressor's weakness (Morris, 1986). In contrast with their counterparts in democratic societies, religious practitioners in China realize that moral principles cannot be advanced by calling for justice, legal protection, or outside help. Instead, they call for basic human dignity and use the Communist Party's own rules against it. They keep their heads down when the Party uses laws to push for obedience, because they agree to "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar," but they fight when the government's action violates its own promises of basic freedom and dignity.[18]

Like Western human rights activists, transnational religious activists aim to leverage the distance between words and deeds. The difference is that they do not publicize this distance, but use it as a bargaining chip to "persuade" officials not to choose repressive means. The use of repression by officials may hurt their reputations and make their work more difficult in the future. That is, by refusing to respect the self-restraint being exercised by activists, the activists may choose to go underground and evade the rules directly in the future. People may be surprised that officials in authoritarian nations care about their own reputations and the consequences of their following orders. This is because certain forms of accountability still exist in an authoritarian state (Tsai, K., 2007a). Furthermore, a distance between words and deeds means that officials are violating the religious freedom promised by the Chinese constitution and international human rights treaties signed by the Chinese government. Although going public is not what activists desire, it is always an option, which means that local officials should worry about the possibility that these principles will be taken seriously under certain circumstances. For example, the blowout events of political dissidents like Liu Xiaobo, Fang Lizhi, and Chen Guangcheng openly humiliated the authority of the Chinese government. If the unexpected happens, local officials know they will be punished along with the exiles.

Focusing solely on the victims of repression often ignores the fact that increasing the level of repression is a double-edged sword. Local officials

have to pay a price when a situation escalates, because both the public and the central elites will point their fingers at them for their poor management, lack of oversight, and failure to contain the agitation. Studies of public protests in China show that protestors usually blame local officials for their grievances, not the central government or the Party (Chen, 2012). Central elites can divert public attention from themselves to local officials to release pressure; the victims then question the local rather than central government to improve the chances of their demands being met. Under these circumstances, local officials would be cautious and thoughtful about their actions against those activists who have national and even international attention.

In addition, 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 frame this struggle between church and state as a "battle," and hold the same optimistic attitude about the future outcome 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. 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."[19] If the discourse of freedoms and human rights is a public religion (Ignatieff, 2002), then transnational religious groups may be its strongest believers. They believe in the power of morality and the normative principles arising from it. Their strong determination reminds repressors that the costs of tyranny could be higher than they once believed. The findings of this project return religious activism to the realm of academia and debates on global norms that it deserves.

1.4 Approach to this Topic

In eight parts, this book seeks to explain this unexpected development in transnational religious activism. The first chapter outlines how this work is built on studies reported in the literature and addresses their limitations. I argue that transnational activism need not always involve "internationalism," the key mechanism promoted in mainstream literature. In a country like China, the contentious space provided by IOs and INGOs is often rejected by religious advocacy groups as the focal point or basis of their campaigns, because it is too dangerous and counterproductive. As such, an alternative transnational connection is necessary.

The second chapter includes a review of two prominent paradigms found in the literature, develops my alternative theory of transnational activism, that of an "internal spiral," and explores the rationality and behavior patterns of opportunists, advocates, and protestors who struggle with each other in this internal spiraling process. Practically speaking, internationalism brings unnecessary tension, interference, and suspicion that may be fatal to a weakly supported transnational religious movement. Instead, carefully crafted intergroup strategies play a more important role than external strategies such as international shaming or the spiral campaigns promoted by conventional wisdom.

The third and fourth chapters provide historical and institutional details and interpretation of this theory. In short, in the 1950s, the CCP created a religious affairs system to manage an army of religious establishments by monitoring, co-opting, dividing, and conquering religious populations. By relying on discourses on anti-imperialism, this system has created a rigid religious affairs policy and generated hostility from national institutions toward transnational activism. The functionality of the two proposed mechanisms can effectively overcome these barriers.

The fifth and sixth chapters put to test this theory by comparing the performances of transnational networks of Christians, Taoists, and Buddhists. Four case-study scenarios were selected to consider the effect of the two mechanisms—the strategy of establishing a local foreign aid group (backdoor listing) and the collaboration and sharing of aid between registered and unregistered churches (minority–majority alliance).

The goal of the seventh chapter is to further test the theory beyond the confines of religion in China. First, I address the key element underlying the two mechanisms highlighted in this study: registered organizations. The goal is to find evidence of a correlation between a stronger presence of registered organizations and a greater religious freedom at the provincial level. In the absence of better data, I use a national dataset of political prisoners to assess the possibility of such a correlation by comparing the numbers of government-sanctioned social organizations with the number of political prisoners. This data has been formally collected from 1989 to the present by the Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC) and provides details of people who have been arrested for religious and political reasons.

Second, the chapter explores the theory's validity outside the Chinese context. The experience of Christianity in Vietnam, including Protestantism and Catholicism, is explored to show that transnationality, not specific

faiths, is what concerns the authorities. Identifying similarities between Vietnam and China can help to highlight the true impact of transnational activism as well as its limitations.

In conclusion, the findings presented here show that when activists choose the appropriate transnational strategies and establish local alliances, a powerless social group can expand its freedom and social space to engage in a broader social agenda. I hope readers will consider the proposed theory and use it to understand the success and failure of other transnational activist campaigns in similar authoritarian contexts.

Notes

1. To protect the safety of my interviewees, all the names in this book are aliases, except those cited from open sources, third-party publications, and news reports.
2. "No Foreigners Allowed" is one of the unspoken but well-known rules established by the Chinese Communist Party. The formal reason for this 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. This rule transfers into almost every social aspect of life, from taxi drivers who are asked to report foreign customers to police when their destinations are outside metropolitan areas, to foreigners being barred from preaching in any Chinese church. For Protestant Christians, this policy is inherent in the founding principles of the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" (TSPM) Church, the only legal Protestant organization in China.
3. Because Clinton won the presidential election in 1993 and Congress was debating China's Most Favored Nation status in 1994. See Osofsky (1998).
4. One distinct feature of the Chinese political system is its mass political education and re-education program, which is designed to ensure that everyone understands and supports the fundamental policies of the Party (Solomon, 1971).
5. The main introducer of this research, Pastor Lee from Taiwan, told me that he maintains a relationship with registered churches because of 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 would not approve the budget.
6. In fact, more than once, the officials I interviewed expressed their concern about my denominational background and showed relief when they realized that I claimed no specific denomination.

7. A clear indication of unspoken restraint is the open "partner" relationship claimed by the Presbyterian World Mission (USA) and the unregistered congregation ministered by the Rev. Ho Ban and Min Young Ban, who work in Shenyang, China, as noted in the fundraising document ("Presbyterian Church USA website", n.d.).
8. It is no secret that some provinces are more open and friendly to social groups than others. For example, many grassroots NGOs would preferentially choose Guangdong Province, especially the municipal area of Shenzhen. There is much anecdotal evidence for this (He, 2008; Huang, 2003; Kelly, 2006).
9. The earthquake hit the Sichuan province of China on Monday, May 12 and was identified as the most devastating earthquake in Chinese history. However, the Chinese government refused to accept outside help until May 15, as hundreds of rescuers and hundreds of tons of relief materials were waiting at nearby airports in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan. Initially, due to transportation problems, the Red Cross Society of China refused to accept help other than financial support. Relief efforts were delayed for weeks in the case of Myanmar, for which NGOs like Philanthropy Action characterized the Myanmar government's stance as "genocide".
10. Although the research focus was trade negotiation, the logic holds when foreign aid is considered to be 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 lends governmental features to the transnational aid negotiation. For a definition of veto groups, the reader is referred to Mo (1994).
11. In fact, this view is very common among overseas Christian communities. In my visits to Chinese provinces, I found that very few registered churches have received outside aid. This is partly because registered churches must respect the leadership of the Party and follow the "No Foreigners" policy more closely, and partly because of their religious label. The TSPM Church has been viewed as a pawn of the government by the majority of Western Christian communities.
12. For information about Chinese corporatism, the reader is referred to Bruce J Dickson (2000) and Saich (2000).
13. This is a very long-term and common practice in Chinese politics that began in the 1950s. Party officials will allow a certain measure of creativity and entrepreneurship at the local level in dealing with social crises, but they will not openly endorse them until the new approaches prove to be effective. This is called "wading across the stream by feeling one's way" or "groping for the bottom stones when crossing the stream" (摸著石頭過河), which is considered to be a trade mark principle of reform and opening-up in the post-Mao era. The intermediary is there for the security of the official's career. If an official directly endorses an operation that violates

or potentially violates the religious policy, the operation may become a liability to that official when his/her superior determines that the new practice is a threat. In addition, although local officials have very few resources to routinely monitor all the various religious and social activities, the popular assumption is that everything is controlled and the Party knows everything in China, because of its strong state capacity. However, the survival and continuing growth of underground Protestant missions and congregations show that there is an obvious information gap.

14. Religious affairs officials in both Provinces A and B told me that they have little motive to investigate "illicit" religious activities unless someone reports or receives a call from their superiors and orders them to act. They believe most religious activities pose little threat to stability, but they are duty bound to respond to formal requests. Interview No. 60, February 2010.
15. In fact, according to many of my interviewees, some "religious repression" cases reported to foreign human rights groups are unrelated to government persecution or purposeful interference. For example, China Aid published five new cases of harassment of house churches in different provinces and claimed the existence of a national trend of persecution of house churches in 2012. However, in my visit to one of the reported cities, I learned that the church in question was a registered TSPM congregation, not a house church. What was termed "local government persecution" arose from a financial dispute between the church elders on a remodeling project. The discontented contractor called the local authorities and tried to collect his money with the help of higher-ranking TSPM clergy (China Aid Association, 2012).
16. This observation was confirmed by almost every interviewee. Direct confrontation between religious officials and churches is rare. The most common "cause" of crackdown is a violation reported by regular citizens, who are usually members of rival churches.
17. For example, Miwa Hirono documented Christian businessmen from Hong Kong who founded the earliest foreign NGOs that were allowed to enter China after the 1950s (Hirono, 2008: chap. 4).
18. Mark 12:17. One the phrases most quoted by Chinese church leaders regarding talk about state–church relations.
19. Interview No. 12, September 2009.

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CHAPTER 2

Facilitating Activism in a Strong Authoritarian State

Transnational religious activism is a kind of transnational advocacy network (TAN), 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" (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 2). The network includes individual missionaries and aid workers, missionary agencies, charitable organizations, religious freedom watch groups, and religious media, which share common values, discourse, and collaboration based on evangelism.[1] My explanation of the religious advocacy network emphasizes an overlooked dimension in the prominent theories of transnational activism: local activists can act both as spoilers of and advocates for their foreign sponsors. One of the key determinants of their role is the biased governmental sponsorship to social groups unique to authoritarian and post-authoritarian societies. The strength of this view is that it helps explain the variation in the treatment of transnational collaboration across provinces and sectarian lines. In short, aiding a non-sponsored, unregistered group first increases the chance of repression of the participants, because foreign aid makes the government expect the unregistered group to become more autonomous, and their loyalty toward the Party might become questionable. In addition, aiding an unregistered group makes sponsored loyalists feel threatened, and therefore they are more likely to report the prohibited collaboration to authorities, who may be unaware of the collaboration or did not think it a serious threat in the beginning.

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Following the same logic, transnational activism can survive and grow in this environment when a transnational player befriends a government-sponsored group. When this happens, the chance of both repressed and sponsored group being allowed to receive aid rises because (1) the vouching for and recognition from the sponsored group may convince officials that the ongoing collaboration is not a threat to the corporate system; and (2) the sponsored group may feel less threatened and have less incentive to spoil the collaboration. This model of transnational interaction helps explain the puzzling variation in government treatments of 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 affects 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 regimes and closed societies, foreigners need the right local partners to market their advocacy.

This chapter outlines three dimensions of this alternative theory of transnational activism. First, case studies in authoritarian states echo the puzzle raised by the literature of transnational advocacy that the absence of the basic freedoms of association and speech does not stop all forms of activism. This book 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 explains how my work is built on the literature and addresses the limitations of existing understanding. Two prominent theories of transnational activism provide partial answers to this puzzle: the transnational advocacy network (TAN) and the transnational social movement (TSM) help to develop a relation-based framework for understanding the strategy, agency, and organizational features of transnational activism that goes beyond liberal institutionalism and structuralism. TAN stresses the importance of solidarity

among the concerned states, international organizations (IOs), and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and particularly the normative power of INGOs, while TSM 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, the network spiral and the opportunity spiral, are limited in explaining growing transnational activism in strong non-democratic settings. The problem for the 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 works 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 IOs and INGOs is often rejected by religious advocacy groups as the focal point or a base of their campaign, first because the space of internationalism has been occupied by state actors who maintain a strong secular ideology and rarely demonstrate persistent interest in pressuring authoritarian regimes to improve their record of religious freedom. Second, and more practically speaking, internationalism brings unnecessary tension, interference, and suspicion, which may be fatal for the weakly supported transnational religious movement. Instead, carefully crafted intergroup strategies play more important roles than external strategies such as international shaming or spiral campaigns in facilitating transnational activism.

2.1 The "Secret Handshake" in an Authoritarian State

Advocacy and activism in an authoritarian state are thought to be difficult because terror against citizens has been the very nature of authoritarianism (Arendt, 1956). Society-based attempts to challenge an authoritarian state like China are particularly difficult because the corporatist, Leninist-Maoist–style political system has shown zero tolerance for independent social forces and tries to co-opt all social organizations into its management framework (Schurmann, 1966). Chinese administrators even refuse to use non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to categorize civic groups,

because the concept assumes the separation of social organizations from the state and implies an anti-governmental propensity (Stone, 1998, pp. 10–13). 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.[2] 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. (Ministry of Commerce, 1998)

Article 4 in the PRNEU Provisional Regulations makes it clear that independent social groups in China can be tolerated, but that tolerance is under strict rules. The rule of no harm to public interests is understandable, but no violation of the "legitimate rights and interests of other social organizations" is open to selective interpretation when all "other," 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 (Calhoun, 1993; Gold, 1990; Nathan, 1990). Case studies suggest that the strength of old Leninist-Maoist–style corporatism in China is declining, although the concept of fully autonomous social organizations is not yet recognized by the regime (Saich, 2000). The number of foreign NGOs has increased from only 15 in the 1980s to around 2000 today, many of which are high-profile, apolitical INGOs such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and have received a warm welcome in China (Meng, 2012). Unlike their counterparts in African and Latin American countries, social organizations in China are highly regulated; national and foreign partners experience "parallel growth" and are kept largely separate (Hsia & White, 2002, p. 333). For example, Hsia and White (2002) found 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" are allowed to establish a long-term presence in China and affect lasting change (Hsia & White, 2002, p. 329). Thirty years after the reform process began, the Chinese government's policy toward transnational social groups has changed very little. Reportedly, there are 1000 US-based NGOs operating in China, but only 3% have official permission.[3] 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 stages, there is a clear consensus in the field that various forms of transnational activism are on the rise in China. The Chinese state, which is strengthened by continued economic growth, is alarmed by this West-to-East mode of transnational activism demanding civil society and democracy. Since 1979, many foreign advocacy groups have begun to enter China, with mixed goals 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 overstating it to suggest that foreign sponsorship has facilitated the booming scene of the Chinese PRNEU market, but local social groups do rely heavily on outside support and the Chinese state is planning on changing that. The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) published new regulations for NPO organizations in 2012 and promised that national funding would go to registered social organizations to "buy" their services. Reports have said that provincial MCA officials have been invited to participate in national conferences to learn about the new policy of contracting welfare-, charity-, and health-related services to approved social organizations (Xinhua Net, 2011).

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. Before Communist China, there were about 4478 foreign full-time missionaries in the country, according to the 1936 *Handbook of Christian Movement in China* (p. vi). No official record or reliable academic number of missionaries in China today exists, because missionary work is seen as illegal under Chinese law. Most of them are on short-term visits from two weeks to a few months and enter in the guise of tourists, businesspeople, students, or teachers.[4]

In general, registered Protestant congregations enjoy more freedom than their unregistered counterparties in terms of worship. Despite the criticism from Christian communities overseas, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Church, the registered body of Chinese Protestants, works 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 (Vala, 2009, p. 106). My fieldwork also found that some TSPM clergy conduct "illicit" transnational activities without interference from the ARA. Evidence indicates that ARA officials do show flexibility on executing regulatory policies and exercise their unquestionable power with caution. When interference is expected, it is evident that officials make efforts to avoid criticism about violations of religious freedom by keeping their directives informal (Vala, 2009, pp. 109–110). What makes this "self-restraint" happen is puzzling, given that regulations clearly indicate absolute subordination of churches to the state and that no foreigners are allowed to participate in Chinese religious affairs.

The explanation cannot be found in the role of civil society, since China does not have liberal civic traditions and constitutional democracy. One possible explanation for this strange tolerance is the time-honored relational perspective outlined 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 (Dahl, 1971). Since the cost of using violence remains moderate to low in the foreseeable future of the nation, it is reasonable to argue that the answer must be related to the "benefits" of tolerance or the mechanisms to induce this tolerance.

In contrast with the popular leadership thesis, this chapter explores a relational explanation (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Mohrenberg, 2011; Risse-Kappen, Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999; Tarrow, 2005; Tarrow & Tilly, 2007). A relational approach assumes that actors are interactively engaged in and conditioned by relations, in the form of the network, system, or structure in which they are embedded or "rooted" (Tarrow, 2005, p. 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 the 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 (Rudolph & Piscatori, 1997, pp. 2–3), transnational religious

activism is automatically suspect in the eyes of authoritarian leaders. When foreign advocacy groups sponsor groups that are not on the "trusted list" of the regime, for instance an independent social group or an individual with a record of dissidence, then officials begin to intervene in transnational aid collaboration and use violence when necessary.

On the other hand, officials restrict the use of coercive power when they are convinced by participants that the collaboration proposes no or only a minor threat to the regime, or the backlash from repression would be too great for the regime to bear. This is Robert Dahl's formula for political opposition: restraint to political opposition can happen only when the cost of violent crackdown is higher than the benefit of crushing the opposition. 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 are the key determinants of repression and tolerance that dictate relations between Christian believers and the state. Religion has always been a part of political institutions in Communist China. In 1954, the Bureau of Religious Affairs, the precursor of the current State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), was created as a core control agency under the State Council (國務院). However, it is no secret that neither the State Council nor SARA has the authority to alter an existing policy. The real power is from the United Front Work Department (中央統戰部), a Party organ that supervises all non-Party social groups (Ashiwa & Wank, 2009, p. 10). I will discuss this further in Chap. 4.

Advocacy groups often cannot control how they are perceived by the authorities, but they can work at improving the persuasive process. The critical distinction between a "good" and a "bad" religious group has to do with whether the group in question brokers foreign influence through unauthorized channels.[5] Specifically, the more unauthorized foreign support the advocacy group provides, the more likely it is that 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 measures, 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: the government wants the leadership intact, and advocates want the freedom to expand and deliver more resources. There is a

tacit middle ground indicating that the two sides can have the things they want the most, though reaching this point may require some compromise, as well as mastering a certain "secret handshake."

One part of the cycle story of this secret handshake is the creation of the Amity Foundation in Nanjing City, China. Bible distribution was a major source of contention between the Chinese government and foreign Christian advocacy during Mao's rule and in the early days of Deng Xiaoping's leadership. Christians used to sneak in hundreds of bibles 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 US$1 million to create a "non-governmental" organization, under the management of TSPM, to produce "legal" copies of the bible in China.[6] Foreign denominations and bible societies provided funding and training, and took charge of most of the translation work. Chinese collaborators organized a printing facility in Nanjing and produced a million bibles for government-censored retailers each year. I have interviewed one of the founders and a former board member of the Amity Foundation from outside China. He confirmed this story and detailed the process of negotiation. More details are in Chap. 3. Now the Amity Printing Company (APC) is the world's biggest bible printing company and takes orders in 80 languages from countries all over the world (China Ministries International, n.d.).

Interestingly, such unexpected political openness is overlooked by most Chinese scholars. It is an unexplained puzzle that the 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 the 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.[7]

2.2 Network Spiral and Opportunity Spiral: The Debates

Despite lively debates on many issues, 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 "internationalization," 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 the legwork but also the advocacy to market new perspectives and practices to the state. Second, this transnational network of advocacy needs to avoid the language of internationalism, because it may produce unnecessary difficulties when collaborators try to bargain for more space for this activism. I have argued in the first chapter that the key inadequacy of current theories is their 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, or distribute resources freely in a target nation; practitioners have to seek mobilizing, networking, and marketing capacities from some unconventional "activists," who may or may not possess the conventional characteristics of non-state advocates.

2.2.1 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 must satisfy four basic criteria: (1) it involves political contention based on a conflict of interests; (2) challenging or supporting certain power structures; (3) involving non-state actors; and (4) taking place fully or partly outside formal political institutions (Piper & Uhlin, 2004, p. 4). I adopt the narrowest definition of transnational religious activism, but theorize it as a policy contention that mainly comes from actors outside conventional political processes and refuses 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 the 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. Sikkink (1999) further specified the process of this cycle as escalating contention and bargaining between non-state and state actors and called it the "boomerang pattern" of political change: NGOs obtain information about human rights violations that states are too embarrassed to share and then "boomerang" out the information to the 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. Amnesty International is one of the best examples to illustrate this boomerang pattern that aims at utilizing information on persecution and discrimination to generate an international momentum of "diplomacy of conscience" to pressure nation-states (Clark, 2001).

Empirical studies have shown that TANs shape politics through (1) holding government accountable by exposing gaps between rhetorical commitment to international treaties and practices through transnational mobilization (Cardenas, 2007; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Okafor, 2007; Risse-Kappen, 1995; Risse-Kappen et al., 1999; Thomas, 2001); (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 (Evans, 2005; Okafor, 2006; Roht-Arriaza, 2005).

The key mechanisms of promoting change are through networking with advocates and activists who share common norms and values in different societies, as described in the "boomerang effect." The networks serve as the platform to *internalize/socialize* international standards, knowledge, and organizational and financial resources into target states (Risse-Kappen et al., 1999) and *internationalize* domestic grievances into international society (Bob, 2005), a cyclic process described in Fig. 2.1.

2.2.2 Who Is the Brave Soul?

If TANs provide otherwise absent resources and leverage to local groups and try to politicize their demands, it is natural for governments to have a strong suspicion of transnational religious collaboration, because they may turn against it someday. For this reason, transnational religious advocacy

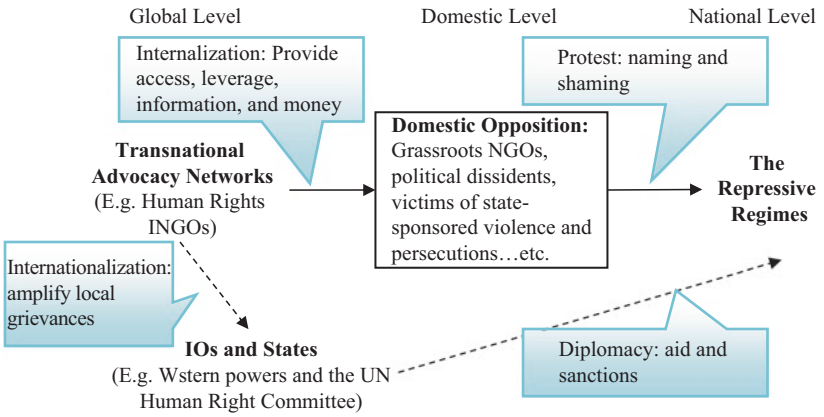

Fig. 2.1 Network spiral: the boomerang mechanisms of transnational advocacy networks. Source: Revised from Risse-Kappen et al. (1999, pp. 18–19)

groups could be a political threat to authoritarian states, whether the participants make political claims or not. Therefore, the TAN framework shows its weakness when the target state takes careful measures and refuses to recognize the basic rights of advocates and activists. When 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, the TAN framework cannot explain why authoritarian regimes do not outlaw all advocacy groups at once to prevent further complication. Without local informers and conspirators, foreign advocacy groups cannot do much. It is almost impossible to imagine an effective campaign while targeted states tactically consent to international human rights standards to divert attention and oppress local conspirators at the same time. Gränzer (1999) has pointed out that transnational human rights advocacy in Tunisia, compared to nearby Morocco, is very ineffective because the government limited all human rights activists to joining the only legal NGO, the Tunisian Human Rights League (Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme or LTDH; Risse-Kappen et al., 1999, p. 116). President Ben Ali skillfully manipulated the human rights discourse to secure his power coup, and he even agreed to legalize a branch of Amnesty

International in April 1988 in order to impress international critics. This tactic kept him in office from 1987, until he was forced to step down and flee the country in 2011 (BBC, 2011). The human rights power package promoted by advocates, Western state power (France) plus INGOs (Amnesty International), has proved to be very limited when the national leader has resolve and is skillful in manipulating international attention and advocacy efforts (Wood, 2002).

TAN theorists are forced to admit that little can be done without two critical preconditions: brave local activists who are willing to take risks to transmit critical information under repression; and no smokescreen of rhetorical concession from leaders who know how to take away the most powerful weapon of transnational advocacy: the moral power to expose the government's denial (Risse-Kappen et al., 1999, pp. 132–133). Tactical concessions and fake compliance deprive transnational advocacy of influence 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 the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, but refuses to ratify and internalize them into domestic law (Kent, 1999). The Chinese government has organized a domestic human rights commission and association and published "Human Rights White Papers" each year since 1997, but these actions are considered by many critics as diversionary and propaganda projects rather than genuine socialization of global norms (Steiner, Alston, & Goodman, 2008, p. 794). Therefore, activists and advocates in these nations have to work under the framework set by the authorities: in the case of Tunisia, joining and organizing opposition under the only legal human rights organization; and in the Chinese case, cooperating with and aiding state-sponsored "social" organizations.

2.2.3 Opportunity Spiral: The TSM Paradigm

A TSM, in contrast to a TAN, is built on the emphasis on certain structural preconditions, widely defined as the opportunity structure in political sociology literature.[8] It relies less on international solidarity or transnational advocacy because of a firm belief in the difficulty of collective action. In Charles Tilly's words (2004, pp. 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, the will to change alone is insufficient. When an unexpected change appears, there must be sustainable space to support the change. Based on observa-

tion 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 international institutions, and the opportunities this produces for actors to engage in collective action at different levels of this system."[9] 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" different issues. To attract more audiences, advocates reframe their claims from a single issue to multiple issues. Like the network spiral model, internationalization and internalization are described as key mechanisms of change, but Tarrow's TSM model emphasizes the physical ability of activists to externalize collective actions, "to shift their activities among levels, taking advantage of the expanded nodes of opportunity of a complex international society" (Tarrow, 2005, p. 25). 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 that starts from local disputes like the Euro-Disney protest to a global civil society movement such as the formation of the World Social Forum (Tarrow, 2005, p. 34).

In the context of religious activism, it is evident that many religious organizations have adopted broader frames such as humanitarianism and cosmopolitanism. Petersen (2010) surveyed all NGOs with consultative status at the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and found that only 10.1% of the total of 3183 organizations consider themselves religious; among the 320 religious NGOs, only 14% focus on religious promotion, while the majority of them (47%) focus solely on secular fields of work and goals.[10]

Tarrow (2005) argues that one form of transnational collective action against the authorities could be two or more socially rooted movements echoing and responding to each other, creating collective pressure that is more powerful than a single movement alone can produce. French and German protestors are concerned with different local issues, but they can learn from each other about tactics and organizational strategies, and, most importantly, by framing themselves as a united movement, they all benefit from the internalization process. In terms of localizing emerging global norms, this mechanism inherits the "spillover" 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 emerges, its potential is not limited to promoting a single issue, and therefore new norms and practices can be transferred among participants and diffused elsewhere (Evans, 2005; Kolb, 2005; Tarrow, 2005).

In short, it is a local movement that shares its knowledge of financing, campaigning, and organizing with local partners in other societies. There may be money and staff involved, but they might be inessential. One prominent example 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, the United Kingdom, and other European Union states. Once a "civil society–like" global moral space has emerged, its power is not limited to promoting change in a single issue (Fisher, 2004; Meyer & Whittier, 1994; Tarrow, 2005, p. 17). In other words, the growth of activism and a society's development are interconnected: once the power of civil society has reached a certain level, activism is inevitable.

Based on the TSM paradigm, the opportunity structure of the transnational Christian movement, if there is one, is determined by the strength of the global contentious space, and, most importantly, by the status of the civil society movement in each country. In the case of China, it is easy to see a global "society" 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 learning from and collaborating with their global partners, and sustaining a movement to challenge the status quo when knowing they must do this on their own?

2.2.4 Social Activism without Civil Society?

In contrast to what has been reported in newspapers and television 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. In general, social groups in China 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 wanted to join the Communist

Party (Tsai, 2007a, p. 101). Lu (2008, p. 108) studied the performance of Chinese NGOs and concluded, "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 stages, how can we explain the rising civil disobedience of Protestant churches and the growing tolerance of them based on the political opportunity created by civil society?

Studies on other authoritarian regimes reveal similar problems of using NGOs as a creator of political opportunity. Abdelrahman (2007, pp. 128–133) discusses how foreign involvement delegitimizes local human rights and political campaigns in Egypt. As the second largest social funds receiver (next only to Mexico), Egyptian NGOs rely heavily on foreign and government funds and show limited legitimacy and social influence. In contrast, Islamic NGOs, which have popular support and the capability of mobilization, are purposely underestimated (informally estimated as 43% of Egyptian NGOs) and repressed by the regime, while minority Coptic NGOs enjoy sizable funds from Western governments and donor agencies (9% of all NGOs). The Egyptian government ensures its control over NGOs through a process like the Chinese: the legal framework and corporatist strategy that require NGOs to be members of a federation in a state-controlled hierarchical system. The Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) under the infamous Law 32 of 1964 is the foundation of this system, which authorizes government officials to intervene in the selection of NGO leaders, budget and expenditure, allocation of government grants, and control over foreign funding. Different from their 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 fall under the supervision of MOSA. They successfully refuse to be co-opted by the state and maintain their activism and independent status.[11]

2.3 Marketing Transnational Religious Activism: Internalization

Many religious studies experts have found that religious advocacy, in the forms of intellectual dissent and rural disobedience, pose significant challenges to formal political institutions in China. The rapid expansion of unregistered congregations and spread of unorthodox beliefs cause serious confrontation between the state and religious communities (Aikman,

2003; Cao, 2008, 2010; Chau, 2006; Kindopp, 2004; Kipnis, 2001; Lambert, 2006; Lumsdaine, 2009; Madsen, 1998; Marsh, 2011; Wenger, 2004; Xin, 2009; Yang, 2006; Yang & Lang, 2011). From those cases, I find evidence that different parts of this advocacy possess the modalities of *information exchange*, *coordinated tactics*, and *joint mobilization*, which are identified by scholars as the dominant features in rights advocacy (Khagram, Riker, & Sikkink, 2010, p. 9). Transnational religious activism is organized through their shared discourse, tactics, and networks to better their chances to fight religious repression.

For example, Yalin Xin found that one of the largest underground Protestant networks in China, the World of Life (WOL), has developed a small village congregation in Henan Province into a two-million-member, national and transnational network (2009, p. 32). The leader, Peter Xu, accepts the teachings of Western missionaries such as Hudson Taylor and turns them into a Chinese version of the "Great Commission." WOL's impacts on Chinese politics and transnational communities are evident: its "renewal" (propagation and conversion) model has become a strong alternative to government-sponsored methods and its continuing existence and growth inspire resistance to the authorities' unity policy (Xin, 2009, pp. 128–137). As an important player in Protestant communities internationally and locally, its coordinated tactics and joint mobilization with other evangelical movements are noteworthy. For instance, WOL has become an important figure in the transnational "Back to Jerusalem" (BTJ) movement since the 1990s.[12]

Anthropologist Nanlai Cao (2008, 2010, pp. 5–6) discovered 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 out of the influence of Western missions and a victim of an inherently hegemonic state–society relation, the "Wenzhou model" he describes is more locally driven and apolitical. "Boss Christians" often own and operate small to 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. This happens under the conditions of "a modernizing state, lax local governance, an emerging capitalist consumer economy, and greater spatial mobility among individuals" (Cao, 2010, p. 11).

Although there are many publications on transnational collective action in Chinese evangelism, not many have positioned themselves on a theory-

driven inquiry into institutional change. Case studies like WOL or Wenzhou provide detailed insights about how leadership, organizational structure, and theological viewpoints affect their institutional strategy and impact, but they are not particularly helpful in unpacking the secrets of how advocates overcome obstacles from the establishment, especially those limitations that constrain their transnational modalities. Both repression and tolerance toward these modalities permitted by the system require 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, the atheist state is not the only institutional source of religious repression and tolerance. Gordon Melton (2011), a historian and 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 establishment. However, taking into account ethnicity and theology, some unregistered congregations, such as Wenzhou's Christians, are closer than other religious sects to the establishment for their own reasons; while "new religions," such as "cult" groups like the South China Church, Three Grades of Servants, and Eastern Lightning, are repelled by both established churches and regular unregistered congregations like WOL (Yang & Lang, 2011, pp. 47–60).

Also recognizing the importance of registration, Yang Fenggang (2006) asserts that religious groups' distance from the establishment 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 into the repression and tolerance that seems chaotic to outside observers: state regulation of religion is a long-term and institutionalized tradition that dictates the spiritual life of China. When the "demand" side of religion was raised at the end of the Cultural Revolution, the "supply" side, membership, and participation offered by organized religions were deficient. While deregulation is never the norm in Chinese politics, it is no surprise that there is a great proportion of Chinese religious groups in the "gray" or "black" areas that suffer from constant harassment and persecution, while there is also a proportion of religious "red" groups operating with restrained

interference (Yang, 2006, pp. 96–99). Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke (2007) test this thesis in a cross-nation study and find strong evidence to support the conclusion that "[over]regulation leads to persecution."

In sum, findings from comparative religious studies have suggested that political institutions, including state organs and state-sponsored organizations based on the different type of secularism that each state possesses, 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 extent underestimates the significance and particularity of world religions and the transnational characteristics of modern religions. For example, Buddhism is a "red" religion and its religious advocacy groups have rarely run into trouble with the Chinese government in 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 in social policies (Eng & Lin, 2002; Laliberté, 2009; Tsai, L., 2007b). Since world religions are transnational, a transnational theory of religion, including its local and transnational actors, is needed.

2.3.1 Internal Spiral with Limited Externalization

The TAN and TSM models have identified three major mechanisms of transnational activism: internationalization, internalization, and externalization. This chapter reconstructs two additional sets of mechanisms on 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 of the majority of the target community (a primitive democratic rule). The assumption is that even a strong authoritarian regime would not crush popular demand without thinking twice about the high costs of repressing a proposal with majority support. When popular demand does not directly threaten the survival of the regime, 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 to have occurred, which are addressed by different disciplinary traditions.

While the TAN framework from the international relations discipline emphasizes the socialization and internalization strategies, the TSM

framework from political sociology stresses the limitations set by political institutions and the opportunity provided by externalization. In a conceptual perspective, as illustrated in Figs. 2.1 and 2.2, TAN argues that the spiral process can happen when the principal groups on the delivering and receiving ends collaborate on an issue network (a "vertical process" from domestic level to global level), while the TSM asserts that the spiral goes in both geographic and ideational directions, depending on the given conditions (a horizontal and vertical process). The internal spiral I propose is mostly horizontal and it is discreet about the vertical process. It is an indirect process between state institutions and challengers. It is discreet because the state does not want outsiders to perceive its self-restraint as a

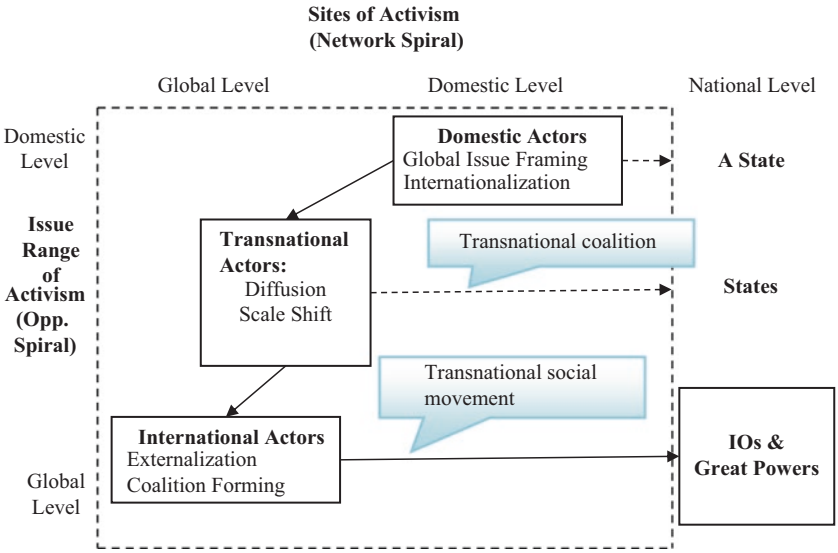

Fig. 2.2 Opportunity spiral: the contentious space of the transnational social movement (TSM). The formation of a TSM has three sets of processes. First, local activists frame their issues as global problems and try to internationalize the movement. Second, the norms and practices of the movement may diffuse to another nation (e.g., the French ATTAC model is copied by Germany activists) and the scale of the movement escalates into a transnational collaboration. Third, participants begin to see the benefits of an international coalition and then further expand the goals, discourses, and practices in order to development a global-scale social movement. Source: Revised from Tarrow (2005, pp. 32–33)

change of policy, which might signal weakness and encourage more challengers (Ginkel & Smith, 1999; Shiu & Sutter, 1996). Gary Shiu and Daniel Sutter demonstrate in their political repression model that the central government had to take a stand against the students in Tiananmen Square because it could not show weakness to its periphery rivals. John Ginkel and Alastair Smith used formal methods to understand the success of the Velvet Revolution and the failure of Tiananmen Square in 1989 and concluded:

> 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 & Smith, 1999, p. 309)

In the post–Tiananmen Square period, the prerequisite of "not showing weakness" becomes even stronger. Local activists and dissidents, especially those who have confronted the authorities for years, know the government type and "red line" 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 persecution. They deliver, share, and pass on normative and material resources among domestic, transnational, and international participants, but they prefer the label of local operatives to a global movement. Therefore, the critical difference between transnational activists in an authoritarian state and conventional activists in a democracy is *the lack of political opportunity to adopt an international frame*. For Chinese social groups, whether registered or unregistered, the basic mandate from state institutions is to keep foreign influence away. Since activists still want financial and organizational resources from foreign advocacy groups, they must work out a way to keep the authorities at bay. Borrowing a concept from Bob's *Marketing Rebellion*, advocates and activists need to market themselves and the proposed collaboration as beneficial and as harmless to the regime as possible. For this reason, they need a second kind of local "activist" to bargain with officials who used to act in a hostile way to international and transnational collaboration (Fig. 2.3).

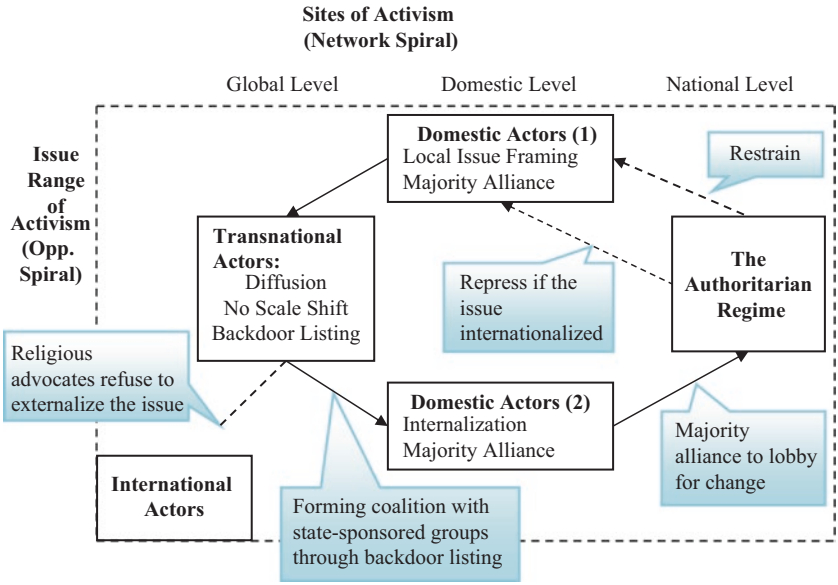

Fig. 2.3 Internal spiral: the mechanisms of transnational religious activism

In addition, religious advocacy networks in a strong authoritarian setting need to be cautious about the range of the activism in which they partake. They must try not only to avoid the language of internationalism, but also to limit the issue scope of their operations. While their actions clearly involve a wide range of civil and political rights, from freedom of speech to the socioeconomic rights of poor and marginalized populations (many local religious organizations have welfare functions; Tsai, L., 2007b), very few religious advocates or activists frame their issues beyond the legal rights of citizens according to the Chinese constitution. The absence of a global framing of universal human rights or freedom of religion is a careful choice of these participants. Unlike their German or American counterparts, religious advocates and activists in China face a much more closed society, which has been exposed to decades of atheist education and patriotic movements against foreign-imported religions. Nevertheless, the avoidance of global issues does not cover the fact that the networks of advocacy work on a global scale and frequently collaborate on challenging the biased religious policy on Chinese Christians.

2.4 Opportunity, Incentives, and "Cheap Talk"

Neither TAN nor TSM can explain the puzzle of transnational activism in a strong authoritarian environment: participants must overcome great repression under conditions of absent or very weak civil society. In many cases, locals do collaborate with foreign advocacy groups despite the difficulties. As I argued in Chap. 1, alternative "marketing" strategies or mechanisms are the keys for transnational activism to succeed. Foreign advocates with local partners produce space or opportunity for activism through backdoor listings and majority alliances. The remaining questions are: Why would they join this risky business and under what conditions will they work together? The core argument, which 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 "risk" 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 the international media or human rights watch groups, or internalize them through domestic means. An internal spiral happens when a foreign group decides to seek solutions locally. For them to work locally, foreign religious advocates need to gain permission to enter and present themselves in a way that the Chinese authorities would accept. They need a proper front or cover to operate legally in China. An invitation from a registered group is one of the starting points and foreign advocacy groups can list themselves as educators, co-operators, service 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 most 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 for changes of religious policy in their favor. Later, when repression appears, either from a discontented church leader or a police officer who receives an order from the governor, this majority alliance, supported by a TAN, would work together to protect the foreigners, and especially the leaders of the regis-

tered group, and 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 walk by without questioning or provoking any trouble. In many Chinese cities I visited, foreign advocates work with Chinese Christians under all kind of cover—students, teachers, businesspeople, 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 of groups or individuals who did not have this kind of local alliance and had to be extremely cautious and try to hide their presence from the authorities, sometimes having to escape from searches and raids.[13]

2.4.1 Involvement of Opportunist Groups

The key local factor of a successful alliance that I identified is the attitude of registered churches. Under 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 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 inside information on 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, therefore they 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.

Readers might wonder why the powerful state would restrain its behavior just because registered groups are on board with the operation. In general, the government would prefer stopping aid over allowing any church to receive it. First, we need to consider the severity of the government's punishment. A cautious aid receiver will evaluate the cost of this

action before taking support from foreigners. Punishment for collaborating with foreign religious organizations ranges from a threatening phone call to serious jail time, depending on the severity of the case. The evaluation of severity falls on the head of local law enforcement agencies, and they rely on a set of criteria to judge it: if the aid-receiving group gets registered, approved, or has 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 think seriously about cracking down on legitimate social activity that might contribute to local development, except in a situation in which they are ordered to do so.[14]

It should be noted that it is not only the TSPM label, the registration status of the church, that grants protection to an operation. The protection comes from a set of institutional affiliations to the regime, such as a graduate certificate from a government-censored theological seminary, a pastor's "lecture license" issued by an ARA office, and other leadership titles such as membership of a GONGO organization such as the 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 Department, an 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 the security agencies and convince law enforcement that the proposed operation poses no harm to the regime and, most importantly, to 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 a local TSPM leader he knew for details and then contact the ARA field office for further clarification. Whether the TSPM and ARA put in 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.[15] In short, it is the institutional 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 the "legality" of its participants and activities (Leung, 2005). In other words, the government would not object to a foreign aid project without proper assessment of the cost and benefit com-

ing with it. Foreign aid, through various forms, accommodates the socio-economic needs of Chinese society, while the potential risk is uncertain. The regime will crack down on outside support if it is deemed harmful. The regime will see the aid as harmful when it helps the growth of unregistered congregations (on the gray and black markets) or impedes the growth of the registered population (on the red market; Yang, 2005).

2.4.2 Why Take the Risk? The Incentives for Participation

For churches to participate in transnational activism, the cost–benefit calculation is obscured. Should a church leader risk 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 demolition of churches are reported to international society (Aikman, 2003; Bays, 2003, 2004; Kindopp, 2004).

However, participation should not be understood as only from individual heroism or religion-inspired sacrifice. Participating in transnational evangelism has many "rewards." Since the publication of *Wealth of 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 (Chaves, 1995; Durkin & Greeley, 1991; Finke & Stark, 1992, 2000; Iannaccone, 1991, 1992, 1995; Stark & Bainbridge, 1987). On many occasions, religious rewards are realized in material form; churches are constantly competing for "patrons" and their loyalty through demonstrating various secular successes (Bainbridge & Iannaccone, 2010). Attracting outside funding and skillful preachers, for example, is an eminent opportunity for a clergy to show off their success in front of a crowd. Chinese clergy are attracted by foreign aid for both material and spiritual reasons. My interviews with house church leaders illustrate that foreign sponsorship was essential to sustain the living of many church leaders in the early times when local offerings were forbidden and limited. Today, proficient outside speakers are still popular for providing spiritual stimulation and authenticity to particular theological stances. For example, foreign ministers are often asked to preach on offerings, which would have been perceived as immoral if overemphasized by local clergy.

For maintaining the palatial church buildings left by pre-1950 missionary agencies, TSPM clergy also do not shy away from revealing their connections to foreign denominations and patrons. For example, one of the historical church buildings in Shanghai went through a major remodel in 2010, and the clergyman told me all the materials were from England and they received help from the British Anglican Church, although he refused to comment on the exact amount and process of funding (Interview No. 10).

Today, in many cases foreign donations 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 their leadership. This is true for both registered and unregistered church leaders. The ability to bring in extra cash or skilled preachers is critical for a local lay worker to stand out from his or her colleagues, when most Chinese churches are struggling to deal with various forms of government interference in their financial and recruiting strategies. For example, preaching Tenth Offering is still considered taboo because the authorities believe it is a violation of people's right not to give offerings to the church (Interview No. 1). Therefore, Chinese churches in general would prefer to receive aid if the conditions permit.

2.4.3 Unregistered Groups: There Is Nothing to Lose

For unregistered churches, it is in their best interests to participate in transnational activism. Neither rejecting nor accepting aid changes the fact that the government's tolerance of house churches is slim. The church leaders know that the government would never allow them to participate in transnational collaboration and would try to search for illicit money and personnel if it obtains intelligence on it. So the question for the leaders of an unregistered group is simply: Will the benefits of accepting aid outweigh the costs of a crackdown? If the answer is yes (e.g., the church may be able to hide the money or missionaries from a search successfully), church leaders would be very likely to choose rebellious behavior.

From the point of view of churches, this behavior structure enhances the necessity of participating in a TAN's backdoor operations, 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. This suggests that the capacity of backdoor listing moves, such as hiding

foreigners as tourists or teachers in the life of a busy city, 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, since existing policies already took away their rights to be "further" punished. They already are used to a nomadic church life, moving from location to location, a member's home to another apartment, and they quickly recover from police raids. Unless the ARA decides to permanently imprison key participants, it is reasonable for resolute and well-connected church leaders to keep participating in illicit transnational collaboration.

2.4.4 Government's Threat Becomes "Cheap Talk"

The situation becomes more complicated if the aid goes to a registered church. Ideally, the government would be less likely to object to a foreign aid proposal if it targets a registered population. The registered group would also make its choice of receiving or rejecting the aid based on the expectation of the government's behavior. However, allowing foreign involvement indicates a shift of official policy and it may also provoke a 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 rejects the 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 does not allow it; and the church rejecting the aid when actually the government does not plan to stop it.

For a registered church, the reasoning is like that for an unregistered congregation, except for two critical points. The church is less vulnerable to state crackdown because it has 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 a TSPM pastor using his cell phone to call the police chief to explain the situation of multiple "foreigners" who had appeared in his jurisdiction. There have also been several TSPM clergy who have shown me their multiple titles to political institutions: a representative status on the local CPPCC, for example, demonstrates that this person has obtained official approval from the Party's United Front Work system.[16] Second, the institutional protection

comes with responsibility. It is against the TSPM's self-interest to stand on the opposition side of government policy. Therefore, the church wants the aid and does not worry about the consequences, but it would see resonating with the government position as a plus.

For a corporatist government, its highest priority is to synchronize state and social groups' actions, based on national interests (Unger & Chan, 1995). The worst situation for a government happens when a legal coalition goes behind its back to accept aid. The second worst case is when the government is going to open up, but the leader of a legal church fails to recognize the unspoken willingness to change. Either case represents a failure of coordination, and therefore of leadership. This is a typical "battle of the 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) indicate, a "battle of the sexes" structure increases the possibility of "cheap talk," when participants realize that two strategic pairs are almost equally possible and desirable, and therefore the first one to execute or to signal the will to execute the action has the first-mover advantage. As in the case of the TSPM, clergy may choose to accept illicit aid without asking consent from the government because they know that the official restriction is just cheap talk (Farrell & Rabin, 1996).

The difference in preferences induces distinct behavior patterns of government in relation to the two kinds of churches. To the government, it is evident that the unregistered church would behave in the opposite direction of its interest, while a registered church would be more likely to respect government policy. Therefore, without knowing what exactly a church would do, it is reasonable for the government to choose restraint in response to registered groups and repression in response to unregistered groups. After a few rounds of interaction, the government may simply punish whatever unregistered churches are doing, while tolerating anything registered churches propose to do. Borrowing Rapoport's words, the psychological expectation may motivate players to be 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; Rapoport, 1967, pp. 81–84). When there are always some churches that want to be exploiters or heroes, the government has serious coordination problems. From the behavior of the governments of Chile, Venezuela, Israel, and Palestine to their dissident groups, Stephen M. Shellman finds that levels of government repression are affected not

only by the hostility of opposition, but also by the sequences and contexts of the interactions between the two sides (Shellman, 2006, pp. 73–74).

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 a government official's decision on aid is not as easy as making a phone call to an ARA office, first because not every clergyman has the connections to ask this kind of bold question directly. Second, the answer from the ARA office would definitely be "no" while the possibility of welcoming outside funding always exists in money-thirsty local politics.[17] In a Chinese version of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," tacit permission is a common practice for getting around an unpopular policy in local Chinese politics (O'Brien & Li, 1999). Registered churches have institutional advantages in winning tacit permission because first, government officials expect they would respect the policy "red line," and second, even if registered churches decide to go behind their backs, it is much easier for them to pretend nothing serious has happened or to explain this backdoor move as a harmless "exception" to their superiors. Both scenarios have been observed in my fieldwork and are further discussed in Chap. 4.

Notes

1. 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 to violations of religious freedom in their resident nations. However, the critical strategic difference between conventional TAN and religious TAN highlighted in this project is that the advocacy approach explicitly excludes state-based agencies from its networks. The key reason is that activists in this kind of network try to avoid the "naming and shaming" tendency in state-based reporting and monitoring processes. They believe that 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 that IOs and sympathetic state governments can do to a regime like this.
2. 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 Decree No. 251 of the State Council of the People's Republic of China on October 25, 1998 (Ministry of Commerce, 1998).

3. The original source is the China Charity & Donation Information Center, a platform sponsored by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) of the PRC in order to increase the transparency of the Chinese charity sector.
4. The 100,000 number is from Jason Mandryk (2010, pp. 214–216). The China Aid Association (CAA) notes that the mass deportation of foreign missionaries in the post-Mao period is not uncommon and usually happens before a big political event, such as the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 (Smith, 2007).
5. Relevant evidence of forbidden foreign influence is plentiful in official documents. For example, in the Regulations of Religious Affairs, the highest Chinese law on religion, 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 exchange activities of an economic, cultural or other nature" (Wen, 2004).
6. Nanjing City is the parish of former 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 China and receives annual foreign donations of US$400,000–1,000,000. Bible printing has become an independent "business" separate from the Foundation.
7. Most academic studies of the Chinese Bible are on its pre-1949 history. Studies of the post-1950s Chinese Bible in the English world are extremely rare and they do not touch on political issues (Zetzsche, 1999).
8. The most prominent writers in this branch of the literature are Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly, and Sidney Tarrow. In general, there are four criteria for assessing the 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; and (4) the state's capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam, McCarthy, Zald, & Mayer, 1996, p. 27). A more recent discussion can be seen in Tarrow and Tilly (2007).
9. Against 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, p. 25).

10. The effects of secularism on religious NGOs are powerful and affect scholarly work on religious organizations as well. Sociologist Kurt Alan ver Beek (2000) reviewed the literature on humanitarian and development aid and finds that religious NGOs have been mysteriously overlooked by researchers. He calls religion a "development taboo" in the humanitarian and development aid literature. Quoted from Marie Juul Petersen (2010).
11. For example, the Sadat regime freed all members of the Muslim Brotherhood and offered them legal status as an apolitical NGO, but they refused (Abdelrahman, 2007, pp. 128–133).
12. BTJ is a popular international evangelical movement, which refers to the Crusades in the eleventh to thirteenth century, but stresses non-violence. The Chinese version of BTJ is to emphasize the geographic significance of China to Central Asia and the Middle East, and therefore the responsibility of Chinese Christians to fulfill this historic destiny (Xin, 2009, pp. 108–109, 134–136).
13. Almost every underground missionary I interviewed has the experience of hiding or escaping from police research and raids. 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 locked door, which is specifically designed to stop a raid and give time to illicit workers and missionaries to escape. Interview No. 99, July 12, 2011.
14. Interview No. 98, August 21, 2011.
15. The concept of embeddedness is raised by sociologist Mark Granovetter's work about economic policy and was introduced into political science by Robert Putnam (2000) in his seminal work on American political participation, *Bowling Alone*. This phenomenon is well documented, particularly in the corruption literature, 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 punishments as an opportunity to expand a social group's freedom, because Chinese religious law itself is designed to constrain, not protect religious groups. The original concept can be seen in Granovetter (1985).
16. All participants of the CPPCC are invited only. The Chinese Communist Party selects individuals it can trust to represent groups that supposedly select their own representatives to the CPPCC. The heads of the TSPM are the necessary members of the Chinese Protestant delegations to the national CPPCC. The CPPCC is a grand system that has instituted levels of meetings from the state, to provinces, metropolitan areas, major cities, and counties. As long as there is a government structure, there is the CPPCC.
17. The monetary relationship between Christians and the local government is full of possibilities. The Amity Foundation is an example showing that even

the central government can be bought. Local governments want more investment, tax, and aid when Christians have the means to provide them. One possibility is the investment brought by Christian-owned companies. For example, one report has said that a Hong Kong–based company announced a US$659 million tourism project in China's northeastern Liaoning province to build a Christian theme park. Similar stories abounded when I interviewed what were called "business Christians" in China. "Businessman plans to build China's first Bible park" *AFP*, November 24, 2009.

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CHAPTER 3

China's Religious Affairs Policy

This chapter introduces the historical analysis of the increase in political restraint on transnational religious activism in China. Two lines of development have occurred in the past 60 years. First, the 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 being transferred and the globally accepted norms of religious freedom seem to be being 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 fails to establish a legalist relation between the state and religion, because the core deadlock, independent social groups' right of association, is unrecognized by the Party's doctrine. The second line of development is the rapid growth of religious populations, especially Protestants and their demand for transnational exchanges and collaboration since the 1990s. While current religious regulation still forbids 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 the existing platform will be crushed immediately by the regime. Yet, control is becoming more

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and more difficult, since the existing framework is viewed as insufficient and outdated even by many state-sponsored churches and frontline officials.

In this historical development, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) has become the poster boy of the Chinese United Front Work Department and the baseline of religious policy toward all religions, even today. These findings lay out the historical foundation to support the basic premises of this book: (1) Chinese religious policy is based on the core agenda of protecting the freedom of government-sponsored groups and oppressing unsponsored groups. (2) Their legal status has become the key standard for local enforcement agencies to treat religious groups. (3) Accepting foreign donations and services has become a tacit breakthrough in this biased religious affairs policy, because all local participants, registered and unregistered, recognize the benefits of evading this restriction.

By observing the increasing number of incidents of disobedience without the state's direct interference and punishment in the past decade, it is reasonable to argue that the government has shown great restraint toward the growing religious activism, although that 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 was little incentive for the regime to tolerate any potential opposition when 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, restraint appeared on the government side.

This chapter shows that the major predicament of religious freedom in China is not the government's failure to meet its constitutional duties. On the contrary, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) takes the Constitution and its legal promises seriously and frontline officials especially take them to heart. The law is created by the CCP with no objections and it has drawn up legal regulations to reflect the ideological and political needs of the regime. The rigid interpretation and despotic political structure mean that frontline 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 jeopardizing this mandated "freedom" already granted to registered groups.

Nevertheless, fully executing the principles and regulations is difficult under current circumstances. Unregistered Christian congregations, for

example, have become three times larger than registered churches, and new religions have emerged as foreigners and migrant workers have moved into Chinese cities; the sanctioned-to-underground ratios of other religions could be even higher. 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 their independence and to grow, propagate, and even collaborate with foreigners.

3.1 Anti-imperialism and the Three-Self Doctrine

Although neither Christianity nor Islam was popular in China before the twentieth century, events like the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864) and various Muslim uprisings in the late nineteenth century reminded political elites that these foreign religions may not be directly sponsored by, but are related to, foreign forces that might threaten the stability and legitimacy of contemporary Chinese authority (Marsh, 2011, p. 158). The key for foreign-imported religions to survive in China was to adopt and indigenize. Protestant Christians (Table 3.1) believed they had done this

Table 3.1 Protestant missions in China before 1949

Sending agency	*Number in China at postwar peak*	*Number in China in 1949*	*Change in %*
Northern Baptist	31	19	−38.7
Congregational	92	54	−41.3
Disciples of Christ	31	18	−41.9
Evangelical and Reformed	24	13	−45.8
Methodist	237	162	−31.6
Northern Presbyterian	241	147	−39.0
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	Average (−45.5%)

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

already, as evidenced by the output of consensus from the international missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910 (Sumiko, 2000). A China Continuation Committee was formed in 1913 to advocate for a coalition to unite different denominations and national backgrounds, leading to the formation of the National Christian Council of China (NCC) in 1922. The work of the 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 (Tiedemann, 2012, pp. 3–8). The NCC–CCC framework included 60% of Chinese Protestant Christians and therefore it became the first target of the CCP's takeover in the 1950s (Cartwright, 1949, pp. 301–305).

The predecessor of the Communist regime was neither friendly nor tolerant of religious activism. Although it is reasonable to assume that the pre-1949 relaxation on Christianity was because both generations of Kuomintang (KMT)'s leadership, Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek, were Protestant Christians, the actual policy of the KMT was not pro-Protestant. In June 1931, the Central Committee of the KMT published the Regulation of Guiding Foreign Religious Organizations (Second Historical Archives of China, 1994, pp. 1030–1032). The target of the Regulation was the foreign-sponsored religious organizations active in engaging Chinese youth, such as the YMCA, which were suspected to be in competition with political parties and accused of "cultural invasion." The Regulation asked all missionary groups to be under the supervision of the KMT and Nationalist government, that their regular meetings should include KMT members, and they could not advocate thinking against the KMT's San-min Doctrine.[1] In addition, without proper registration (registering with the KMT Central Executive Committee and then filing reports to local government), the government could ban the religious organization. However, the Regulation was never fully enforced due to continuing turmoil and conflict in China; only three Chinese Christian organizations were registered. From 1931 to 1949, no foreign-sponsored organization applied for registration and no group was punished (Zhang & Hu, 2001).

The existence of the Regulation proves that militant, intrusive, and corporatist policies toward religious activism are not unique to Communist ideology or because "imperialism" (the United States and the United Kingdom, with alliances to the KMT) was behind those missions, as critics often state. It has been a consistent phenomenon since missionary enterprises and their social work became an important social force in the late

nineteenth century.[2] 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 Officer of the YMCA and the founder of the Red Cross Society of China, in the aftermath of the KMT's northern military campaign. Tai demanded Yui follow three principles of the Party–religious relationship: respect religious freedom, work under the San-min Doctrine, and the YMCA would belong to the Chinese people (Second Historical Archives of China, 1994, pp. 1023–1025). A similar scene occurred 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 the 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 would be protected if it were 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 be free from the control of imperialism. The Party will not wage an anti-religion campaign and will not go into churches to preach Marxist-Leninism. At the same time, the churches should not go on the street to propagate their beliefs. (Zhou, 1984, p. 180)

The principles of the two parties from two ends of the 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 from becoming alienated from the official doctrine, or at least not becoming sympathizers with the opponents' ideology. Both parties accuse Christian social organizations of being agents of imperialism; however, imperialism in this context is closer to a witch-hunting strategy. Both the CCP and the KMT knew that social groups like the YMCA or the CCC were not agents or spies of foreign governments, but they also knew that trying to discredit these foreign-sponsored groups could be propagated as an achievement of "fighting" imperialism and therefore win the nationalist crown.[3] From a self-interest standpoint, these nationalist claims are also beneficial for mid-ranking

Chinese employees and clergy to obtain better promotion opportunities. Co-opting Chinese Christian enterprises, at least on the Protestant side, has been on the agenda of Chinese political elites since the late 1920s.

The history of changing sides from 1949 to 1950 reflects the self-fulfilling prophecy of imperialist accusation. Nationalists and reformists within Christian organizations gradually turned these church-owned enterprises political. Sympathizers in the YMCA and other Christian institutes quickly recognized the legitimacy of the new regime and denounced the old one, despite the caution of many Christian leaders. On the eve of revolution, rival parties tried to win over as many religious institutions as possible to their own causes; the one who won the civil war also won over the most social organizations, including churches. For instance, T. C. Chao (趙紫宸), a world-famous Chinese theologian at the time and Dean of the School of Religion at Yenching University, sent a series of letters to the United States to support the new regime after Beijing was captured by the Red Army.[4] Kindopp and Hamrin (2004) point out that many student organizers of the YMCA become the future backbone of the TSPM's local administration. Ying (2009) found that 12 out of 25 preparatory committee members of the TSPM were from the YMCA system.[5] By the end of 1952, without massive physical coercion, 60% of Chinese Christians had signed a document proclaiming loyalty to the Communist regime and denouncing the foreign missionary societies that had supported them for more than a century.[6]

The carefully crafted "backdoor" collaboration between nationalist Protestants and the CCP was the reason for this successful turnover. In an internal document from the CCP to provinces and cities, Directives of Progressing Religious Reforms 1951, the CCP admitted that the TSPM and other patriotic movements at the time were promoted by the government directly:

> From these and other experiences in the past, it is impossible to expect that an effective reform movement of Protestant or Catholic Christians is self-initiated. 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 participate in the reform. (CPC Central Research Office, 1992, pp. 95–97)

Different from Soviet and other Eastern European nations, where Orthodox churches have long histories and strong social foundations,

Chinese Christian communities are feeble and in many ways are much more easily captured by political forces. CCP leaders have learned from Soviet experiences and added a new twist based on their own experience of fighting the KMT, who had the ideological advantage of persuading Christians to support atheist Communists. As the Soviets helped the schismatic clergy to start a "coup" within the Russian Orthodox Church in 1922, the CCP adopted a similar method in the 1950s and obtained successful results in a shorter time.[7] In the Soviet Union, the government-supported schismatic church continually lost public support and the People's Court released Patriarch Tikhon, the 11th Patriarch of Moscow and of All Russia, who openly condemned the killing of the tsar's family and protested human rights violations under Soviet rule. This unpleasant result forced the Soviet government to give up the plan in 1924 when Lenin died.[8] The CCP instigated some pro-Communist Christians to begin anti-imperialist campaigns and helped them with their propaganda machine and mass mobilization. During the meetings of Zhou Enlai and pro-Communist Christians in 1950, a ten-point document was drafted and revealed at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) on May 20 and mailed to 1000 Christian leaders demanding their support on July 28.

In short, the document, later called *The Way for Chinese Christians in Building New China* or Three-Self Manifesto, highlighted the principles of self-administration, self-support, and self-propagation, but the hidden agenda was to rebuild the leadership of Chinese churches through thought reform. The Three-Self Manifesto signified the beginning of a four-year movement to purge administrations of all Protestant institutions and established churches. After 1950, Wu and his collaborators traveled across China and organized public gatherings in major cities to promote the Manifesto. During the first two months, the self-promoted movement progressed slowly. On September 8, 1950, under Mao's personal order, *People's Daily* published the Manifesto on the front page and had a signed editorial praising this "spontaneous patriotic movement," with a detailed list of 1527 co-signers.[9]

This purging movement combined with the CCP's new wave of anti-imperialist campaigns at the breaking out of the Korean War on June 25, 1950. Before the Chinese army joined the war on October 19, 1950, patriotic campaigns had already been organized throughout the major cities. On October 10, collaborators led the last annual meeting of the CCC (1922–1950), the biggest Protestant association and missionary platform

in China, and published the second version of the Manifesto. While the first version abstractly denounced financial sponsorship from the West, the second added provocative political missions to Chinese churches: patriotic Christians wanted to (1) passionately participate in the movement against America, particularly its aiding of the Korean War; (2) support the government policies on dealing with land reform and anti-revolutionaries; and (3) resolve to reject any temptation from imperialism, helping the government find reactionaries and villains, exposing the plots of the Three-Self movement, and organizing denouncement campaigns in all Christian churches and organizations (Ren, 2007, p. 19).

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 60 years. The Chinese TSPM Committee became the only legal authority for Chinese Protestantism and the first institutional implement of "democratic dictatorship" above Chinese Protestants. The first generation of the TSPM body included 232 representatives from 62 churches and organizations from 18 provincial areas; those organizations had been purged and were forced to follow the political agenda in the Manifesto. The era of "Great China Missions" (Price, 1948) had ended.

There was a four-stage process to transform Protestantism in China between 1950 and 1954 (Vala, 2008). First, a new Protestant collective identity was crafted through correcting three "wrongs" of the old identity: denying the existing political identity assigned by class status; "opiating" the masses with a faulty hegemonic identity; and subordinating them to an organizational identity controlled by foreign imperialists. Second, the system of the TSPM was set up to promote a new collective identity. Third, a new TSPM hegemony was imposed through "thought reform" on church leaders and aligning them with the CCP's atheist agenda. And lastly, Protestantism was monopolized under the TSPM (Vala, 2008, pp. 40–52).

By early 1952, the number of Protestant missionaries had declined from 1800 to 1900 to less than 100.[10] Of those, 40 American missionaries requested to leave but could not obtain travel permits from the Chinese government, and 11 were in prison (Yang, 2008, p. 240). Foreigners in Chinese Christian enterprises became a liability to their

respective organizations and Chinese colleagues and were the subject of anti-American imperialist accusations. In February 1951, the CCP announced the Law for the Punishment of Counterrevolutionaries, under which a few key Protestant leaders were arrested without clear charges ("Law for," 1951). The chilling effect enhanced the speed of the TSPM's purging actions.[11] In April, the 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 the People's Government for Protestant churches is very deliberate and well-considered in every possible way. Article 5 of "The Common Program of the *CPPCC*" guarantees the freedom of religion, and we do indeed enjoy that 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 the government's assistance, that Chinese Christians totally can use our own power to build much better, much purer enterprises and more services to the Chinese people. ("Law for," 1951)

This meeting is an example of how the CCP was able to transform and reconstruct the religious landscape through a united front. First, it made the mission-based churches agree on the formation of the TSPM system. Second, during the meeting, church leaders were forced to learn how "progressive" Christians should act by denouncing their foreign and Chinese colleagues. The list of targets of this denouncement, including two American missionaries, four Chinese leaders, and two national associations, were given by CCP officials to the assigned speakers.[12] This same strategy was repeatedly used in denouncement campaigns over the years: the CCP's United Front Work officials would decide the targets and direction of accusations; pro-Communist Christian leaders (many suspected to be undercover agents) were made examples of for their church members; then mass meetings were organized and followed up with the government's encouragement (newspaper articles and radio programs); finally the appraisal (supervision of Party officials) and punishment (charging the targets with anti-revolutionary crimes) would take place. After the accused leaders were expelled, jailed, or forced to leave, people with the "correct attitudes" would be promoted and gradually took over the organizations (Ying, 2008a, pp. 118–119).

Although the purging process was a success, the Manifesto, denouncement campaigns, and the Three-Self organization had their limitations in taming and co-opting *all* Protestants. The part that Communist sympathizers could take over was the proportion of the community built by foreign missionary agencies. After Beijing joined the Korean War and Washington froze all property and investments in China, all mission-based establishments, church buildings, schools, hospitals, publishers, and charitable organizations that used to be administrated by the joint forces of Chinese clergy and foreign missionaries now proclaimed their loyalty to the TSPM and the political force behind it. However, the united front of the "progressive" Chinese Protestants and the CCP now faced a problem: the local churches that were built by the Chinese had never received sponsorship from foreigners. The imperialist accusation had no legitimacy for them. The enterprises captured by the TSPM were the mainline Protestant missions motivated by a social gospel and liberal theology. Pentecostal, charismatic, and independent evangelical preachers had their own followers and they did not have large amounts of properties and organizations, as mainline social gospel Protestants did (Vala, 2008, p. 33). Therefore, the economic sanctions and government embargo had little effect on them. 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 a second round of political repression. Watchman Nee (Ni Tuo-sheng) of the Christian Assembly (a local-grown, nationwide church system) asked his colleagues to follow the policy of "Not listening, Not believing, and Not spreading" toward the Manifesto.[13] He was imprisoned in 1952 and remained in prison until his death in 1972 (Hunter & Chan, 2007, pp. 121–123). Wang Mingdao was the pastor of one of the largest non-mission churches, the Christian Tabernacle, and a famous evangelist in China. He criticized the participants of the TSPM as "non-believers" on several occasions and in an article in 1955 (Wang, 1955). Pastor Wang, his wife, and 18 church members were arrested in 1955 (Xi, 2010, pp. 200–201). 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 on staying in prison, until he was "tricked" out of the facility in 1980 (Li, 2008, p. 21; Wang & Min, 2002, p. 10). While mission-based establishments were fully controlled by the TSPM, independent grassroots churches showed resilience to state-sponsored repression until the last minute. Nee and Wang became martyrs among Chinese Christians. Many house church congregations I visited upheld 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 suffered and how many of them survived in this period. Yet limited statistics show independent churches were significant Protestant forces at this time and their influence continues to be underestimated for political purposes today. An estimated one-quarter of all Chinese Protestants do not belong to mission-founded, mainline churches and TSPM strategy has little effect on them (Hunter & Chan, 2007; Vala, 2008, p. 34). Chinese official statistics excluded this group of Protestant Christians and claimed there were only 700,000 Protestant Christians in 1949. Table 3.2 summarizes the key figures of known statistics on Protestant Christians from different sources. Note that there is a

Table 3.2 Statistics of Chinese Protestant Christians: 1900s–2010s

	Missionaries	*Missionary agencies*	*Clergy*	*Churches/ meeting points*	*Christian population*
1900s	1296	61			80,000
1910s	5144				161,000
1920s	8000	150			400,000
1930s	4478[a]		430,669[a]		650,000
1940s	4062[c]				
1949	*3500*	*130*	*100,000*	*10,000*	*700,000*[b] *1,000,000*[c]
1956	0	0	0	0	800,000
1970s	(Cultural revolution)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1982			5900[b]		3,000,000[b]
1991					4,500,000[b]
1995			18,000[b]	37,000[b]	10,000,000[b]
2010s					*23,000,000*[b] *70,000,000*[c]

Source: *Mou Zhong-jian, Zhang Jian* 2000, *General History of Chinese Religion [Zhongguo zong jiao tong shi]*, Social Science Academy Press (China): 1146. *Jiang Ping (ed.), 1996, China Today: The United Front, Contemporary China Press*: 271.

[a] *1936 Handbook of the Christian Movement in China: vi.*

[b] Yang (2006) gets the numbers from Document No. 19 and other official publications (Yang, 2006, p.103).

[c] According to Ying Fuk-tsang, the difference between the two numbers is because the "underground" congregations were often excluded by official statistics (2008b, pp. 218–219). The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life estimated over 67 million Christians, which included 35 million independent Protestants, 23 million Three-Self Protestants, 9 million Catholics, and 20,000 Orthodox Christians. http://www.pewforum.org

300,000-person gap between the government-declared number and a scholar survey in 1949. American historian Kenneth S. Latourette (1970) collected data from 18 mainline denominations and concluded that these denominations alone had around 750,000 Christians in 1948. Rev. Frank Price, noted American Presbyterian missionary (Southern) to China for over 50 years, made a similar estimation (790,000) from the same group of mainline denominations (Ying, 2009). Recent Chinese government publications still maintain the 700,000 number; however, the State Bureau of Religion Affairs (BRA; the predecessor of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, SARA) conducted a survey for internal reference and it mentioned the number was 1,005,699 in 1950. 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 the TSPM system or were classified as cult religions afterward (e.g. Christian Assembly led by Watchman Nee has been banned since 1952), their exclusion from official statistics as well as from the right to exist was a logical choice for the authorities.

This discrimination experienced by grassroots Christians remains strong even today, despite the fact that they have never been collaborators of imperialism or of self-governance and self-reliance. This contradiction supports my understanding of Chinese religious affairs: the policy, the source of repression, is the "distance" between churches and the regime; the self-governance nature of grassroots churches made the leaders of the CCP uneasy and resulted in repression. A foreign connection or "imperialist" perception may accelerate the degree of distance, but it is not the core reason for governmental interference. The interference and harsh repression continued even when mission-based Protestant enterprises were all dissolved or nationalized after 1954. The persecutions of non-mission-founded churches demonstrate that full control of autonomous social groups was the real agenda of the anti-imperialist project. This overreaching control was the origin of the underground house churches, which were, not surprisingly, flourishing in rural areas which lacked foreign mission work and TSPM presence.[14]

In a broader historical context, established Christian enterprises in urban areas were taken away by the state and became the foundation of registered churches that re-emerged later, in the mid-1980s, while the grassroots churches and individuals purged out of established churches in the 1950s became the backbone of house church networks emerging in the countryside during the late 1970s. Further explanation of these processes will be

provided in the next section. As Vala (2008) has pointed out, the state-sponsored TSPM campaign created an unexpected result: the Chinese Christian community was transferred from a hierarchical structure led by top-down, foreign-educated and -sponsored clergy stratums, to a more bottom-up system which was full of center-less, grassroots networks.

3.2 Christian Disobedience in the Reform Era

Following economic liberation and rapid development, public uprisings and protests became common in China in the 2000s; in the latter half of Hu Jintao's term, more and more *weiquan* cases (維權; rights protection) were fought not only in the streets but also on the Internet. People began to notice that many of the civil rights activists and lawyers were Christians or had close connections to the Christian community. In 2005, the magazine *Asiaweek* selected 14 Chinese *weiquan* lawyers to be the "People of the Year," and more than half of them were believed to be Christians. Some of them publicly organized an action group called the Chinese Christian Civil Defense Team in 2006, including well-known political dissidents like Gao Zhisheng (高智晟)、Wang Yi (王怡)、Li Boguang (李柏光)、Teng Biao (滕彪)、and Fan Yafeng (范亞峰) (Ying, 2015).

Although the state-owned media blocked all discussion about their cases and related public actions, a network of concerned citizens was able to sneak in controversial topics to the public and generated enough social attention to put pressure on the government through social media and a few liberal news outlets such as *Southern Weekly* and *Southern Metropolis Daily*. For example, Christian law professor Gao Zhisheng and other legal activists participated in and provided legal consultation to the villagers of Taishi in Guangdong province to recall corrupt village officials in July 2005. In August of that year, the recall was denied, and the event turned into hunger strikes and street demonstrations, and eventually led to a full-scale violent confrontation with the authorities on September 12, 2005. In the meantime, *Southern Metropolis Daily* published a full investigation article about Taishi village, and local social media and international attention began to boil up regarding this small village in Southern China, only 13 hours from Hong Kong by bus. The incident was the country's first campaign to oust an active official and it turned into a transnational movement, including local activists, international news reporters, professionals from Beijing law firms, and scholars from nearby universities, actively exposing the lies and persecutions against villagers and activists.[15] Although

the recall failed, and the government still denied any wrongdoing, this incident and many similar events afterward marked the beginning of the New Civil Citizens Movement that occupied the front pages during the mid-2000s, until the mass arrest of rights lawyers on July 8, 2015 (Xu, 2012).

The New Civil Citizens Movement is not a faith-based movement by any standard, but many of its members are clearly inspired by the idea of religious freedom, which is seen as an inseparable part of the freedoms necessary for defending a growing civil society and even for democracy. For example, Guo Feixiong (郭飛雄), an award-winning human rights defender and one of the jailed activists from the Taishi incident, and the law firm he worked for were among the few in China who were willing to defend Falun Gong and other underground Christian believers in court. He gave an interview in Washington, DC in 2006 and explained why he took the risk to defend those sensitive cases: "there is a boarder freedom behind Christianity, which is religious freedom. Religious freedom consists of freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of organization. If religious freedom can be expanded in China and people's religious activities can be not obstructed, it can become the primitive, the simplest training for democracy" ("Guo Feixiong," 2006).

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 studies on collective resistance of civil disputes reveal that the costs of repression are rising, and the urgency of finding effective management strategies is evident for the government to deal with the growing unrest in society. In 1993, there were 730,000 people involved in 8700 instances. By 2003, these numbers had risen to 3.07 million people in 58,500 cases, almost seven times higher than ten years earlier (Cai, 2010). The average number of participants in each instance was 84 in 1993 and 51 in 2003; only 16.1% of the cases in 1993 had more than 100 participants, and the percentage of large-scale instances was only 12%. These statistics indicate that small-scale social unrest is far more popular and prevailing; organizing a public protest in China is not as costly as it used to be. Scholars find that the key factors in organizing successful public resistance are to gain intervention from the central authorities and to seek support from alliances inside or outside the political system (Cai, 2010; O'Brien, 2009, 2013). The institutional connections of a protesting group, either having quiet supporters inside the Party or sympathizers in the state-run media, for example, provide it with better chances to invite central government to intervene in its disputes with local authorities.

Since public protesting is strictly forbidden, a defiant yet cooperative approach, what China study expert Kevin O'Brien called "rightful resistance," is more popular (O'Brien, 1996). This trait of social activism often features citizens legitimizing their causes by making use of the CCP's own laws, policies, or rhetoric in framing their protests, not publicly opposing them. In the religious field, this is characterized by reference to the Chinese Constitution and the Party's "religious freedom policy," such as Document No. 19, and avoiding language "politicizing" the issue; in the secular field, a similar apolitical method is often chosen and legal litigations and petitions have been seen as the most common practices against the government's infringements of basic human rights.

The numbers of legal litigations and petitions rose between 2000 and 2010. The number of civil grievance petitions submitted to central government was 297,900 in 1984, began to rise in 1994, and doubled to 603,000 in 2005 (Cai, 2010, p. 23). The CCP realizes the significance of these growing demands and has adopted a series of measures to address various social grievances. After 2000, there was a series of academic studies funded by the State Council and different CCP organizations on various social problems, ranging from state-owned enterprise workers, religion, and migrant workers, to land usage in rural areas. In addition, the "manage by law" principle was further emphasized under the Hu Jintao government. Although he adopted swift and violent measures against the Tibetan uprisings in 1989 and his "martial law" approach won him the trust of top CCP elites. Hu relied on legal approaches more than any other leader in modern Chinese history (Ewing, 2003). The State Council issued a series of documents to regulate the use of force when confronting public gatherings, demonstrations, protests, and petitions. A civil resistance action has to be proven to be "political," "attempting to overthrow the socialist system," "threatening the integrity of territories," "destroying important infrastructures of facilities," or "supported by overseas forces," and then the use of force is permitted (Cai, 2010, p. 50). An unexpected result of this restriction was that there were numerous reports of local administrators hiring thugs and private security personnel to deal with dissidents, a situation that civil rights lawyer Chen Guangcheng and many other activists have faced. The phenomenon also indicated that violent repression from state organizations has become more the exception than the norm (Cai, 2010, p. 51).

3.2.1 Christian "Rightful" Resistance

After economic booms in the coastal regions, migrant workers brought their faith and networks to the 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 who want more space and resources for their worship, propagation, and access to foreign groups with advanced experience and resources for organization, social outreach, and evangelism. Many TSPM churches hold five sections of services on Sundays to satisfy the growing demand, because the government forbids them to build new churches or expand their original buildings. When a church invites a well-known foreign speaker to organize a workshop, lay workers from all neighboring congregations crowd into the place for the message.

This is a source of confrontation in church–state relations today. The church wants more freedom to organize and propagate due to rising local demands and global engagement, while the state is afraid of the consequences and demands that they be halted. For Christianity, the conflict is stronger because the foreign involvement and therefore the concerns are manifest. The United Front Workers Department (UFWD)-led TSPM system makes the confrontation even more severe, because only a small portion of the Christian community is restrained by the rules. In fact, the TSPM movement and anti-religious campaigns before 1979 turned those foreign mission–built, established urban Protestant enterprises into registered churches that re-emerged in the mid-1980s. The political movements had pushed disobedient Christians underground and they returned as grassroots churches in the countryside during the late 1970s. While international engagement for all registered groups was restrained and growing slowly (they had to act like law-abiding citizens), underground groups welcomed international engagement with little holdback and global resources helped the massive growth of house church congregations in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Evidence can be found in the changing distribution of house church congregations: Henan Province and Anhui Province only ranked 7th and 10th, respectively, in 1949 (out of 18 provinces) but have had the largest Protestant population since the 1980s (about 48% of all Protestant Christians in 1997; Ying, 2008a). Henan Province and Anhui Province are still among the least-developed regions and are the hometowns of many migrant workers. When Christianity was under great repression in the

urban centers, these workers' hometowns become relatively safe places to practice the faith.[16] After the urban regions become more developed and demanded more workers, faith in the form of house church gatherings flowed into urban regions as the migrant workers, with their connections to global patrons, moved into the cities.

The challenge brought by increasing numbers of Christians is twofold. First, registered churches are still strictly limited by the authorities in terms of location, budget, outside donations, propagation, and a host of issues related to freedom of the group to act autonomously. Although a registered church's clergy usually can decide most of the daily affairs, and officials rarely check on regular operations, the important decisions of the church, such as assuming a pastoral position, have to be reported to the TSPM regional chair, who reports to the local Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs (DERA) office and the provincial-level Administration of Religious Affairs (ARA).

Second, unregistered congregations, an estimated 60–70% of the total Protestant population, are often discriminated against by the legal establishment. Due to past persecutions and denouncement campaigns, most senior house church leaders believe that TSPM clergy are traitors. Fundamentalists also reject the liberal theology popular in TSPM seminaries and rostrums. Most confrontations occurred from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, when the BRA and state organizations stood firmly on the side of the TSPM and persecuted non-members. Based on the long history of rivalry, the Chinese Protestant community was divided into two confrontational parts, which cannot be resolved in a short time.

In many Chinese cities today, the local TSPM system is restrained by the informal SARA decree of "one-city, one church" and is overwhelmed by the demands of the Christian community. There are reportedly 100 unregistered meeting points or unregistered churches currently in operation. Many are independent, self-reliant, and rarely connected to the popular house church systems developed from Henan and Anhui Provinces; simultaneously, they are well connected to groups, trends, and norms outside China. Additionally, they are not persecuted or harassed by TSPM clergy or local officials as frequently as the house churches were in the 1980s. Some unregistered urban churches are even run by graduates and certificated staff from officially sanctioned seminars or training workshops. Leaders of these unregistered churches have no strong hostility to the registration system and the TSPM establishment, due to the relatively peaceful history between the two sides.

For instance, there is a 200-person unregistered church with the code name "Shining Star" operating near a university campus in a provincial-level city.[17] The leader is a TSPM-licensed pastor who maintains a close relationship with one of the two registered churches, although the connection is kept private. The church developed out of a set of very successful meeting points supervised by the pastor when he was an intern at a registered church. The church's opening in 2007 received a few police visits, but never faced serious confrontation or harassment, unlike similar urban house churches in Shanghai, Beijing, and Chengdu.[18] 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.[19] The pastor constantly visits foreign churches and vice versa; signs of strong foreign influence and sponsorship are obvious in this local house church. Furthermore, there has never been an intervention from the authorities on its transnational collaboration, which is unique—most urban house churches have been warned or stopped by the authorities for their transnational engagement.[20] The reasons they can do so will be discussed in Chap. 5.

3.3 Sinicization in Xi's Time

Nonetheless, the openness and transnationality of this kind of urban congregation challenged the Party's red lines, while the local authorities were reluctant to punish such behavior because their members were mostly revenue-making urban elites. Since the 2010 Arab Spring civil revolutions broke out in the Middle East, the central government has started to grow cautious about new religious establishments among the urban population and has gradually tightened control. Since 2012 when Xi Jinping came to power, the extent of religious persecution and repression started mounting, with the return of a rather satirical slogan, "sinicization of religion"—after 60 more years of political effort, some religions are still too "foreign" to the CCP leadership (Yang, 2018).

The "sinicization of Christianity" was suggested by a group of Chinese religious scholars as a remedy to mounting church–state problems in 2012, and the term was adopted by the authorities and has turned into a massive state-led political movement of sinicizing all religions. In his April 2016 speech at the National Religious Work Conference, Xi Jinping asserted that united front work cadres must "actively guide the adaptation

of religions to socialist society, an important task is supporting China's religions' persistence in the direction of sinicization." Since then, the Islamic Association of China has initiated a "Four Enters" campaign, intended to "promote Islam's adaptation to a socialist society by requiring mosques to hold national flag raising ceremonies, hold special study lectures and speech contests at mosques, and conduct other activities intended to raise political consciousness" (Bowie & Gitter, 2018). Reports have indicated that a massive number of minority people have been forced to enter "re-education camps" in Xinjiang to re-learn Mandarin and Chinese culture as well as patriotic doctrines in order to "be more like Chinese."

For Christianity, the measure seems to be less dramatic because large-scale "sinicization" projects have been going on for decades. TSPM is one of the continuing efforts that aim at separating Chinese Christians from their historical roots and contemporary outside influences. After 2012, the top leadership started re-evaluating the current framework, asking loyalists to do more. Local cadres are creating new initiatives, and one ongoing event in Zhejiang demonstrates the political intent of this sinicization discourse well. In February 2014, Zhejiang's provincial government issued a policy of "Three Rectifications and One Demolition" (三改一拆), justified as a plan to remodel old housing, factories, illegal structures, and unofficial billboards, in order to modernize and improve aesthetics and local amenities. Protestants quickly realized that they were the main targets. The authorities argued that demolished church buildings and removed crosses were built without legal approval and their styles were incompatible with the modern look of Chinese cities (Ying, 2016).

However, most of the targeted churches were considered legal as defined by UFWD policy.[21] For decades, the Zhejiang UFWD had established a close relationship with Christians, and many places of worship had been legalized, either becoming members of the TSPM or registering under local Religious and Ethnic Affairs Committees. Registration then required church leaders to meet weekly with UFWD officials. Understandably, complaints of religious repression rarely come from these established churches, which compare themselves favorably with independent house churches and underground foreign mission-related congregations. The latter, of course, are strongly opposed as a basic CCP policy.

For rule-following Zhejiang Christians, the "rectifications" and demolitions came as an unwelcome surprise and believers tried every channel, including complaints to the CPPCC, group petitions to the UFWD and to central-level officials, as well as signing open letters to the media. Similar

actions never occurred with TSPM congregations because such open criticism is considered "unpatriotic" by the authorities. However, all these legal and consultative efforts failed. Many incidents turned into confrontations and street protests that led to arrests and even more conflict. At the end of 2016, Zhejiang's Protestant Christian Council disclosed that more than 1500 churches and crosses had been demolished or removed. Moreover, some human rights groups believed that this might herald a nationwide anti-Christian movement, with authorities increasingly treating the growing numbers of Christians as a front for foreign forces intent on destabilization ("Guo Baosheng," 2015).

The demolitions and protests in Zhejiang are embarrassing for the central UFWD because the national strategy of uniting religious populations for development and stability has not changed. The new regulations required local cadres to follow the principles of united front work and for cadres to take the lead in "making friends" with these challenging groups.

What *has* changed are the practices of local cadres, who have reset local priorities based on their personal interpretations of political trends. One piece of observational evidence among many other personal reports is that no neighboring provinces have adopted Zhejiang's campaign emphasis. Since it began, TSPM's frustration with the UFWD has grown. Well-known official church leaders have publicly stood up to criticize the provincial government, while one key figure even resigned from his position in a municipal CPPCC (Yu, 2015). The suffering in Zhejiang also has been widely publicized via unofficial news channels and personal networks, including internationally. Clearly, such campaigns weaken united front work and dampen the already shaky credibility of the UFWD.

3.4 Two Lines of Historical Development

This chapter illustrates these two lines of development from the 1950s to the 2010s. Religious affairs policy based on the TSPM is unchanged because of consideration of the 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 the united front framework. "Democratic centralism" especially creates a bureaucratic system that causes officials to over-interpret the policy and become extremely conservative and cautious about change. The administrations of Deng, Jiang, and Hu all tried to

loosen up some components of the system through institutional reforms. Deng agreed that Party cadres should not execute an atheist agenda in the reform era; Jiang provided more efficient and professional administrators and allowed the TSPM to participate in social services; and Hu further supported these strategies with legal procedures and hoped to induce more benign interaction between government and churches. Because the leadership of religious affairs is controlled by the same faction of the Party (i.e., the UFWD) and the discourse of religious freedom has changed very little (freedom from religion), the effects of these institutional reforms were limited. Xi Jinping's remedy to the problem is to strengthen the old united front work system, with more staff, more regulations, and more dogmatic treatment of religions.

Nevertheless, Chinese society has changed dramatically in the past 30 years. Christians as well as other religious groups have become significant social forces that cannot be ignored or simply repressed. The 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 the unregistered population. Yet the results are disappointing, because the limited freedom is barely attractive, and the price of violent crackdown becomes higher and higher each day due to the growing Christian population and international pressure. For sanctioned clergy, the existing religious affairs policy is unfair because they cannot accept foreign aid and services, while unregistered churches are almost always "free" to do so. Therefore, they cooperate 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 by unregistered congregations have become two major sources of growing transnational Protestant activism. By observing increasing disobedience without severe state 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 tactical and varies significantly across groups and locations. Dahl's thesis of opposition is largely correct. Since the 2000s, Protestant activism is no longer trivial and is now equipped with national networks, mass congregations, financial resources, and communication technology; restraint on transnational collaboration is becoming more and more visible yet is still regional due to the rigidity of management institutions.

Notes

1. The San-min Doctrine or Three People's Principles is the political philosophy of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, which aims at promoting Chinese nationalism (Principle of Mínzú), democracy (Principle of Mínquán), and Welfare (Principle of Mínshēng). The platform is highlighted by the KMT as the highest political guideline against the radical socioeconomic reform promoted by Communism, but the fundamental ideas are shared by both CCP and KMT. In fact, Sun proposes "supervised democracy" as the transitional period before constitutional democracy, which is like the democratic dictatorship of Lenin in the way that it legalizes the party–state system and strips civil and political rights away from regular citizens. Dr. Wang Shih-Chieh (王世傑), French-educated constitutional expert and congressional representative of the KMT, argues that "supervised democracy" is a single-party system but is still democracy, since its framework puts legal restrictions on the party and itemizes the boundaries of the party's power (Wang & Chien, 1997).
2. Anthony C. Yu (2003, pp. 1–20, 2005) has argued 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 the 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 the Chinese state is not religious and always acts neutrally.
3. Lutz (1976, pp. 395–416) points out that both the CCP and the leftists of the KMT passionately engage in the anti-Christian movement through initiating and coordinating protests, providing support and publicity that are crucial to the Educational Rights Movement, which aims at taking the administrative power of Christian schools and universities back from Western missionary agencies. A similar observation can also be found in Lewis Hodous (1930, pp. 487–497).
4. 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. In his letters in 1949, including "Days of Rejoicing in China," "Christian Churches in Communist China," "Christianity and Crisis," and "Red Peiping after Six Months," he praises the discipline of the Red Army and believes Christians would receive fair treatment after the CCP seized power.

5. Many believe that many Protestant Christians who actively support the denouncement campaigns and the establishment of the 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, admitted that he was an undercover Communist member when Red Guards tortured him during the Cultural Revolution.
6. Both academic and church sources confirm the surprisingly high number of Christians signing the document. It should be noted that the CCP applied a relaxed social policy in the beginning period of the new republic. The harsh political campaign did not happen until 1957 (Anti-Rightist Movement). This view is from Ying and Leung (1996); Leung (2002, pp. 165–168, 2006); Ren (2007, p. 20).
7. By accusing Patriarch Tikhon of instigating a coup against the government and trying to establish a new schismatic church (Marsh, 2011, pp. 58–59).
8. Stalin began 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 crosses and bells, and an "anti-religious carnival" vandalizing church properties (Marsh, 2011, p. 61).
9. Signed editorials must have the authorization of the CCP. CCP literature published later also recognizes and shows pride in this resolute action (Ren, 2007).
10. Catholics remained resilient a little longer. The number of Catholic missionaries dropped from 6000 to less than 1500 in 1952 (Bush, 1970, p. 1956; Marsh, 2011).
11. Two famous cases are Methodist Missionary F. Olin Stockwell and Chen Wenyuan (陳文淵), Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in China. Stockwell was charged with espionage activities and deported in 1953 (Stockwell, 1953, pp. 72–85). Chen's case can be seen in Ying (2008a). 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.
12. For example, Presbyterian missionary and Chief Pastor of Shanghai International Church Frank W. Price was accused as an "American imperialist" and forced to leave China in October 1952 (Ying, 2008a, pp. 88–89).
13. It is also called Assembly Hall or Little Flock in other writing; *Juhuisuo* (Ying, 2008a, p. 42).
14. Vala (2008) makes a similar observation and believes that the resistance demonstrated by Protestant dissidents in the 1950s became the "seeds" and inspiration of Protestant social activism in the reform era.
15. The government insisted that Yang Maodong (pen name of Guo Feixiong) was the person to blame for this violent confrontation. For the official

interpretation of the incident, see "A true story about Taishi village incident" (2005).

16. Without large-scale anthropological work, this suspicion remains unproved. However, all the churches I contacted have similar stories that the origins were when some elders from the cities began talking about the gospel and then started small fellowship or bible study groups.
17. To protect the identities of interviewees, real names and locations are kept confidential.
18. Interview No. 78, April 20, 2011.
19. *Ibid*. The interviewee refused to identify the amount of financial support received from foreign churches or denominations, only noting that exchanges are very frequent. However, from the interior layout, forms of service, and theological stances of the church, it is evident that the leadership has received a significant amount of foreign influence. From participant observation in the field, all transnational exchanges, even an hour-long day visit, involve a certain amount of financial sponsorship. It is a common social norm that foreign visitors pay all board, lodging, and travel expenses as a gift to local churches; Chinese visitors' travel expenses are often compensated or directly paid by foreign agencies. The amount of money involved could range from a few thousand RMBs to enough for a building project. The unequal duties reflect the difference in economic status between Chinese Christians in general and 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.
20. For example, a series of "outdoor worship" services occurred in major cities as well as a confrontation between government and house church leaders about attending the World Christian Conference in 2010.
21. The demolished crosses were all owned by member churches of the TSPM, which is registered under the SARA and supervised by the UFWD (Ying, 2016).

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CHAPTER 4

United Front Work and Religious Affairs Institutions

People have seen a different China today following 30 years of economic liberalization. Have the "Reform and Openness" since 1979 changed the nature of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) religious affairs policy based on the united front work framework? Official CCP documents refuse to recognize that there has been any change in the fundamental doctrines of democratic dictatorship; the new 2017 version of Regulations of Religious Affairs further strengthens control by introducing an even harder and more complicated registration and punishment system. The new leadership persists in the direction set in the early 1950s and has allowed only institutional, not political, reform in the reform era. This reform focuses on collective leadership at the center and diffuses more power to private and local sectors. These strategies ultimately create a dual state–religion relation: at the center and principal level, religious freedom is narrowly defined as personal "hobbies" in bad taste; they are not agreeable under the Party's atheist doctrine, but they are tolerable as long as believers do not try to organize and expand their activities out of a united front work framework. In practice, both the orthodox doctrine of religious freedom and the united front work framework are evaded by constant rule-breaking behavior. Opportunists inside the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and local officials show remarkable restraint toward these troublemakers. On the one hand, religious policy seems rigid and unchanged: officials constantly request that religious practitioners join

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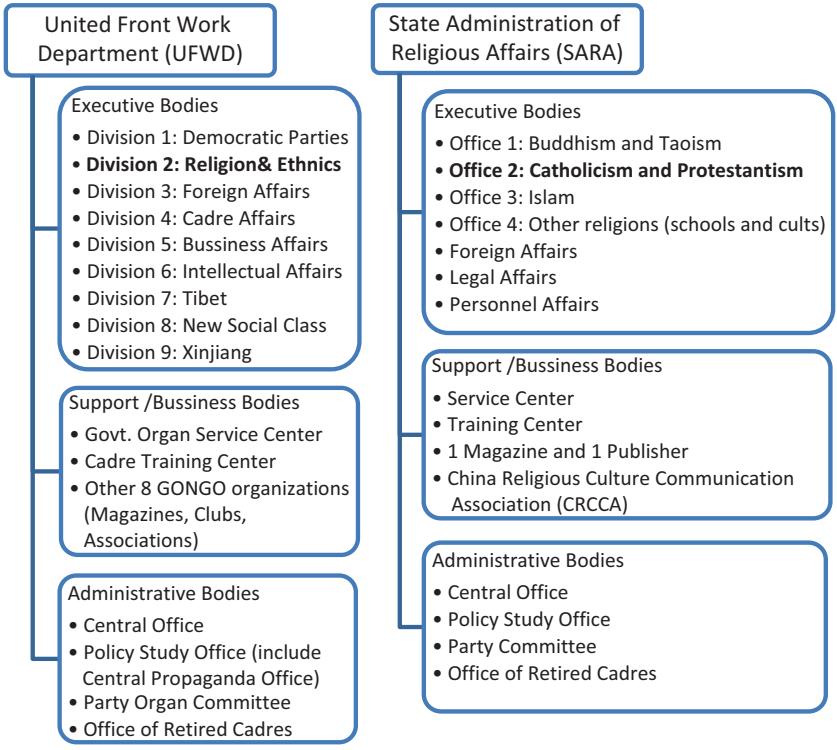
registered groups and obey their leadership. On the other hand, the implementation of the policy reveals a totally different picture: the system tolerates most illegal missionaries and underground congregations with their uncensored evangelism.

4.1 The Source of Rigidity: Religious Affairs Institutions

Why the rigidity? A quick answer from the literature is the authoritarian decision-making structure based on the doctrine and system of "democratic dictatorship," which gives the Party organ superiority over corresponding state institutions (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Organizational structures of religious affairs management



Source: The author

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" ("Constitution," 1982).

Although the constitution 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' unconditional obedience, in which "individuals obey organizations, minority obeys majority, the lower level obeys the higher level, all party members obey the party center," is implemented in all formal organizations, from the CCP itself to "consultative" organizations in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC; Pu, 2005).

As political scientist Kenneth Lieberthal (1995, p. 179) has pointed out, one key feature of Chinese politics under the 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 wants and execute the policy accordingly. Looking up 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 with ruling bodies separated from professional bureaucrats (Peterson, 1966), CCP members work in every public office and monitor every step of the state's daily functions. "Big Brother" is watching every step of a government official fulfilling his/her duties and Party members do hold every key decision-making position in the government. Lenin and Mao knew the strength of this dictatorship and they believed it could create extra motivation to accomplish difficult revolutionary changes. Deng and later Chinese leaders had no intention to change this (Peterson, 1966, p. 176). Theoretically, democratic dictatorship centralizes leadership that would systematically promote officials with the strongest performance because it maximizes the "encompassing interests" of the ruler (McGuire & Olson, 1996; Olson, 1993).[1] For this reason, the system rewards overachievement (or pretend overachievement) at the expense of deliberation for quicker realization of a given political agenda. Each level of official overinterprets a little bit of the policy in order to get ahead of others and avoid

punishment for failing to reach the goal that has been pushed up by other career competitors.

For example, if the central government demands 10% more steel production for the year, an upward-looking governor would ask his district officials to produce 12% more. Consequently, after new targets are added, local frontline officials have unrealistic and almost impossible quotas in front of them to accomplish. When Mao asked his cadres for moderate approaches to weaken religion, the system rushed the steps and implemented aggressive measures to eliminate religion. Mao thought the overachievement, as well as other fabricated socioeconomic figures that came out in the early 1960s, was an encouraging sign of success. In the midst of the Cultural Revolution in 1967, Mao once gave the order to gather the brightest minds of religious fields to study Christianity, and believed that 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 (Ren, 2007, p. 19).

The overachieving tendency of government leaders may produce opposite effects and become hurdles to change. When a superior demands no reform and no radical change, for example the political reform that stopped after the Tiananmen Square Movement in 1989, the petty dictators at every level become extremely conservative and try their best to stop any break in their routine. Authoritarian regimes already have a narrow winning coalition by default and the ruling elites tend to focus on factional and encompassing interests rather than service provision to society at large (DeMesquita, Smith, Morrow, & Siverson, 2005). 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 rather than trying to propose solutions that might be counterproductive and upset their leaders. When local-grown independent churches become prevailing, officials still stick to the anti-imperialist discourse and fabricate data in order to conceal the need for change.

Evidence is easy to find in formal Chinese publications and propaganda materials; for instance, the government never officially recognizes that there are house churches in China. In national statistics, they are “unregistered gathering points,” which happen occasionally in a few believers’ homes. During my interviews, TSPM and State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) officials often talked about old cases that happened in the

late Qing Dynasty in the early twentieth century to justify the government's extra caution and intrusive measures on Christianity, but refused to recognize or comment on the unregistered congregations just across the street. Religious affairs officials have no incentive to honor the freedom or even the very existence of religious groups outside their system, because they cannot bear the career risk if their superior begins to question why the overall measures (against any religion in that sense), on which many loyalists' livelihood relies, are not working as well as they promised. In addition, the political cost of continuing the old practice is relatively low, since church people are also subject to democratic centralism and cannot openly protest against the system. Consequently, we see religious affairs officials today push for more legislation and regulations in order to clarify what can and cannot be done; they are deferring the responsibility to the upper levels by asking for more directives.

On the other hand, Big Brother is not really watching when there are about 80 million Party members and they are all afraid of making mistakes. In addition to overachieving and overly risk-averse tendencies, this bureaucratic despotism creates serious corruption and principal-agent problems from information asymmetry (Akerlof, 1970; Stiglitz, 1987). Anyone who has contact with Chinese locals knows that there are always two groups of numbers: the one published by the central government based on statistics collected from local offices, and the one hidden in the drawers of local officials' desks. The missing numbers of Protestant Christians are an example. Lieberthal told the story of when the Chinese government asked Washington for satellite images on the area under cultivation in the early 1970s during Sino-American rapprochement, because the Chinese knew the reports from the provinces were unreliable.[2] Two mechanisms have been employed to address the information problems since the Long March period, but their effects are limited. The first is the "democratic" component of democratic centralism. The People's Congress, CPPCC, 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 leverage, yet there is no sign of real improvement on transparency or accountability.

The second mechanism is the intertwined meetings and independent document system outside levels of offices. Meeting and documenting are designed to improve the efficiency of information exchanges and the

quality of information management. Each year before the national "Two Meetings" (兩會; the CPPCC and the People's Congress) are held 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 for the national meetings. Administration of Religious Affairs (ARA) officials often meet intensively with other organs during the fall and numerous conferences follow after the "Two Meetings" to deliver important policy messages. In addition to regular visits, ARA officials often invite top TSPM clergy to participate in meetings to "exchange" opinions and information.

Contracting analysis to research institutes and think tanks has become more common since the 1980s because of their ability to provide third-party assessments on policies. Yang (2005) reports that China now has more than 500 well-trained religious scholars, 60 religious and ethnic research institutes, and 60 academic journals dedicated to providing independent assessments on religions.[3] 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 part of the system and they cannot break through the extreme degree of secrecy and bureaucratic *xitong* boundaries (Lieberthal, 1995, pp. 177–179). 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 Religious Blue Paper published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) each year since 2007, conducted the first large-scale, nationwide public survey of Chinese Protestant Christians across 321 randomly selected counties in 2010. The data on 63,680 cases has been widely criticized by the Christian community and overseas researchers for the surprisingly low number of Protestants it estimated. Except for some aggregate regional and national numbers, details of the dataset are not open 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."[4]

Empirical work on Chinese bureaucracy supports this petty dictatorship thesis (Bachman & Bachman, 2006; Lieberthal, 1995; Lieberthal & Lampton, 1992; Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1986; Mertha, 2008; Whiting, 2001). Bachman and Bachman (2006) found that the alignment of bureaucratic interests with Mao's radical doctrine produced 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 interpretation that fit his revolutionary ideology the best, the winning side helped the leader to defend the path by distorting information and repressing criticism (Bachman & Bachman, 2006, pp. 6–8). Shih, Adolph, and Liu (2012) reached similar conclusions from the career paths of alternate members of the CCP Central Committee from 1982 to 2002. They found that 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. These findings support the rational view of authoritarianism: under dictatorship, officials act differently from bureaucrats in democracies, in regard to not only the ideologies or norms they hold, but also the incentives and constraints provided by the system. The end of Mao's period indicated a new generation of "collective leadership" and the punishment became less brutal and more rule-bound, but the core feature of petty dictatorship did not fundamentally change. Officials became more factional and the way to advance was still to try to align with senior central leaders through taking care of their interests.

In November 1953, the CCP formalized 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 (UFWD) of the CCP Central Committee.[5] In the 1950s, there was no division of labor between Party and government. The power of religious policy-making belonged to Division 2 of the UFWD, and the Department had offices and regional branches at every level of government. In October 1955, the Bureau of Religious Affairs (BRA) was established and an initial institutional reform took place; this government branch was supposedly under the dual leadership of the State Department (government) and the UFWD (Party). The original idea was to separate the Party from 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 the Hundred Flowers Movement in May 1956, the CCP decided in March 1957 that UFWD officials at all levels should still lead religious affairs and the BRA took charge of only administrative tasks, especially with regard to cooperation with other departments such as propaganda, policing, foreign affairs,

the Communist Youth League, and the National Women's Union. The highest decision and collaborative body was the Religious Affairs Committee inside the central UFWD office (Ren, 2007, p. 428).

The institutional reform in the 1950s did not move power to the State Department system; on the contrary, Party organs remained the sole center of religious affairs. For example, before all government organs were stopped by the Cultural Revolution, the UFWD organs had 5700 employees, Civil Affairs organs had 2600 employees, and the BRA had only 560 from the provinces to Beijing (Ren, 2007, p. 429). Party leadership in principle was easy to state, but it was difficult to exercise in practice when everyone in the government belonged 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 is the group of bureaucrats, also mostly Party members, who work in the BRA and under the supervision of the Party Group in the State Department. The unspoken rule is that to secure the leadership of the UFWD on policy-making, the chairperson of the Party Group in BRA should always come from a superior Party agency; in terms of religion, this is the UFWD.[6]

For example, Xiao Xian-fa (肖賢法) was both the Chair of the Party Group in BRA and the Director of BRA from 1961 to 1981. He was a political supervisor in the Red Army and then operated a radio station for CCP delegates in the Kuomintang's (KMT) wartime capital city. He also built Xinhua News, later the People's Republic of China's (PRC) 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 the PRC was established. After holding several different positions in the UFWD, he was assigned to the newly established BRA as the Party Chair and Bureau Director. During the Cultural Revolution, the BRA was forced to close and Xiao was sent to a re-education center for four years. The Deng Xiaoping government cleared his name and Xiao regained his original position in 1979.

From Table 4.2, detailing BRA/SARA's previous and current administrators, it is evident that the leadership of the UFWD in religious affairs has never been changed: six out of seven BRA/SARA top officials were directly transferred from the united front work system. From the backgrounds of post-1979 directors, the most common preceding position was director of Division 2 of the UFWD, which was the highest bureaucratic position of religious and ethnic affairs inside the CCP. The only exception is the current SARA Director Wang Zuo-an (王作安), who

Table 4.2 BRA/SAR chairpersons from 1954 to 2018

Chair of BRA/SRA	*Terms*	*Previous position*	*Factional backgrounds*
He Cheng-xiang [何成湘] (1900–197?)	1954–1959	Director of Cultural Committee in State Council; Vice Governor of Gansu Province	Organizational Department of Central Bureau, Deputy Director of UFWD Division 1
Xiao Xian-fa [肖贤法] (1914–1981)	1961–1975	UFWD Office Director	UFWD; Xinhua News Agency Hong Kong Branch (*de facto* diplomatic office of China in Hong Kong)
Xiao Xian-fa [肖贤法]	1979–1981	BRA Director	
Qiao Lian-sheng [喬連生] (1917–1984)	1982–1984 (Acting Director)	Deputy Director of BRA; became Director after Xiao died during his term	UFWD Secretary Office, Deputy Secretary General; UFWD Party Organ Office Chair (1979–1982)
Ren W-zhi [任務之] (1929–)	1983–1985 (Acting Director) 1985–1992 (Director)	UFWD Division 2 Director (1982–1992)	Deputy Secretary General of Party Secretary Office in Tibet (1959–1982); Party Chair in Center of Tibet Studies of China (1993–1999)
Zhang Sheng-zuo [張生作] (1932–)	1992–1995	UFWD Division 2 Director; Deputy Director of UFWD (1988–1998)	Office Deputy Director of Xinxiang government
Ye Xia-wen [葉小文]	1995–2009	UFWD Division 2 Director (1991–1995)	Party Secretary General of Communist Youth League in Guizhou Province (1985–1990); Deputy Director in UFWD Office in Central Youth League (1990–1991)
Wang Zuo-an [王作安] (1958–)	2009–2018	SARA Deputy Director (1998–2009) SARA closed in 2018 and staff moved to UFWD	1983 into UFWD right after college; 1985 moved to Guizhou Province and served in top official in Youth League and provincial Deputy Director of UFWD; 1987 entered SARA; became Deputy Director of UFWD in 2018

Source: "60 Years of SARA" State Administration of Religious Affairs, http://www.sara.gov.cn/ztzz/jq60zn/hg60/index.htm

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 UFWD positions for years). The highest ranked official in SARA is the former UFWD's Deputy Director, Zhang Sheng-zuo (張聲作); he held a concurrent directorial post in the BRA between 1992 and 1995, possibly due to the political instability in the early 1990s. To address the growing problems in religious affairs, the BRA was greatly expanded and renamed SARA in 1998. In 2018, Xi ordered a massive institutional reform and SARA and other state bureaus with united front functions with the Party's UFWD emerged. The independent SARA office no longer exists, but the functionality and personnel remain as an integral part of the UFWD, which in a way is a comeback of Maoist Party–society relations.

The management process of this UFWD–SARA framework is summarized in Fig. 4.1. On the policy-making level, UFWD consults on religious affairs with other Party organs such as the Department of Politics and Law (DPL) and the 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 to 1948 and the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1949 to 1958. His successor, Li Wei-han,

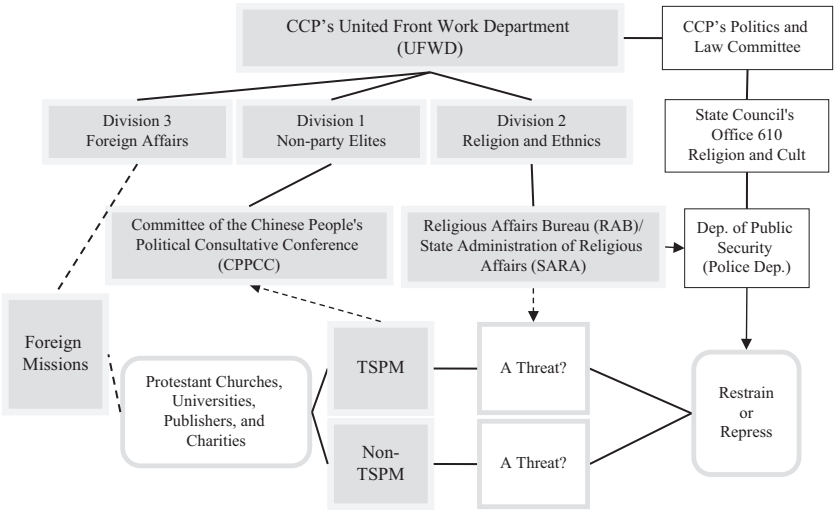


Fig. 4.1 Chinese religious management system for transnational Protestantism

worked in the UFWD on major events, including negotiating the peace treaty with Tibet (1951); promoting nationalization of the private sector in urban areas (1953); drafting the 1954 Constitution; and fighting with the "Gang of Four" until the Cultural Revolution.[7] The Party Chair of UFWD is critical for the stability of the regime. The job involves collaborating or fighting with every *internal* organized force, including religious organizations, businesses, 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 coming back for family reunions, business opportunities, and religious purposes since the 1980s. The UFWD cannot dictate policies involving so many parties and interests, since its administrative level is not high. The pay level of the Chair of the UFWD is equal to a state minister or a provincial governor and there are 400 officials at this level.[8] Yet its organizational opinions and interests are never taken lightly inside the Central Politburo (CP), the 24-member power house of the CCP. For example, in the 17th CP (2007–2012), there are three members representing the united front work system (the military system has only two representatives). Liu Yandong (劉延東) and Wang_Zhao-guo (王兆國) have been the heads of the UFWD. Since 2002, Jia Qing-lin (賈慶林) has been the Party Chair in the CPPCC and the third person in the core decision-making cycle, the nine-member Standing Committee of the CP.

On the policy implementation level, the UFWD plays the gateway (*Kuo*) role through three key offices: Division 1 is responsible for the CPPCC, where eight democratic Party leaders have a 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 that each religious and ethnic background has at least one representative in the CPPCC. There are 74 representatives from 16 minority groups and 5 legal religions. The TSPM has been guaranteed one representative as the co-chair of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Committee in the CPPCC (Chen, 2012). Division 2 is responsible for religious and ethnic affairs and it supervises the SARA, the 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 processed by the SARA through the corresponding office, then

approved by the Central Office of the UFWD. If an operation does not go through the official censoring process, the 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 an invite to have a "coffee" with government agents to deportation of foreign participants or maybe jail time. A proposal requires dozens of offices and their stamps to obtain legal permission. Quoting one of my Chinese Christian friend's words, "getting permission is a mission impossible."[9]

Approval of certain transnational religious collaborations encompasses the political agenda. To approach Taiwanese Christians and their growing underground missions, for example, the Chinese government invited 19 leaders of major Protestant denominations, charity, and missionary institutes to visit China in March 2011. The trip was hosted by the SARA, but its core agenda, discussion of the underground religious missions in China, was developed with the Deputy Minister of the UFWD, Zhu Wei-qun (朱維群). According to my interview with one of the key participants, missionary leaders were impressed by the resources that the Chinese government used on religious management and the reasons for China needing these regulations. One participant stated, "Now I give more appreciation to these restrictions." Although the Taiwanese side is optimistic about Chinese promises on permitting exchanges of theological students, pastors, and recorded or printed publications, China's red line is unchanged: transnational religious collaboration has to go through the TSPM framework and obtain permission from the SARA, which basically means "no" to all outside-in missions under current religious policy.[10]

The local level of transnational collaboration has to go through a similar censoring and approval process, although records show certain provinces have a more positive attitude toward transnational religious collaboration than others. Fujian and Guangdong Provinces have vigorous Buddhist and Taoist exchanges with Taiwan and Hong Kong. In news reports, UFWD and SARA officials are standing in front of the religious crowd and shaking hands with outside believers—this is staged united front work with clear political motives. For improving relations with two overseas societies, the 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. John Sung was the son of a pastor of the local American Wesleyan Methodist Church and became a famous Chinese

evangelist. He traveled to Southern China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia during the 1920s and the 1930s and became one of the few Chinese evangelists with an international reputation at a time when Protestant missions were dominated by Western missionaries.[11] John is seen by many as the key figure in the indigenous Protestant movement before 1949; his legacy fits the TSPM/UFWD ideology. The ceremony was administered by the provincial TSPM and some overseas Christian leaders were invited to attend. The project required around 1 million RMB (US$156,593) from foreign donations for building a missionary training center and a memorial under John Sung's name.[12] It is unclear whether the project was sent to the SARA for approval, but judging from the level of completion of the project, it probably obtained a certain level of consent from the city's ARA and UFWD offices.[13]

The evidence here suggests a curious phenomenon of Chinese religious management: it is a hyper-rigid system, which was only temporarily discontinued in the 1970s. Two things have never changed: the Party's control and the leadership of the UFWD on religious affairs; yet at the local level, the practice is complicated. In John Sung's case, the local TSPM church successfully obtained foreign support and some donations, but the religious official, the director of city's ARA office Zhang Yuan-kun (張元坤), expressed his attitude to "stopping and cracking down an illegal religious activity to use the name of John Sung" in his 2011 and 2012 public reports. Despite his tough words, so far no church building has been dismantled and no one has been arrested. For local religious officials, John Sung is a dilemma: his daughter was a leader of an unregistered church network and had to be sent to a labor camp for 20 years, and died after a police raid on an underground gathering in 1993 ("Like Father", 2009; "The Call Quality", 1995).

However, the building of a training center and memorial is beneficial for the development of registered churches, which is also Zhang's obligation. In addition, religious donations from Taiwan to Putian are an increasing, superior-approved business; the Fujian government has ordered districts to enhance their relationship with Taiwanese religious organizations in order to bring in more donations and develop "friendship" between Taiwanese people and China (Hong, 2008). Is Christianity treated differently than Buddhism and Taoism because of the imperialist history? It is so at least on paper, but exceptions have been given to some exceptional Protestant activists. The scene of police raiding churches led by ARA officials is one of the many and maybe the

least likely possible results. To the best of my knowledge, activists worked on Sung's case for two years before it had today's ambivalent result. The "door-busting" kind of coercive behavior did not happen in this case. Chapter 5 introduces firsthand evidence of similar events that 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 on or tolerating transnational activism can be more clearly identified.

4.2 The Source of Opportunity: The Discourse of Religious Freedom

The key opportunity for opportunists and protestors alike was 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 (Dai, 2001). 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 guiding discourse consistent. The national propaganda machine rebuilds history and insists on the legitimacy established by Mao and the early revolutionaries through emphasizing the credits of unifying the nation and defending national integrity, but skips the mistakes and hypocrisies to which the same discourse is entitled.

One pragmatic principle they found is the "Four Cannots" (Dai, 2001). In the highlights of the Hundred Flowers movement and the end of the first Five-Year Plan, Mao was confident about his economic and political achievements, and wanted cadres to be re-educated and transform social forces with caution. He made one of his famous remarks in 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. ("Selected Works", 1999)

In Chinese Communist discourse, the distinction between *contradictions among the people* (人民内部矛盾) and *external contradictions* (外部矛盾) makes a life-and-death difference. External contradictions indicate that enemies with these characteristics must be crushed 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." These means Party officials do not need to and should not use violence to address these state–society confrontations ("Selected Works", 1999). The first and longest-serving UFWD Chair, Li Wei-han, elaborated Mao's points and provided five reasons why religion was a part of internal contradictions and the Party should not rush the transformation and reconstruction of the religious population: religions are mass-based, ethnic, internationally driven, long-lasting, and complex in character.[14] Due to the complexity and wide-ranging social forces involved, he suggested that the CCP should learn from the experience of wars with the KMT and Japan that the Party should ally with religious groups, not push them to the opposite side.

"Four Cannots" and "Five Characteristics" have become the foundation of the CCP's religious affairs policy in the reform era. The Deng Xiaoping government pasted Document No. 19 to all levels of government in 1982 and re-emphasized Mao's united front thinking and "Five Characteristics." The interpretation formally acknowledged the legal status of religions in atheist China and adopted a more moderate attitude toward the religious population for developmental purposes (Yang, 2005, pp. 19–39). Officials since then do not need to pretend to eliminate religions or stop religious growth, as they were asked to do from the late 1950s. The line between religious and economic activities is often blurred at a local level. Many Buddhist temples are tourist attractions; churches produce revenue that helps poor communities provide social services (Tsai, 2007). It was a policy dilemma for frontline officials, since the relaxation of control over socioeconomic life to boost productivity had become the first priority of Deng's government, but they were not sure how to treat religious activities under this new agenda. Document 19 confirmed the importance of religion and restated the leadership of the UFWD and its pragmatic views on religious management. This retrograde definition of religious freedom from the 1950s reappeared in the 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. ("Constitution of the People's Republic of China," 1982)

These two articles are clear about the "new" definition of religious freedom: it is not about the protection of faiths based on an individual's inherent rights. The definition is closer to the French tradition of religious freedom, *laïcité* or secularism, that asks for a more hostile separation of religion from public space, than the American tradition of religious freedom implying friendly recognition of religion and exclusion of agnosticism and atheism (Gunn, 2004, pp. 420–465). As human rights law expert T. Jeremy Gunn pointed out, both doctrines rooted in the 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 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 to divide citizens (Gunn, 2004, p. 422).

Document 19 and the 1982 Constitution also reflect 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 of an economic foundation provided by the bourgeoisie, it is necessary for the CCP to allow the proletarians to be addicted to opium for a little longer.[15] 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 these two legacies stem from the mistake of putting the Party's atheist ideology above the Constitution's secular framework, which asks the state to be neutral between religions and also between religious beliefs and atheism. These two principles constitute the legal foundation for religious persecutions since the 1980s: churches are subject to state approval as are other social organizations, and religious freedom is not an excuse for them to be immune from scrutiny and registration requirements. Second, propagation outside approved facilities and propagation to the 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. China in the 1950s was to some extent *déjà vu* of France in the 1790s. The French experience demonstrated the modern version of a state-led conversion to secularism. During the French Revolution in 1789, the Constituent Assembly 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 that French churches cut off all relations with foreign religious institutions, including dismissing 50 Catholic bishops and appointing 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 in many parts of France during the riots and political turmoil. After six years of violent struggle, on February 21, 1795 a compromised version of the law was passed and stated the new principle of free worship, forbidding state suppression of any religious organizations. Yet the legacy of state control of religion persisted (Gunn, 2004, p. 438). For example, the ban on headscarves in 2008 was built on the discourse and legal legacy of the 1790s struggle that forbid priests to wear clerical attire in public.

Different to the French and American founding moments, the Chinese struggle over religious freedom at this time exists only within Party elites. The retrogression of religious policy creates a dilemma for legitimacy.

First, if the Party proclaimed the policy was new, how could it justify the anti-religious movements of the past 30 years without hurting the legitimacy set up by Mao? Second, if the Party insisted that atheism was and will be the core value of religious affairs policy, how could it explain the unsuccessful results from previous and current anti-religious measurements, also designed by Mao? If Chinese literature and official documents had proclaimed that religions were dead 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 after 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 the TSPM and other establishments gradually returned to operation in 1979, it took another three years for the 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 the Party's stance on religions.[16] Document 19 was the conclusion of this three-year struggle and deliberation. It admits that the religious population had not declined after years of campaigns, but that these efforts had slowed the growth of religions. It believes the slowdown is the achievement of the previous CCP leadership, yet the overinterpretation of Mao's policy created more harm than good (Yang, 2005, p. 24). The document is a direct order to Party cadres and asks them to avoid rushing their work and pursuing overachievement 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 showed 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's legacy and the 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 that need 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 have changed, since religious cadres now have dramatically different tasks: to make religious groups and believers serve the developmental goals of the "new" regime. Most importantly, the atheist agenda, 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 priority. TSPM theological experts are writing and preaching the new duties of "Protestant Christians in the reform era," UFWD officers are helping the TSPM on petitions and requests to return church properties from the government, and SARA officials are making sure these transactions and the subsequent growth of church enterprises are properly administered by loyal clergy, and mediating in disputes between churches and government agencies on housing, licensing, budgeting, public safety, and other registration issues. If deviations from this "religious freedom policy" happen, such as the appearance of foreign missionaries, the SARA will choose strategies between persuasion (UFWD) and coercion (Department of Public Security) depending on the situation and carefully avoid provoking criticism from the religious community.

A senior missionary from the Baptist Church of Taiwan told me how the Chinese system responded to his entry to 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 man never disclosed his official title, but local ARA and police all knew of his presence and responded to his request immediately. When the missionary agreed to meet with TSPM clergy and showed his willingness to talk about cooperation, the official introduced him to one of the biggest registered churches in the city and even offered him the opportunity to deliver a speech in front of theological students at a TSPM seminary.[17]

The Jiang Zemin (1989–2002) and Hu Jintao (2003–2012) administrations basically followed this strategy and put more emphasis on the institutional arrangements of Document 19. In 1991, after the National Religious Conference in Beijing gathering by the State Council, Jiang's

Central Committee Office delivered Document 6 and put the legalist principle of "manage religion by law" into the policy for the first time. The first step was to strengthen the management institutions. The BRA used to have only one administrative level; the state office in Beijing had to rely on the UFWD and meeting system to guide regional offices in provincial capitals and province-level cities; in most cities, religious affairs were combined with ethnic affairs and staffed with civil servants employed locally. Religious work at county level and below often belonged to the local Party organ's UFWD officers with no formal institutional assistance, and almost no counties had designated religious and ethnic work officers. Document 6 demands that all village and town-level districts need to have designated personnel in charge of religious affairs. All levels of government above the county need to have designated religious affairs offices. Cities with significant religious activity need to have religious work branches in divisions (Ren & Liang, 1999, p. 429). In 1998, the BRA was upgraded to a ministerial-level agency and renamed the SARA. In the Jiang period, the institutional capacity of the BRA was greatly enhanced. Now it is equipped with a propaganda medium (Chinese Religious Cultural Publisher), a research center (three divisions on foreign and domestic religious studies and academic exchanges), a training facility (hosting an 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 top CCP officials attended these two meetings to teach the policy to the cadres.[18]

The second implementation was to reconstruct religions to be useful for development. Jiang's united front work officers created a new policy slogan, "leading religions to adopt socialist society," to pair with the "Three Represents" doctrine highlighted in the 2001 National Religious Conference ("National Religious Conference," 2001). "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 of the Chinese people. The religious population as the minority needs to follow and adopt the Party's vision of society.[19]

This new implementation opens the door for religious organizations to operate enterprises for education and charity, which were greatly oppressed during Mao and remained taboo in Deng's period. "Three

Represents" defends the legitimacy of centralism, but also demands that cadres act like progressive leaders in three fields. To act 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 the SARA and the UFWD, the YMCA and other Chinese religious government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) began to appear in the media and to join disaster relief and other social works. A few Protestant organizations are allowed to open vocational and independent schools to complement the existing school system. Nevertheless, after decades of docility and order-following, religious GONGOs rely heavily on financial support from the government and have failed to accomplish either the new development agenda or the basic "Three Self" goal they were forced to accept 55 years ago:

> Because it [the 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. (Sun, 2010)

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

A series of SARA decrees have been published to provide guidelines to the increasingly complicated 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; the 2006 Method on Assigning and Reporting Major Clergy Positions in Religious Organizations; the 2006 Method on Establishing Religious Schools; the 2010 Detailed Implementing Rules for the Provisions on the Management of the Religious Activities of Foreigners within the People's Republic of China; and the 2017 Regulations on Religious Affairs. 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 2004/2017 Regulations on Religious Affairs are the highest level of document passed by the State Council. Its 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. (The Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 2004)

Transnational religious collaboration in principle is permitted. The major concern for government is foreign religious organizations' use of non-TSPM channels to perform missionary tasks, the backdoor listing strategy. Ideally, foreign religious organizations can operate in China for charity, education, and other social purposes, but the operation cannot involve any religious agenda such as trying to spread the gospel to children when teaching them English. However, if foreign agencies choose the TSPM as their collaborator, the operation can include secular and religious agendas. The 2004 Regulations do not specify the process of approval; they intentionally leave a gray area for UFWD officials to mediate the decision based on circumstances, while the 2017 Regulations tighten up control over various religious activities, from religious schooling to pilgrimage travel, although the implications are still unclear. Nevertheless, one rule is clear and unchanged: transnational collaboration has to go through a united front work–sanctioned, patriotic platform and this is non-negotiable.

Notes

1. The longer time horizon of the CCP, as Mao, Deng, and many Communist leaders insisted that the revolution should take a century to finish, also made it the "stationary bandit" and gave more incentives to "extract the maximum possible surplus from the whole society and to use it for his own purposes" (Olson, 1995, p. 568).
2. They found out that almost 20% of cultivated land was not reported by the provinces. It was "hidden" in order to lower the percentage of procurement on grains and taxes (Lieberthal, 1995, p. 175).
3. 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, p. 33).
4. Interview No. 68, November 11, 2011.
5. 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 each level of Party cadre. Non-party elites, representatives of democratic parties, and religious leaders and their associations belong to the UFWD (Ren, 2007, p. 429).
6. This design is called a "gateway" (*Dui-kou* or *Kou*). The CCP organizes its top executive members into major functional areas in order to make sure that the Party's will is always followed in government units/agencies. This inside member is referred to within 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 consultation may include security and the military (Hamrin, 1992; Lieberthal, 1995).
7. It is noteworthy that Li Wei-han's articles and works have been re-published and quoted by many publications in the reform era ("The Memorial Day", 2006).
8. According to the 1994 "Temporary Regulation of Civil Servants," the UFWD is equal to a State Ministry (Qian, 2012).
9. Only a small number of individuals, such as Dr. Chow Lien-hwa (周聯華), have been approved by the 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 on the board of the Amity Foundation for decades.
10. I have interviewed the key participants of this meeting. Photos and a list from this trip can be seen in "Pastors from Taiwan" (n.d.).

11. For his biography, see the testimony *John Sung* (宋尚節傳) from a Britain missionary, Leslie T. Lyall (賴恩融), (1961) and Liu (1988).
12. Details are from interviews and the testimony of a Baptist Pastor (Wu, 2010).
13. According to the annual report published by the Bureau of Religious and Ethnic Affairs of Putian City ("The Annual Report", 2012) in 2011, the agency was aware of John Sung's funeral.
14. He made this speech at the 11th National United Front Work Meeting (5th National Religious Conference) in December 1958 (Gong, 1999, p. 279).
15. Deng himself made few remarks directly addressing religion. His policy was realized through the return of former UFWD leaders and religious scholars in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They all expressed the bitter experience and resentment toward Mao's religious policy in their writings. For example, Dai Kangsheng (戴康生), researcher (1960–1998) and Party Chair (1993–1998) of the Study of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Yang, 2005, pp. 22–23).
16. The debate was between scholars at the Chinese Academy of Social Science (national) and the Shanghai Academy of Social Science (regional). The debate is significant because the backgrounds of the two institutions represent the conservative and reformist views, not limited to religious issues, hotly debated at that time (Zhuo, 2008, pp. 42–45).
17. Interview No. 8, December 20, 2010.
18. The information was gathered from the SARA website in 2012.
19. About Jiang's social policy and the historical background, see Lewis and Litai (2003).

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CHAPTER 5

A Tale of Four Cities: Transnational Christian Activism in the Heartland

Like any secular social organization, religious groups can become targets of state repression when their organizations become too big or too tightly linked to foreign advocacy, and are deemed as threats to the regime. Since the publication of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Document No. 19, state policy no longer mandates that officials eliminate or directly control religious activities, although the new management closely follows that of the old patriotic doctrine established in the 1950s. The "rule by law" discourse, as emphasized by the generation of leaders that followed Deng Xiaoping, formalizes the old doctrine as an exclusive system of religious affairs, with patriotic establishments at the bottom and the Party's United Front Work Department at the top, as described in the previous chapter. Therefore, many Christians believe that failure to establish normal relations between state and church because of a core deadlock will mean the right of association for unregistered congregations will not be recognized by the system (Wang, 2017).

However, the registration or "legalization" issue faced by underground groups is treated differently across provincial and sectarian lines. Many unregistered churches operate openly in cities like Beijing and Chengdu, whereas such tolerance is not found in other metropolitan areas like Shanghai and Chongqing. Little explanation is given for these variations. In the comparison provided in this chapter, I want to convey to readers that the reason for this variation could be in the various levels of

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development and performance of patriotic religious establishments in each location, which cause the authorities, locals, and foreigners to react differently toward each other. The concepts of backdoor listing and minority–majority alliance most accurately capture this complex interaction, the exact functions of which are illustrated in our four cases.

For a long time, outside observers have noted the negative impacts of these registered establishments. For example, the religious freedom report by the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) noted the strategic importance of registered establishments when "the government also called for 'guiding' members of unregistered Protestant groups to worship at registered sites." Underground Christians who had been arrested were sent to the registered churches of their residencies instead of prison for "re-education" and "thought reform" (The Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 2011, p. 18). It is important to point out that this description, which emphasizes registered establishments as a "tool" of the government, only tells a fraction of the story. The clergy of registered churches have no legal power or resources to hold protestors in custody; the latter basically walk free after being given a little "talk" and a tour of their "new spiritual homes" should they wish to join. Of course, both sides know full well that they are going through prescribed motions for the benefit of the authorities and that afterward everyone can resume their old ways. This process only strengthens the will of the protestors to persist and the unwillingness of the loyalists to trust the authorities, because both sides realize that the state has no intention of relaxing its control over Christianity. The popular explanation based on classic party–state theory especially fails to account for these nuances within and between religious communities, which have become not only obstacles but also sometimes breeding grounds of religious activism.

The second unsolved puzzle regarding Christianity is the rapid growth of transnational religious collaboration, especially in Protestantism, 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 persecution and suppression, government restraint toward Christian groups increases in places more distant from China's economic and political centers, where most foreigners live and work. For example, Fujian, Yunnan, and Sichuan provinces have the best records of religious restraint toward underground churches, the reasons for which have not yet been explored in the academic literature.

One of the most significant outcomes of the Christian revival is the rising activism toward expanding the Church's role in the public sphere. Believers have resumed activities, established organizations, and built and rebuilt their churches, and these efforts have inevitably clashed with the decades-old strict regulation of all religions. When believers talk about love, justice, generosity, and salvation by faith, it is natural for them to want to implement these principles in practical ways and to respond to human suffering in cases of nature disaster and the persecution of other Christians.[1] Church members want to do more than pray and worship. These outward actions demand bigger spaces and wider freedoms for charity, education, and other social efforts, or simply to expand their membership, collaborate with each other, and propagate their faith. However, existing institutions forbid such outreach behaviors. The regime demands that Christians remain in their original locations and confine their religious activity to their buildings. In response, to alter these restrictions, church members create a quiet network of activists to gain greater power and leverage.

Because they are connected with transnational religious advocacy networks, whether directly or indirectly, Protestant churches have become one of the most important sources of social activism in China. They are also better organized than other social organizations like kinship, professional, or issue-based 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 other non-profit organizations in China possess these qualities. One Protestant activist joked about the odd similarity between churches and the CCP: "They [the CCP] 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 material incentives and people still don't want to attend those meetings."[2]

Undoubtedly, the CCP still possesses unmatchable organizational strength and resources, but people have long criticized the loss of volunteerism, self-sacrifice, and many other disciplinary qualities. The rise of any competing moral entity can make the CCP very uneasy and could also cause embarrassment. I interviewed several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Sichuan Province after the 2008 earthquake. Almost all religious organizations in China joined the relief effort, but few received a warm welcome. One story has been told of a refugee shelter built by Protestant Christians from Beijing that was run well in the first few weeks

after the quake. The organizers were the focus of numerous interviews by the government-run China Central Television (CCTV) and foreign media outlets. Yet the site was quickly taken over and the group was asked to leave and never come back. The rumor is that the success of these faith-based groups embarrassed the Sichuan government regarding its own efforts. Consequently, recent religious persecutions in China have mostly been cases in which the government has tried to divide and weaken well-respected churches, even when they propose no direct political or security threat to the regime. Two of this kind of case are discussed in this chapter.

The analysis of religious activism provided here is based on this understanding of the struggle for the 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 are related to more than their grievances regarding the government. Both the decisions of their leaders and the responses by the government are shaped by China's overall political context and the specific local environment in which they occur. Yet some leaders are far more successful than others in leveraging their existing strengths and expanding their range of freedoms. This chapter presents qualitative evidence to support the internal spiral theory discussed in previous chapters.

5.1 Christian Activism in Two Directions

The CCP keeps close watch over and strictly regulates every social entity. It is particularly suspicious of individuals and groups with foreign connections and specifically forbids foreigners from engaging directly with local organizations.[3] Yet unexpected exceptions occur, and these exceptions vary among groups and locations. The cases presented here highlight one of the most sensitive aspects of transnational activism—the money and services foreign advocacy groups provide to empower local Chinese churches—and explores the reasons why some aid groups have been allowed to work in certain locations when conventional wisdom and experience would indicate otherwise.

Scholars often consider transnational activism in strong authoritarian environments such as China to be ineffective due to their strong economic performance, non-liberal culture, isolation from international society, and/or "authoritarian resilience" (Dickson, 2003, 2007, 2008; Nathan, 2003; Shambaugh, 2008; Wright, 2010). By the most optimistic estimates, transnational activism can be effective only when the outside world

witnesses instances of bodily harm to individuals and infringements of their legal rights (Keck & Sikkink, 1999). However, its effectiveness, when it poses a threat to national cohesion and integrity, is considered to be greatly limited in scope and, theoretically, lost in societies that are impervious to outside criticism (Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999, 2013). In previous chapters, I argued that by building a local network that includes government-sponsored social groups, transnational religious activists can pressure a strong authoritarian regime to incorporate basic freedoms and to establish a space for activism, even in societies closed to outside criticism and in which the state overtly ridicules and condemns advocacy as imperialism. Via a structural comparison of four cases, we reveal the mechanisms needed to sustain more effective activism.

5.1.1 Case Comparison: Quiet Christian Activism

Based on personal interviews, participant observation, and archives in seven Chinese provinces with significant numbers of Christians—Shandong, Henan, Anhui, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Hubei, and Sichuan—I employ the agreement-and-difference method to construct a case comparison that isolates the mechanisms associated with effective religious activism.[4] To demonstrate the essentiality of the two mechanisms proposed in this work, the comparison presented in this chapter focuses on just one US-originated mainline Protestant activist group in four selected Chinese cities (my research scope is far beyond this group and these cities). These four cases help to explain why advocates in different locations have been either able or unable to promote progress. The Catholic Church and other religions around the world have similar transnational networks to those in China, but their scale and effectiveness in China are far less developed. They are also geographically concentrated in certain parts of the country and sharing the details of their stories would reveal their identities.

The narrative for the activist organization described here, which is given the codename Mission X, highlights the two mechanisms—back-door listing and minority–majority alliance—that I theorize to be critical to the success of transnational activism. Although these four cities are not identical, distinct developments occurring there are also occurring in nearby regions (mainly in the East and Yangtze River area) approximately simultaneously, for which the environmental factors are controlled, including geographic remoteness, economic autonomy, and regional political

openness. City H and City W are located in Province A, and City T and City S are nearby in Province B; rapid trains connect each city with commuting times of about two to five hours. Due to safety concerns, their names and locations are kept confidential. Table 5.1 summarizes the basic characteristics of these cities.

These four cities are located in an industrial region that has been economically prosperous in the past three decades, generating around 15% of the national annual gross domestic product. Unlike Yunnan or Fujian, where the political atmosphere is argued by some to be more relaxed due to their localism and distance from Beijing, Provinces A and B are situated at the core of the Chinese economic engine, which makes them vulnerable to scrutiny and interference from Beijing. Their economic significance creates similar political conditions in which top officials are charged by the CCP with meeting higher expectations and who experience severe consequences if they fail to reach designated goals.

5.1.2 Local Opportunities for Activism

The economic significance of this area not only creates political constraints, but also affords opportunities for activism if proper strategies are used. Although the provinces are growing wealthier and are far more developed than other parts of China since the era of reform began, they both have very limited autonomy in terms of either setting general economic policy or altering existing social policy in their districts with respect to religious freedom. Local leaders cannot negotiate with CCP officials regarding the granting of greater legal rights, but they do have the power to implement and enforce restrictions over these rights. Rights advocates and activists have the best chance of influencing these officials in terms of their flexibility in enforcing those laws and regulations. This requires a

Table 5.1 Summary of major features of four research sites

Cases	*Freedom of Protestant activism*	*BL*	*MA*	*Political openness*	*Economic autonomy*	*Geographic remoteness*
City H	Low	*No*	*No*	No	No	No
City W	Moderate	*Yes*	*No*	No	No	No
City T	Moderate	*No*	*Yes*	No	No	No
City S	High	*Yes*	*Yes*	No	No	No

Note: BL: backdoor listing; MA: minority–majority alliance

deep understanding of the "dos and don'ts" of local politics, which foreigners often lack.

Administrators of religious affairs who are appointed by these local Party cadres have little political incentive to change their practices unless they are forced or persuaded to do so. They and other local administrators are required to create a stable and friendly environment to attract foreign investment and, therefore, additional revenues for the local authorities.[5] This creates a dilemma, but also an opportunity when a foreign advocacy group has a presence in town. That is, even though religious advocacy is deemed to be harmful by the Party's ideology, the foreign group can still help the local economy and advance the prospects of personal promotion by channeling donations, technological assistance, and skilled personnel from outside the area. For example, many foreign missions are conducted under the cover of businesses, including publishing firms or foreign investment companies, while other missionaries work as aid workers, teachers, or scholars in charity programs or academic exchanges.

When foreign groups work in an isolated setting and confine themselves to their sanctioned spaces, such as a campus or inside a factory, the likelihood of political constraint is reduced. Confrontation occurs when these foreigners begin to expand the sphere of their religious work to local churches and start to reach out to the larger population. This expanded activity alerts authorities to the possible violation of state policy. However, as with many other law-breaking behaviors tolerated by Chinese authorities, from tax evasion to unlicensed birth, enforcement depends on the judgment of frontline officials. When a foreign missionary is invited to deliver a Sunday service in a Chinese church, for example, should officials prevent it? When a foreign denomination offers to donate a new church building, should the Administration of Religious Affairs allow it? While state policy clearly forbids such collaboration, its existence varies significantly in practice. In City S, such illegal behaviors and more are tolerated and even quietly encouraged by local officials; in City H, proposals like these would be quickly rejected and their activities shut down with no exception. At the same time, similar collaborations in City W and City T face a moderate level of obstacles, depending on the situation. In my observation, the variable treatment of foreign advocacy depends on the existence of the two mechanisms previously identified—backdoor listing and minority–majority alliance—which I discuss in greater detail in the following.

The experience of Mission X in these four cities is a good illustration of how the presence of one or both mechanisms can affect the fate of its overall operation. It is evident that officials will tolerate transnational engagement if Mission X is willing to work under the auspices of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM).[6] Registered TSPM churches are mobilized as monitoring agencies to keep a check on Christian crowds. In addition, this tolerance is also conditional upon how well Mission X is able to manage the uneasy relationship between local house churches[7] and TSPM congregations.

5.1.3 Religious Advocacy in City H, a Low-Freedom Locale

Mission X returned to China in the early 1990s and began working to re-establish its missionary projects after its eviction 40 years earlier. Prior to the 1950s, City H was one of the earliest entry points for many Christian missions, and the representation of American denominations had been strong. Although the historical ties were never completely severed (thanks to churches in Taiwan and Hong Kong that were built by the American evictees of that time), Mission X quickly found that it was dangerous and costly to sponsor its own church in the current environment. By comparison, the provision of aid to local churches is more feasible, though still very difficult. Mission X has occasionally visited City H and other locations to negotiate with the authorities, but it has never been allowed to take any role in the community other than conducting a few closed-door lectures in government-sanctioned schools and seminaries. In addition, any outreach to unregistered congregations would be seen as a serious offense that might result in eviction. As a result, Mission X has conducted a few talks with city officials about the possibility of returning old properties, but no actual progress has been made in the past 20 years.

These tough restrictions are not limited to Mission X. In City H, the backdoor listing mechanism is generally absent, because officials strictly forbid foreign religious organizations from operating independently or collaborating with registered entities in any form, whereas this is sometimes permitted in other cities. Officials are also happy to turn one Christian group against another. For instance, unaffiliated congregations have been visited and harassed by both police and TSPM clergy. Because of this tougher state oversight of religion, the opportunity for any group to pursue a minority–majority alliance is also very slim. Although many

foreign missionaries live in City H, they all work in high secrecy, serve only foreigners, and restrict their contact with local churches to prevent trouble.

City H's highly repressed environment seems to contradict our expectation and theoretical predictions. From its vibrant economic development and middle-class–like citizenry, an outsider might expect to see greater levels of religious freedom in this city, and religious facilities and activities are indeed everywhere. However, a closer look tells the observer that every activity is under tight control and scrutiny. In all church gatherings, foreigners must attend foreigner-only assemblies and their passports might be checked before entry; locals who participate in a foreign assembly would be warned and asked to leave with no exception, because their attendance would result in severe punishment by the authorities, such as suspension of the congregation. These rules also exist in other Chinese cities, but City H's authorities enforce them with surprisingly high levels of determination and effort. For example, I was asked to leave a TSPM bible study gathering after identifying myself as a Taiwanese, which had never before been an issue in other places because Taiwan has always been considered by official doctrine to be "part of China." Yet the leader in this situation worried that my presence would go against the rule of "no foreigners allowed."

A comparison of registered and underground churches in City H reveals that both must hide their exchanges with foreigners and both experience more police harassment than occurs in the other three cities. The atmosphere there is "tougher" even than that in Beijing, as described by many of my interviewees. Alternative explanations about why this is so—remoteness, economic incentives, civil society, and transnational advocacy networks—fail to explain why City H, from the 1980s to the present day, has lagged far behind the national level in its degree of religious tolerance, despite the shifts in national leadership in 1993, 2004, and 2012.

One of the university professors I interviewed in City H described the alignment of the city government as "110% by the book," perhaps because the province's economic significance attracts more attention from the top (Interview No. 85). This translates into tougher regulation not only of regular church business, but also in enforcement of the patriotic TSPM policy,[8] which casts contacts and exchanges between foreign groups and local congregations as serious offenses. In the few congregations serving foreign expats, students, and visitors, passport checking is routine before every Sunday service. In all local churches, any involvement by foreign individuals requires written approval from top officials, which in reality

means the answer is "no" to almost any proposal. I once asked a pastor ministering in a historic church if he would open its doors to my American students for a visit, and the answer was simple: "Professor, you do not want to do that because we have to file a request all the way to the top" (Interview No. 83).

In contrast to the other cities in this study, church leaders in City H are extremely cautious regarding church-to-church collaboration. Underground church leaders express a similar concern about promotion-minded officials who are eager to demonstrate Party loyalty, but they also identify another factor—competition between congregations. Independent local congregations have developed in City H for almost a century and have never died out, even under the harsh repression of the Cultural Revolution. After the open-door policy and economic reforms enabled foreign missionaries and aid to return to China, TSPM churches lost many members to the more "spiritual" house church congregations that do not require their members to "put the Party before God." TSPM leaders are particularly unhappy about the support received by "illegal" congregations from the city's prosperous economy and outside supporters, while legal churches must avoid those potential patrons. Many house church leaders believe resentment from the TSPM is a key reason they are so closely watched and constantly harassed by police and agents from the Ministry of Public Security.[9] One house church congregation I visited has had to move twice in the past three years because the TSPM church across the street kept complaining to local police about its "illegal religious activities."

City H represents an environment in which transnational collaboration is almost non-existent because the backdoor listing and minority–majority strategies are unavailable to its social groups. Foreigners cannot work with registered groups to establish legal fronts to operate openly, because those groups are afraid that doing so would open the door to competition from strong unregistered groups for the acceptance of aid from foreigners. The lack of any church-to-church collaboration reflects the overall problem of the weak Protestant movement in City H, where officials have little incentive to back down from the old policy of targeting advocates and activists. Reports of the arrest and harassment of Christian activists are frequent, and confrontations have arisen between authorities and house church members. This lack of religious freedom and social space for related activism in City H is surprising in light of its vibrant economic and social activities, but is unavoidable when activists and potential foreign patrons are isolated by circumstances.

5.1.4 Religious Advocacy Using Backdoor Listing in City W

Although City W and City H share the same provincial locality (four hours by train from each other), Mission X experiences totally different treatment in the two. While Mission X can utilize its historical ties in both cities, only City W welcomes the participation of Mission X in its charity work. As a partner of a TSPM-operated NGO, in the past 20 years Mission X has regularly supplied money and personnel to this charity organization with little interference. City officials acknowledge this collaboration, but insist on adhering to the registration policy that requires all participants and resources to be grouped under the TSPM label.

Like many missionary agencies, Mission X has considered the financing of a business registered in Shanghai or Shenzhen to bypass this TSPM-operated NGO in order to gain more flexibility on handling donations, but that plan has failed to eventuate and money still goes through local TSPM accounts for safety reasons. Many global missions and denominations from Europe and North America follow similar paths, and these efforts have created a trusted circle of religious NGOs in the city. Since certain foreign missions are allowed to operate under the legal front of the TSPM, the religious scene is much more vibrant in City W. Many Christians told me that large-scale, thousand-people outdoor rallies are held near City W—an activity that is strictly forbidden and even unthinkable elsewhere in China.

Statistical data also supports my personal observations (see Table 5.2). Fewer arrests and instances of harassment are reported in City W than City H. Although illegal foreign missions and underground congregations are growing rapidly in both cities, City W has only 4 recorded cases

Table 5.2 Statistical data on religious repression in four cities

	1982–1992		*1993–2003*		*Post-2004*		*Total*
	PD	*%*	*PD*	*%*	*PD*	*%*	
1. City H	8	4	66	36	111	60	185
2. City W	0	0	1	25	3	75	4
3. City T	2	7	16	55	11	38	29
4. City S	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Filtered from the political prisoner database of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Note: PD: Numbers of political prisoners jailed for religious reasons

of religious imprisonment, whereas City H has 185. In addition, the majority of the cases in City W occurred after 2004, which indicates a relatively easy relationship between Protestants and the government in City W, with the recent increase possibly being a consequence of the growing Protestant population and level of activism in comparison to the previous period. In addition, according to my interviewees, local religious affairs officials seem to have better relationships with TSPM churches and even with house church congregations.

The surprisingly low level of religious persecution, and especially the relative harmony in a city with hundreds of underground churches, is no accident. My interviews with City W's Christians show that few people sense any hostility between registered and unregistered congregations. Perhaps the partial foreign support of unregistered congregations eases any potential dissatisfaction and suspicion of the TSPM, which makes both groups more willing to let the other side go its own way. The special opportunity for freedom and social space in City W is related to its lively NGO scene and is actively promoted by religious organizations, universities, and city officials. According to the National Census, the number of grassroots NGOs in City W has grown by 49% since 2001, and the proportion of religious NGOs in all registered groups is 1.5%, ten times higher than the national average.

A local religious NGO leader told me that City W is "freer" because of the strong support it is given from influential figures in the TSPM, who introduce foreign advocacy groups while convincing the Party and public security agencies that these groups are beneficial to the nation. However, this collaboration is very selective, and only certain denominations from certain countries are welcomed. For example, Mission X is welcomed because of the positive role played by its key leaders in the formation of an important Christian publishing organization in China.

The story of Mission X in City W reveals the importance of backdoor listing. Despite various background and diplomatic issues, the critical distinction between a "tolerable" and a "dangerous" American advocacy group in the eyes of Chinese government officials is whether the relevant group brokers foreign influence coming from unfriendly nations through unauthorized channels. In other words, the more unfriendly and unauthorized foreign support provided by an advocacy group, the more likely the government is to consider that advocacy group to be a threat until proven otherwise. Consequently, transnational advocacy becomes possible in such an environment when advocates adopt engagement strategies to

"prove" that they and their foreign partners are not hostile to the leadership. Such proof includes various benchmarks, from sharing information to sharing aid with government-approved religious establishments. Advocating for a new practice or a new idea in an authoritarian environment is not always a zero-sum game: the government wants its leadership to remain intact, and advocates want the freedom to expand and deliver more resources. There is a recognized middle ground where both sides can get the things they most want, although reaching this point may require some skill and mastery of a certain "secret handshake," which is similar to the Amity Foundation case that I discussed in Chap. 2.

The story of the Amity Foundation is consistent with the collaboration observed in City W. The Chinese government is pleased by the fact that resource distribution is in the hands of trusted Chinese NGOs, and foreign advocates have solved the long-term problem of gaining important spiritual and theological access to the Chinese Christian population. Following the same logic, Mission X can introduce and develop activities in City W that are not permitted by state policy by establishing a working relationship with a TSPM NGO. When authorities begin to feel comfortable with this new practice, they loosen their control over similar activities conducted by other organizations, even illegal ones. The much lower level of religious persecution in City W is strong evidence of that spillover. This is a successful "backdoor listing" method used by policy entrepreneurs via a charity organization to encourage a positive attitude toward Christians on the part of local officials, and sets a valuable precedent for the legal operation of a transnational collaboration. This precedent benefits both registered and unregistered groups.

Nonetheless, there are limitations to this top-down method of backdoor listing. The government-sanctioned NGO has little intention of promoting cross-church collaboration, since it is unwilling to share its resources with unregistered congregations. While backdoor listing expands the space for transnational activism, the scope of this activism is very selective. Only mainline Protestant denominations and their social charities are welcomed.

5.1.5 Backdoor Listing with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in City T

Because of its experiences in areas like City H and City W, Mission X used to consider house churches to be the only reliable partners in China. It has

maintained its high-level relationship with the TSPM, but realizes that duplicating the NGO experience in other cities would be difficult. Since the early 1990s, Mission X has been invited by many house churches in many cities in China to conduct secret seminars and church services. Its reputation is growing, and a personal network of a hundred churches has been established across a dozen provinces, from Guangdong in the deep South to Heilongjiang in the far North. But the underground nature of its operation still worries mission leaders: this collaboration relies solely on the supervisory negligence of watchdogs or the ability of house church members to disguise their activities. As such, their visits typically last only three days to a week, they make contact with only a very select and small number of people, and they jump from one location to another from time to time, which limits their overall exposure to the community and prevents any sustainable community influence.

Nonetheless, in ten years, Mission X has become an international operation that has returned missionaries from various professions to China. Their return was met with an upsurge of Christian faith in the countryside and a great demand for theological trainers and preachers in the 1990s. One advantage is due to its presence in several large overseas Chinese communities, in particular Hong Kong and Taiwan, and its recruitment of skilled practitioners with language expertise. In 2000, the dean of a TSPM-run seminary learned of Mission X from his house church friends and tried to contact its missionaries on the ground. One of my interviewees described the ensuing uneasy encounter: "We were nervous about the request for a meeting because we did not know whether the police would be waiting, but since it came from someone we had known for years, we thought it wouldn't hurt to have a meal with this person…."

The meeting resulted in a new collaboration between Mission X and the local TSPM in City T and City S. This was an unprecedented and potentially dangerous move, yet a reasonable one: Mission X needed a stable local partner that could provide a more long-term and sustainable local collaboration, and the local TSPM leaders needed funding while remaining confident about facilitating such illegal transactions. The major characteristic of City T is its strong TSPM theological seminary, whose leadership shows a high level of openness, which is rare in the TSPM system. Historically, state religious affairs officials had required that each Chinese region have only one seminary, and that each theological seminary enroll students only from the neighboring five to six provinces. Consequently, interested students from local churches overwhelmed all

seminaries in China, but few seminaries dared to break the state's unspoken rule by opening more seminaries to accommodate the overflow. By contrast, City T's seminary openly welcomes students from provinces outside its parish, even students recommended by unregistered congregations. This is a bold move at a time when government agencies have total power over all religious decisions.

The dean and chairman of the TSPM from City T spoke openly with me about their problems and how Mission X has become a vital partner in their activism. In the mid-1990s, when the school and parishes were overwhelmed by the rapid growth of Christianity in the countryside, generous funding from Mission X helped to solve their problems and initiate the operation of their school. Such a generous gesture was rare at that time, when most foreign advocacy groups donated only to house churches or to large, national endowments such as the Amity Foundation. The project has created a friendly cycle in which the two sides have maintained continuous interaction and have engaged in collaborations far outside the boundaries of those the religious affairs bureaucracy would usually allow. The dean explained how they could do this: "We tell the Bureau of Religious Affairs what they must know, and they don't bother to approve or disapprove of our projects because they don't want to get into trouble….We have their trust [that things won't get out of hand]" (Interview No. 85).

The story of City T's seminary is typical of how backdoor listing serves to "win over" local officials. Foreign advocates—missionaries, aid workers, or regular educators with missionary objectives—respond amicably to the TSPM's requests and constitute a quiet, strategic alliance. Later, TSPM clergy informally introduce outside visitors to the local establishment through casual lunches or accidental visits by local officials to schools, churches, orphanages, or other institutions with which the foreigners promise to work. After casual handshakes and nodding of heads, local officials evaluate the foreigners and their organizations based on these informal visits and personal impressions. After a few evaluation rounds, carefully planned transactions are executed and foreign advocates are gradually given more opportunities to engage in activities and accept invitations to participate in bigger local projects based on feedback regarding these transactions. From my fieldwork in City T, this ten-year informal alliance has led to an impressive record of credibility for participants in this silent religious advocacy. Its foreign advocacy group has been able to deliver Sunday services, provide training seminars, organize missionary

and charity work, and deliver money directly to churches or selected aid groups. One senior pastor of a foreign denomination has even been invited to chair the first vocational school that TSPM plans to open.

5.1.6 Minority–Majority Alliance: From Competition to Cooperation in City S

Mutual trust between foreign missionaries and TSPM leaders is critical to fostering a backdoor listing mechanism that allows for the existence of new "illegal" practices. However, backdoor listing alone is not enough to secure the survival of this transnational collaboration. The state's "no foreigners" policy persists, and anyone who acknowledges a collaboration could sabotage the alliance simply by reporting it to the provincial or central authorities, which could lead to a shutdown or crackdown from security agencies.

The second important component of successful activism is to bring in the majority group, which does not directly benefit from foreign involvement. This is a challenging task, because most Christian communities in China are deeply divided. TSPM leaders have tended to report house church violations to authorities when they are believed to have been "stealing sheep"; house church leaders have attacked the TSPM by criticizing its legitimacy and corrupt behavior, which also serves to take away its followers. This competition and conflict would become even fiercer when some of the church gathering places or properties had a "gray" status in which multiple parties could claim leadership or ownership (Yang, 2006). A religious affairs officer once joked with me: "We often call 基督教 (Christianity; pronounced "ji du jiào") as 忌妒教 ("jì dù jiào"; meaning jealousy in Mandarin) because there are so many quarrels between churches and they ask us to step in." He reminded me that while crackdowns are sometimes ordered from the top, most persecutions in his district originate in internal disputes over financial interests, which require government officials to take action in response to civic petitions.

Foreign advocates can do little to mediate these situations, although they are often asked to take sides. If they choose a house church in a given location, the door to the TSPM would be closed, and vice versa. The success of Mission X in City S is due to its having avoided involvement in this common problem. Two main reasons it has been able to do so are that the sense of historical grievance is not as severe as in other places, and key local leaders are willing to share resources (e.g., introducing Mission X and enrolling house church students in the official seminary).

In the early twentieth century, Province B where City S is located was a second-tier Christian mission site. Since it received fewer foreign missions, it suffered less during the era of political oppression. This calmer history affords the local TSPM a special advantage. Many congregations joined the TSPM or developed less resentment toward it, and fewer house churches remained underground, so Christians generated fewer feuds in response to the oppression in the 1980s. While house church development created tension between Christians and authorities elsewhere, the situation in City S was much better because the growth occurred under the auspices of the TSPM. When the number of Christians reached a level that worried the authorities, the local TSPM branch was strong enough to enter negotiations with the authorities, establish foreign friendships, and provide resources to lure new congregations under its umbrella. Almost all congregations in City S have joined the local TSPM. "We have a very small house church population now," the pastor says. The data in Table 5.2 also demonstrates the value of these alliances: no cases of religious prisoners have been reported in the past 30 years in City S. Some might say that the situation in City S is one in which the TSPM has co-opted house churches. From my observation, it also can be said that house churches are transforming the nature of the TSPM in this location. The fact is that although neither side can openly talk about the improvement, the overall relationship between these two kinds of churches has improved, which rarely happens in other parts of China. Therefore, the cooperation is better described as a "quiet" form of alliance, rather than co-option.

The story of Pastor Chen in City S demonstrates how a minority–majority alliance works. He is the son of a house church leader, a graduate of City T's official seminary, and the first to obtain official permission to study abroad at Mission X's theological seminary. Due to the policy of openness established by progressive church leaders, his "bad background" did not stop his career or foil his chance of obtaining an education. His multiple connections even made him popular with the local bureaucracy, such that he eventually became the head TSPM clergyman in City S.

Although City T has grown faster in terms of its economy and civil society, City S has seen greater improvements in the conditions favorable to religious expression and activism over the past five years. Local leaders like Pastor Chen can even provide protection to operations that have been evicted from City T and elsewhere. While in the field, I learned that when gatherings and meetings of Christian leaders have become too sensitive and attracted interference within City T, the network has moved its activ-

ity to City S for its better protection. As I was told during my visit, "There are too many informers there [City T]." I witnessed Pastor Chen and his allies move a Chicago-based ten-person missionary group from City T to City S in response to a warning from friends in the government. One winter, I learned that a group of house church leaders from Shanghai were enjoying a "retreat" in the city as guests of Pastor Chen, because "it is still too dangerous for all of us to meet in our own cities" (Interview No. 101).

Since the establishment of a domestic alliance between Pastor Chen and other churches, funding and services have flowed seamlessly into City S. Foreign missionaries have openly performed Sunday services in churches within Chen's parish. Mission X's missionaries and workers are invited to remain long term, and some have been offered formal positions in TSPM schools. Furthermore, this transnational network has stepped up its cooperation since the Sichuan earthquake disaster relief effort in 2008 and has organized joint missions to other provinces. This progress is less likely due to Mission X's strength or resources than to the strength of local activists like Pastor Chen in protecting outside participants and their international networks. They are able to do so because they handle local spoilers and law enforcement agencies effectively. Potential spoilers, like competitive church leaders, are kept satisfied because they share in the resources and officials appreciate the trust and benefits they offer. For example, I saw Pastor Chen receive phone calls from the local police chief and other church leaders asking question about foreigners in the city. His personal guarantee served to quieten the investigation and safeguarded continuous cooperation.

5.1.7 Four Cities, One Lesson of Activism

In summary, the nature of the advocacy playing out in four Chinese cities illustrates how a special kind of local religious activist, especially one with some affiliation with officially sanctioned social organizations, can facilitate transnational activism by helping foreign sponsors deal with the authorities and complex local environments. The comparison of four metropolitan regions in China has enabled the identification of two mechanisms—sponsorship of foreign groups by registered churches (backdoor listing) and friendly gestures from registered churches to unregistered churches (minority–majority alliance). The city regions I studied have different levels of these two kinds of relations—those between foreign groups and government-sanctioned facilities, and those between local members of sanctioned and unsanctioned churches.

The evidence is consistent with my expectation that foreign advocacy groups obtain the highest level of freedom and tolerance only in cities characterized by high levels of both kinds of relationships. Most importantly, by comparison, one city may not be very different from another in terms of its societal, economic, and political conditions. Therefore, the varying levels of freedom strongly suggest that the closeness in the relationships produced by the strategic choices of participants, represented by the two key mechanisms of backdoor listing and minority–majority alliance, is an essential ingredient in the improvement or deterioration of religious freedom in these locations. In short, City S's better record of religious freedom, which includes a wide range of transnational activities that are not permitted elsewhere, is the result of the successful advocacy strategy adopted by Protestant groups over the last two decades.

In particular, the activism that has begun in City S and City T demonstrates a boomerang process that starts with local activists empowering foreign advocates to advance an agenda of religious freedom, which in return brings more resources and opportunities to expand their influence beyond their hometowns (Fig. 5.1). Without their knowledge, dedication,

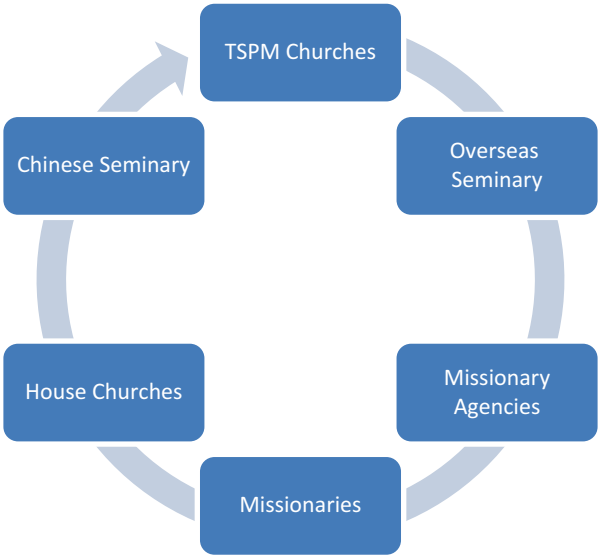

Fig. 5.1 The alternative boomerang cycle

and bravery in breaking the rules set by the authorities, there is little chance that foreign money could flow in or their ideas move toward reality.

This process provides an alternative model to that described by Keck and Sikkink (1998) in their work on transnational advocacy networks. The old model indicates that locals have little capacity to oppose a repressive system, so they require substantial and moral empowerment from the outside to jump-start their activism. However, the evidence here suggests that activism begins locally with the plan to invite outside help, because this is rule-breaking behavior with potentially dire consequences. The invitation from an officially sanctioned group is especially critical, because members of that group have veto power to disrupt transnational collaboration as well as the ability to protect the transaction. Local clergy affiliated with the TSPM can help foreign advocacy groups gain access and temporary permission to operate in China. In return, foreigners can provide funding, training, and ideas from the outside, which broadens their agenda and brings 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 tools used to constrain the development of Protestant churches, have essentially been broken, at least in City S and to some extent in City T. By leveraging key positions in the government-censored establishment and theological seminary, advocates can transfer resources to both registered and unregistered churches. While progress is still limited—that is, there is still no formal recognition from the government that churches' rights will be respected, so most transactions must remain out of the public eye—the bond between these 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 driving their success.

Foreigners and locals share the common goal of promoting a larger space for churches' social and outreach activities, and they are not afraid to challenge existing regulations if necessary. Both groups believe that religious freedom is not only defined as the right to worship within the boundaries set by the 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 work and other needs. In particular, local activists are no longer simply receivers of foreign advocacy who passively absorb ideas, methods, and discourse

about religious freedom from the outside; they play an essential role in teaching foreigners how things work in their communities, and thus protect them from dangers that could trigger repression. Purposely or unintentionally facilitated by the environment, the current relationship between foreigners and locals is much more equal and dramatically differs from the missionary and Westernization campaigns of the nineteenth century to the 1950s, whereby locals were merely lay workers directed by resourceful foreign agencies. Today, the direction of empowerment is from the bottom up.

5.2 Is Catholic Activism Different?

The Chinese government uses an almost identical strategy to monitor and suppress Protestants as it does Catholics; that is, by sponsoring sanctioned groups. Yet these containment strategies seem to have been much more successful with Catholics than Protestants (Table 5.3). One key reason is that the Catholic Church's transnationalism is more hierarchical and institutional, and is thus very similar to the sovereignty-based state-to-state interaction that strongly depends on top-down negotiation and implementation rather than bottom-up social advocacy.

The Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA) was designed to function as the same kind of control mechanism for Catholics as the TSPM was for Protestants. It began with a few local low-ranking clergy who supported the Communist Revolution and were secretly sponsored by the CCP in the late 1940s. In an almost identical fashion to what happened to

Table 5.3 The divided Catholic church in China

	Registered Catholics (CPCA)	*Underground Catholics*
Population	6,000,000	Unknown
Churches	6000	Unknown
Bishops	69	39
Priests	1900	1300
Monasteries	20	16
Monastic students (male)	1100	350
Nuns	3400	1600

Source: The estimated total Catholic population is 12,000,000, so the underground Catholics could be around 6,000,000. Hong Kong: *Holy Spirit Study Centre*, The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. http://www.hsstudyc.org.hk/big5/tripod_b5/b5_tripod_164_08.html

Protestants, a series of "accusation movements" led by these "patriotic" Catholics and sponsored by the new Communist regime purged all non-Chinese and "anti-revolutionary" Catholic clergy and staff from churches and social organizations. With the help of the Korean War and Mao's anti-imperialist campaigns, the new leadership of the CPCA quickly seized control of the Chinese Catholic Church in 1957; but their victory turned sour when Catholicism along with all other religions was banned in the 1960s (Ren, 2007, pp. 34–37).

During the reform era, the CPCA's comeback and the struggle between sanctioned and unsanctioned clerical factions mirrored that of Chinese Protestants, although the anti-imperialist legacy had a stronger latent effect on Catholics than Protestants for an obvious reason: the Roman Catholic Church has always been a persistent, unified, and even authentic source of authority behind Catholicism. The same state policy goals of self-governance, self-reliance, and self-propagation were never fully realized within the Chinese Catholic Church, because the spiritual connection between Chinese Catholics and the Pope was never broken. In much the same way as most Tibetan Buddhists still secretly view the Dalai Lama as their highest spiritual authority, despite his being under close surveillance and severe persecution from a secular ruler, Chinese lay Catholics and followers hold to their traditions and value system. Yet sacrifice and compromise are unavoidable. Since 1957, the CPCA has filled high leadership positions without the approval of the Vatican, and underground congregations have begun to form, which pretend to cooperate with the new rulers, but silently resist the CPCA and the government (Madsen, 1998, pp. 37–38).

Beijing's "Three Self" doctrine applies to both Protestants and Catholics, and ordination has become the focus of confrontation between Catholics and the state. From 1981 to 2002, elder Chinese bishops secretly ordained 82 bishops with informal consent from the Vatican (Madsen, 1998, pp. 37–38). CPCA member churches ordained around 86 bishops with the blessing of the Chinese government, some of whom sought the Vatican's consent afterward, with 25 failing to obtain Vatican approval. After signing an undisclosed deal in September 2018, Pope Francis has now recognized seven Chinese bishops who were illicitly ordained by the Chinese government and has put into motion a provisional solution to this problem, yet actual substantive improvement remains questionable (Brockhaus, 2018).

The illicitly ordained bishops and the mistreatment of non-CPCA bishops remain a matter of contention at the center of China–Catholic relations. For example, in 2010, Joseph Guo Jincai, the deputy head of the CPCA and a Catholic representative to the Chinese National Congress, ordained himself as Bishop of Chengde (or Bishop of Dioceses Geholensis in the Roman Catholic book) in Hebei Province.[10] This event blew up into a series of international human rights incidents when the CPCA had to "kidnap" several bishops to have them perform the ordination ceremony with the help of police and religious affairs officials. In 2010 alone, there were ten ordinations performed without papal approval and such "kidnappings" reportedly happened again in 2011 in Shantou, Guangdong Province.[11] I asked a CPCA priest about this incident and he simply said: "We know who the true leader of the Church is, but the situation is stronger than men."[12]

Unlike the TSPM, which is a foreign body in the community that was created in a vacuum and forcefully imposed on previously loosely connected Protestant groups, the CPCA was a transformation of an existing, coherent power hierarchy, in which the significant change was mostly in who occupied the top leadership positions. While many high-ranking foreign nationals were forced to leave in the 1950s, the remaining Chinese clergy substantially benefited from the situation because they were all promoted. The victory of Communism helped to further the goal of the Catholic Church to indigenize, a goal that had been discussed but had not advanced to the degree experienced by Protestant groups since the 1930s.[13] In the beginning, there was a great deal of public support for the indigenization of the Chinese Catholic Church and the nationalization of its property, because the Church had been involved in unpopular anti-Communist campaigns and was openly hostile to China's new ruler, who swore to reform the nation and win back national dignity. There was little resistance either inside or outside the Church to the CPCA takeover; only a handful of bishops refused to cooperate and ended up in jail. When religion was allowed again in 1982, the CPCA had little trouble regaining its previous glory; within ten years, the government had returned 3900 churches to the CPCA and it had gained 4 million members, a number higher than its peak level (3.5 million) in 1949 (Ren, 2007, p. 134).

Nevertheless, the success of the Catholic Church cannot match that of the Protestants. The most optimistic estimate of the number of Protestants in China in 1949 is just 0.7 million; by 1982, that number had reached 3 million and the number of believers at registered TSPM churches had

grown to 23 million in 2010 (Xiao, 2005, p. 74).[14] The reasons for this difference between Catholics and Protestants in the growth of their followers requires further investigation, but the organizational strength of registered Christian churches is understandable, based on my knowledge of registered religious organizations: they are self-reliant social entities and much more than simple pawns of the CCP. After years of repression and forced isolation from their former international hosts, they are now adept survivalists and are capable of propagating and growing without support from state or foreign sponsors. This organizational capability is much greater among Protestant groups. Whereas they once operated in small groups and rarely cooperated, now they claim two strong organizational centers (the TSPM and house churches). More than once, my Chinese Christian interviewees 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 Church," one house church leader said.[15] It is possible that the TSPM, a controversial and unprecedented framework for in-group collaboration, is one reason why the number of Protestants has grown so much faster than the number of Catholics.

The evidence suggests that the lack of transnational and in-group collaborations is critical to explaining why Catholic activism has struggled, and especially why Chinese Catholics have failed to challenge existing laws and practices. For the CPCA, transnational collaboration is not only troubling but also forbidden by the patriotic doctrine, whereas for underground Catholics, transnationalism is the only acceptable source of legitimacy because of the papal system they have held onto for more than a century. Furthermore, neither side believes they have any option to leave the currently divided Church framework; both claim they are still "one Catholic Church" and their sovereignty reaches other spectrums of the community. This fundamental clash prevents meaningful collaboration and the two sides routinely step on each other's toes. When a clergyman attracts a large number of followers, his success is an immediate insult to the other side because it brings up the issue of loyalty. This results in a lack of incentive throughout the Catholic community to collaborate either internally or externally; each side is reluctant to make any move that would provoke a change in the status quo.

This deadlock has meant the Chinese Catholic Church has grown slowly in the post-reform era. The symbolism and moral authority of the Vatican are only just 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" has also declined over the past decade, as China has become an undeniable global power. Two kinds of collaboration—transnational between the Vatican and the CPCA and internal between the CPCA and underground Catholics—are key to understanding transnational Catholic activism in China.

Notes

1. 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 the Weberian tradition has argued, but simply states that an outward attitude is inherent in the Protestant faith and 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 (Buss, 2003, pp. 57–62).
2. The interviewee used to be a CCP member and is now a founder of a local charity NGO. Interview No. 99, December 21, 2010.
3. For example, in the "Regulations of Religious Affairs," 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" (Wen, 2004). Translations of older religious regulatory documents can be found in MacInnis (1989).
4. Despite criticisms of these methods based on the methodological standards set by John Stuart Mill (1975), it is reasonable to apply them here, since structural features of subnational cases are much more controllable than national cases. For debates about these methods, see Bennett and George (2005); Collier and Mahoney (1996); Dion (1998); Ragin (1987); Skocpol and Somers (1980).
5. The other important and related source of revenue for local governments is the granting or selling of land use rights to corporations (Wong, 1997).
6. TSPM churches are officially sanctioned and government controlled. They are not a recognized denomination, but they protect and promote Christian tenets while acting as an instrument of the Chinese government.

7. House churches are a distinctive phenomenon of Christianity in China. They are autonomous, independent, unofficial, and underground. They are usually isolated from each other and in want of financing.
8. The "Three Self" belief statement, which gives the Church its name, includes self-governance, self-support (financial independence from foreigners), and self-propagation (evangelical missions that target either foreign or Chinese non-believers are forbidden in principle).
9. One quick review of the religious control machine of Chinese authorities is in Jamestown Foundation (2011).
10. In 2010, there were 11 ordinations, 10 of which won approval from the Pope. In November 2010, Joseph Guo Jincai was ordained by the CPCA. Luo, "Chinese Catholic Church Elects."
11. Since 2006, nominations have been sent to the Vatican for approval based on an informal consensus between the two nations, yet Pope Benedict XVI disagreed with Guo's candidacy. Either the Chinese government or the CPCA decided that they would not wait any longer, breaking the consensus of "dual recognition" that had lasted for five years. Gledhill, "Bishops."
12. "Situation is stronger than men" (*xing shi bi ren qiang*) is an old Chinese proverb that says a wise man sometimes has to give up his principles or conceal his righteousness because evil is too powerful. As a member of the official Church, he could not openly criticize the leadership, but he made it clear that most Chinese Catholics had no say on the decision and question the legitimacy of such an arbitrary action. Interview No. 80, December 13, 2010.
13. In 1948, 17 out of 20 Chinese archbishops were foreign nationals; only 21 out of 143 bishops were Chinese (Ren, 2007, pp. 26, 287).
14. The TSPM figure comes from TSPM (1992, p. 3) and Jin and Qiu (2010).
15. He was referring to the reliance on large church operations and use of the church building as a symbol of Christian identity and solidarity. Interview No. 22, December 29, 2010.

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CHAPTER 6

Buddha Versus Jesus: The Transnationalism of Traditional Religions

This chapter introduces the work of other transnational religious advocacy networks, specifically Buddhism and Taoism, in promoting a space for activism in China. In contrast to Christianity, the greater tolerance and freedom of Buddhists and Taoists are understandable due to the popular ideology of anti-imperialism and the fact that both communities have been in China for more than two thousand years. Taoism can be traced back to the accidental philosopher Laozi in the late fourth century BCE, and Indian Buddhism spread into China around the second century BCE. Neither could be accused of being a cultural front for nineteenth-century Western imperialists. Their long histories make them even better candidates than Christian loyalists to present an alternative vision of religious freedom that is characterized by the modern Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The CCP tolerates religions differently based on their political utility and threat (Weller & Yanfei, 2010, pp. 29–50). It has sponsored patriotic associations for each of the five major religions—Buddhism, Taoism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam—both nationally and locally, to regulate believers by aligning them with government religious affairs agencies at each level (Laliberté, 2011, pp. 195–196). These religious affairs agencies rely on top-down control and co-optation, which can be understood as the corporatist methods and institutional behavior of united front work (described in Chap. 4). Under this system, the political taboos

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related to Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditional religions do not fundamentally differ from those related to Christianity: only registered facilities can conduct public activities that involve religious language, rituals, or organizations. Most importantly, participants in these activities are not allowed to receive any form of foreign sponsorship, especially from foreign organizations or individuals with religious affiliations; that is, the so-called Three Self principle (self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation). However, services and money from outside China flow freely into these communities with little interruption, much as illegal transactions do to Protestants and Catholics.

The success of these religions in expanding their freedom involves more than some celebrity monks and masters capitalizing on their personal charisma, or the rebuilding of a few architectural masterpieces for tourism purposes (Laliberté, Palmer, & Wu, 2011; Oakes & Sutton, 2010; Zhao & Feng, 2013). Similar to Christians who break the law by receiving foreign donations and missionaries, Buddhist and Taoist practitioners have also made a breakthrough on the most critical restriction of social activism in the past 60 years of Communist rule—the "no foreigners (outsiders) allowed" taboo. Participants can now conduct transnational transactions that were forbidden in the recent past. Their success is even more noteworthy because the state openly publicizes these activities on the news and welcomes their transnational engagement with respect to a variety of political agendas. Internally, this outside engagement shows that there is religious freedom in China and that good citizens can enjoy such freedom by following the lead of these sanctioned activities. Tourists and Chinese citizens alike can readily observe this to be so by walking into any temple and joining in the bustling festivals that occur in almost every corner of China. Externally, their successes can be extolled to persuade outsiders that China practices its own world religions. In this ideal setting, China's own religious groups are leading transnational enterprises and attracting devotees and pilgrims from other societies.

Money seems to be the common language shared by the state and traditional religions. Even an untrained eye can see that the traditional religious scenes in Han-majority regions are very different from those of Christianity (religious visibility in minority regions is protected for different reasons, but that would require another book to explain). In *Faiths on Display: Religion, Tourism, and the Chinese State*, Tim Oakes, Donald S. Sutton, and other authors document astonishing examples of how Maoist symbols have been transformed by religious opportunists

throughout China. A formal brigade leader "iron girl," Guo Fengliang (郭鳳蓮), built a large Buddhist temple atop Tiger Head in 2010, a sacred location of Mao's "foolish old man who moved the mountain" legend behind the "Learn from Dazhai" (學大寨) political mythology that was popular in the 1960s. By carefully mixing components from Maoist symbolism and traditional religion, Guo Fengliang and her two sons transformed Dazhai into a brand name and profitable "red tourism" destination (Oakes & Sutton, 2010, p. 2). In contrast, Christian churches, even registered churches housed in historic buildings, cannot engage in such entrepreneurship and must close their doors on most weekdays. Christian churches are often turned into fortresses by guards, cameras, and a mood of exclusiveness and secrecy. Traditional religious sites, in contrast, more closely resemble tourist destinations, surrounded by ticket counters, greeters, and street vendors from early morning to evening every day of the week, which guarantees a sense of welcome but also commercialization.

6.1 Christian and Buddhist Transnational Advocacy Networks in Comparison

After reviewing documents and publications from six religious transnational advocacy networks (TANs; three Buddhist and three Christian; see Table 6.1), we suggest here that at least three key differences contribute to their dissimilar outcomes. In general, Buddhist TANs promote local religious practices with limited cooperation from the state and embrace the pre-existing, state-sponsored social establishment. The underlying premise is that successful protection of religious rights requires prosperous local practitioners and some level of state tolerance of transnational activities. Based on this premise, Buddhist advocates enjoy more freedom than Christians not only because of their different faiths, but also because the

Table 6.1 Major religious transnational advocacy networks in China

Name of organization	*Major bases*
Tsi-Chi Foundation	Taiwan, USA, China
BLIA (Buddhist Light International)	Taiwan, USA
SGI (Soka Gakkai International)	Japan, USA
EFC (Evangelical Formosa Churches)	USA
CMI (Chinese Ministries International)	Taiwan, USA
CNEC (Christian Nationals' Evangelism Commission)	USA, Hong Kong

latter usually refuse to work with the state and other pre-existing status quo groups. Christians' ways of practicing religious freedom provide a rare chance to observe the dominant gospel model, which highlights cooperation between foreign missionaries and local believers against the atheist state, which is very similar to the boomerang model paradigm promoted by secular human rights advocates. In contrast, Buddhists and arguably Taoists are keen on an alternative boomerang method that emphasizes internal societal collaboration and implies a more cooperative and less confrontational approach to the state (Koesel, 2014, p. 2).

The most striking difference between Christianity and these traditional religions is their permitted space for social activities outside their designated religious realms (McCarthy, 2013). Local Buddhist and Taoist sects have been allowed to operate a number of businesses, non-advocacy non-governmental organizations (NGOs), charities, and development funds in China (Fisher, 2017; Huang, 2009; Laliberté, 2012). In contrast, Christian entrepreneurs must operate similar operations under their personal names and maintain a great distance between their businesses and their faith. In the 40 years of reform and openness since 1978, the only foreign-based NGO that has been allowed to register and operate openly in China belongs to a Taiwanese Buddhist group, Tzu Chi (Huang, 2009). The CCP is accused by many of trying to make these traditional religious agencies serve as bridges for China with overseas communities, and sometimes as tools for civic diplomacy or united front work (Xue, 2013; Lau, 2016; Wu, 2017). The cases examined here reveal that the situation is much more complicated. This chapter introduces several cases of transnational ties linked to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and East Asia.

In general, the space for Buddhist and Taoist advocates in China, despite their local popularity and utility to China's global united front, is strictly limited to the role of money-providers. For charitable social participatory work, the CCP's policy is identical for secular and religious practitioners: leave the money and let loyalist individuals chosen by the Party decide how to spend it. The interviewees in this study repeatedly stated that the Party tolerates a lot of activism and even criticism, but never credit being given to outsiders. The situation of United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded programs in China is a clear example of the "money only" restriction on social activism. Although foreign funding is generally welcomed and US$275 million was given to programs in China from 2001 to 2010, China continues to refuse permission for USAID to open a permanent office in China, which means 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 (Lum, 2010).

Although their exact scale is unclear, preliminary evidence has shown that some Buddhist and Taoist foreign advocates have successfully entered China and established networks of quiet activism with local believers. Similar to the few Christian advocacy groups examined in the previous chapter, they also rely on sanctioned, registered groups to shelter their collaboration (backdoor listing) and to develop a wide range of "illegal" activities, including receiving foreign donations, holding religious services, organizing training workshops, conducting charity activities, starting missionary projects, and propagating the values and norms of religious freedom that link these believers. Two cases, Tzu-Chi and Yiguandao, illustrate this different kind of transnationalism and are discussed later in this chapter.

The second difference between these religions and Christianity is the lack of a minority–majority situation within their own communities. Mainline Han Buddhism and Taoism are not subjected to anti-imperialist discourse and there have been fewer instances of persecution of their communities than those of Christians, except during the hardest times of the Cultural Revolution (Xue, 2015). Some Buddhist monks such as the Ven. Master Juzan (釋巨贊), a Buddhist charity personality and celebrated anti-Japanese patriot, were passionate about the Communist revolution and actively worked with the CCP to "socialize" Buddhism during the 1950s (Xue, 2009, pp. 217–220). The co-optation of and united front work on Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditional religions never faced as much resistance as that experienced by the Protestant and Catholic populations. In the post-reform era, individual practitioners have been pushing for grassroots "moral activism," which actively criticizes modern materialism, and successfully transmits these discourses through their networks to other temple spaces. However, as yet, they have been unable to initiate collective actions to resist commercialization and most Buddhist sites have become cash cows for local authorities (Fisher, 2017, pp. 247–248). Consequently, state-sanctioned organizations have dominated the whole scene and the line between "legal" and "underground" had begun to blur, until they started to face more innovative and spiritually devoted competitors from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere, when transformation was initiated (Fisher, 2008, 2014).

For example, Xuecheng (釋學誠), a popular blogger and celebrity monk of the Longquan Monastery, built the first Buddhist charity organization, the Beijing RenAi Charity Foundation (北京仁愛基金會), in 2006.

RenAi is classified as a non-governmental social organization, and is staffed by 28 full-time workers and 3000 regular volunteers. Although RenAi functions like a normal civil society group, it avoids any advocacy role, accepts projects only with governmental permission and supervision, and never questions the harsh and sometimes unreasonable limitations imposed by the authorities (Zhao & Feng, 2013, p. 38). Nonetheless, the creation of RenAi is an uneasy example of progress. Xuecheng was able to establish RenAi because he was a member of the prestigious National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC; a united front body) and the Deputy Secretary General and then President of the powerful Buddhist Association of China (BAC) from 1993 until 2018. In August 2018 he resigned his post when two of his deputies accused him of alleged wrongs and corruption, a rare Chinese #MeToo moment (Zuo, 2018). His rise and fall form a perfect example of the corporatist environment faced by traditional religions.

Because these traditional religions often lack an underground, resistance sector, the CCP has more leverage to mobilize their communities for political purposes, which has been evident in post-1990s Taiwan and post-2010 Hong Kong: Taiwanese temple-goers have passionately marched on pilgrimage trips to mainland China, disregarding governmental warnings and restrictions. Especially at times when the two governments became mired in political gridlock, Chinese officials would deliberately go and be welcomed and greeted in Taiwanese temples and altars. In Hong Kong, some Buddhist monks and Taoist priests publicly demonstrated against democratic protestors who were led by well-known Christian figures such as Joshua Wong Chi-fung, Chu Yiu-ming, and Benny Tai (Wu, 2017). In addition to Buddhism and Taoism, folk worship practices such as Mazu (媽祖) and Lord Guan (關公) have been used by the authorities to establish united front work ties with overseas Chinese for the recent "One Belt One Road" initiatives (Ku, 2018).

6.2 Humanistic Buddhism and Tzu-Chi's Global Activism

Following the Humanistic Buddhism (人間佛教) movement initiated in the 1910s, modern Chinese/Han Buddhism (or Mahayanaian Buddhism) has gradually moved away from its original practice and been transformed into a new world religion movement (Pittman, 2001). It now has arguably more similarities than differences with its Christian counterparts: the new

generation of Buddhist organizations are becoming highly hierarchical, demonstrate great strengths in organization and finance, use technology and the media intensively, and engage in external propagation and missions, both social and political. Although their inner-worldly focuses have become similar, the driving forces behind them are distinct (Chen, 2002, pp. 215–216). The major distinction between these traditional religions and Christian advocacy is their innate philosophical characteristics. Due to length limitations, this chapter cannot comprehensively outline the philosophical features of the two religions. Instead, we focus here on three commonly shared principles of Buddhism that have become institutional guidelines for most Mahayana (Pureland, Zen, and Nichiren) Buddhist transnational organizations in the Asia Pacific. Overall, these principles make Buddhist advocacy "softer" and more cooperative in its relationships with the state, secular social groups, and other religions.

Buddhism has become the largest religion in China and Chinese Buddhism comprises the world's largest Buddhist community, with an estimated 185–250 million practitioners, which accounts for 13–18% of the total Chinese population (Freedom House, 2017). Due to the long practice of *three teachings harmonious as one* (三教合一), lay practitioners often conflate their identities with Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and temple-goers visit multiple sites, disregarding the differences. Since Taoism and Confucianism do not have strong institutions but rely on individual temples, altars, and shrines that are only loosely connected, the "three teachings" characteristic has created some problems for researchers of these religions. Although the number of traditional religious adherents is difficult to measure accurately, the Pew Research Center has estimated that more than 294 million people in China, or 21% of its population, practice folk religions (Pew Research Center, 2012). The Chinese government does not report the total number of these practitioners because they are not one of the five legal faiths. Compared to the percentages in other majority Chinese societies in Hong Kong (14%), Taiwan (37%), and Singapore (11%), this 21% estimation seems reasonable, and Buddhism remains the strongest and most institutionalized traditional religion in China (Table 6.2).

6.2.1 Teachings of Jesus Compared to Buddha

The most obvious difference in the two religions that have arisen from the teachings of these leaders lies in the spiritual roots of the lives of Buddha

Table 6.2 Religious adherents as percentage of the population in comparison[a]

	China (2017) (%)	*Taiwan (2005) (%)*	*Hong Kong (2010) (%)*	*Singapore (2018) (%)*
Buddhism	13–18	35	13	42
Taoism and folk religions	21	37	14	11
Christianity	2–5	4	7	18
Catholicism	>1	1	3	7
Protestantism	4	3	4	11
Islam	2	>1	3	14

[a]Sources: Revised and updated from Goossaert (2011, p. 189). The new numbers for Chinese Buddhists are from Freedom House (2017) and those on Taoism and folk religions are from Pew (2012). Taiwan's number on Taoism includes 4% of Yiguandao. Singapore figures are selected from CIA Factbook (2018)

and Christ. Buddha left his noble family around the age of 30, and reached supreme *Dun-Wu* after years of learning, austerity, and meditation under the Bodhi tree. Jesus was born with the burden of resurrection in a needy family, and ended mortal life in a criminal's death on a cross during his 30s (Smart, 1993, p. 12). The narrative and mythic flavors of these origin stories deliver two divergent logics regarding salvation and viewpoints regarding humanity. At the risk of simplification, Jesus saves humanity through his divine deeds and death, with his sacrifice crystallized by churches as the moral compass for believers against original sin. In contrast, Buddha did not himself "save" humanity, but saves people from their "karma" by teaching the way of self-salvation.

The differing logic between salvation through sacrifice and salvation through teaching produces dissimilar practices. For example, Catholic churches practice rigid forms of worship and have developed massive infrastructures that encourage belief in the value of sacrifice through material means or physical efforts. Most churches demand regular attendance and monetary donations. In contrast, traditional Mahayana Buddhist temples generally feature many fewer sacramental decorations and magnificent structures (Smart, 1993, p. 14). In addition, Buddhism's family-centered worship requires no regular temple attendance. Theoretically, Buddhist salvation is the *Eightfold Path* ("八正道"; a more common term in Mahayana Buddhism is the *Dharma wheel*, "大法輪"), which concentrates on self-awareness and deep meditation, and believers need not practice inside temples or have contact with monks (Smart, 1993, p. 15). Some

sects such as Zen Buddhism display no statues or images inside their temples. Temples for Buddhists, which are closer in concept to schools, are places of teaching and learning, not command centers for believers or earthly places for God. Indeed, Buddhism in places like Tibet and Sri Lanka is characterized by numinous and politicized elements, with the logic of salvation through sacrifice being seen as secondary.

Today, differences between practices are blurring. Mahayana Buddhist temples have adopted organizational techniques similar to their Christian counterparts. Their buildings have become extraordinary, meetings are held regularly, and expanded missions now demand more financial and physical participation. In the aftermath of the Chichi earthquake, the Taiwanese Chung Tai Chan monastery spent billions to build a very large, palace-like temple.[1] Other Zen branches in Japan frequently use the remodeling and reconstruction of ancient temples as a way to increase the number of their adherents. Family-oriented worship has been replaced by more hierarchical, organized gatherings. Most temples today no longer function as monasteries, but rather typically comprise one of the following: (1) a resident monastic unit that serves as an administrative and training center and houses various ranks of monks or nuns; (2) a secular institute located close by the residences of followers who attend regular meetings; or (3) an external organization charged with missionary, education, charity, or other external affairs.[2]

Modern Buddhism is highly influenced by the logic of self-salvation. For example, the impermanence of this world ("輪迴"; transmigration) is a central tenet of Buddhist charity, and motivates believers to help others in relatively passive and practical ways. Worship is not central to its ritual practices. Mahayana Buddhists practice stricter, more ceremony-like worship than Theravadin. However, the essence of "chanting" (Nichiren), "za-zen" (Zen), or "Buddha worship" (Pureland), although performed differently from sect to sect, is very unlike the prayers, fasting, or church services in Christian practices. In short, Buddhist worship is not a communication tool between God and self. Rather, its focus is mostly on self-training and meditation to enable followers to walk and advance on the Eightfold Path. Christian worship also involves introspection and mediation (contemplation) practices, but no divine spirit is required in Buddhist worship. The implications of this for the organization are significant. First and foremost, Buddhist worship can be performed anywhere, with or without the existence of a "holy house." In a very simplified sense, the Buddhist viewpoint toward ritual practices focuses on improving

human dignity, rather than establishing a rightful relationship with God. The concept of Jesus or churches serving as a "great vehicle" is absent in Buddhism (Smart, 1993, pp. 15–17).

The second implication of self-salvation has to do with its external relationship. Buddhism tends not to distinguish between "sin" and "righteousness" or heretic and orthodox. Robert Thurman describes the Buddhist principle as being a "cultural notion of rights" (Thurman, 1988). Karma is more an index of spiritual development than a "debt" owed by human beings to the gatekeeper of hell. In Buddhism, there is no ultimate confrontation between good and evil, because human nature cannot be fixed or universally defined; the lives of human beings are karmic in nature and people reside at distinct spiritual levels. The only proper thing to do, according to Dharma, is not to attempt to reverse one's karma (or sins, in the Christian sense), but to advance the self and retrieve one's dignity. Peter D. Hershock calls this human dignity approach a "dramatic intervention" that combines individual freedom with communal flourishing, thus correcting the misleading rights-based assumptions of the Western human rights approach (2000, pp. 9–10).

I interviewed members of Buddhist temples and Christian churches in the Chinese immigrant communities of Los Angeles and Chicago, and asked why they might approach non-believers. The answers from Christians were uniform: to spread the gospel because some have not heard of it, to demonstrate the power of God by saving people in misery, and most of all "to retrieve lost souls for God." The reason they act is based on theological correctness or "truth," and that truth distinguishes the savior from the savage. In contrast, members of Buddhist temples have less coherent ideas about why they choose to share the wisdom of Buddha or help the helpless. Some referred to more secular reasons such as happiness, overcoming death or sickness, and personal philanthropism. None mentioned a higher authority or divine force. The strongest impression I received in the interviews was the intent to help others live in a dignified way through happiness, release from pain, and the retrieval of dignity. This less judgmental and more sympathetic attitude serves to create more inclusive behavior toward others.

Historically, Buddhism has not shown great flexibility in adapting to local cultures. After Buddhism entered China in the first century CE, it quickly adopted Taoist and Confucian traditions, and has evolved into eight different sects over the past two thousand years. The Chinese version of Buddhism has become the basis for those in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan

(Smart, 1993, pp. 26–40). In these places, Buddhism represented a "new" religion and its prevalence has not been reliant on military conquest or imperial occupation. All of these factors contribute to its second important institutional tenet: respecting otherness (inclusiveness).

Unlike Christianity, Buddhist philosophy does not believe that knowledge of truth comes exclusively from the classic writings and masters as taught in orthodox schools. Rather, learning and teaching also arise via contact with other religions and people. Since everyone is simply a traveler in this life, everyone has an equal chance of "becoming Buddha," and there is no reason to devalue any idea or any chance interaction. One of my Nichiren interviewees introduced a Japanese Buddhist concept that delivers this message well: *Dharmapala* ("諸天善神" or "しょてんぜんしん"; protectors of the law). From the Lotus Sutra or Sutra, its original meaning is that various spirits, guardians, and angels have different levels of expertise in protecting the Lotus Dharma. In practice, it explains that anyone has the potential to act as a "protector" of Dharma. Even a non-Buddhist researcher who is only interested in studying this religion could become a protector of the faith under some circumstance.

This unique philosophy contributes to the third principle of modern Buddhism: the pursuit of human dignity through *Dun-Wu* ("頓悟"; sudden enlightenment).[3] This principle concerns how Buddhists interpret their awakening and readiness to promote dignity and change. "*Dun*" literally indicates the very moment a learner is "struck" by his/her enlightenment (not necessary a master), and "*Wu*" refers to a sudden understanding and readiness to move into the next phase (Hershock, 2000, p. 21). What would the Buddhist approach to human rights look like? Hershock says, "our original nature is thus not an inherited or even achieved status but a liberating orientation of our conduct—the expression of unabridged virtuosity in ending suffering and realizing a truly enlightening world-realm, an intimately liberating pattern of interdependence." Recognizing patterns of interdependence is the foremost step of *Dun-Wu*. Human beings cannot be forced into *Dun-Wu*; it requires time, space, and self-liberation. Grand masters or written classics might not be the vehicle to enlightenment; humans become ready to be enlightened only when they can recognize their patterns of interdependence and human conduct is rooted in that awareness. It does not mean that others have no influence on individual personhood.

For Buddhist human rights advocates, preparing the *path* is the most important task. This path involves (1) the freedom to reduce human

ignorance regarding a situation, the ability to address this situation, and the dramatic nature of its interdependence; (2) the freedom to express individual understanding through intentions or desires that are appropriate to a previous situation; and (3) the freedom to speak and communicate in ways appropriate to our understanding (Hershock, 2000, p. 27). In short, Buddhist universal rights, if any can be identified, are the rights that guarantee everyone the freedom to cultivate and enjoy appropriate qualities of attention and focus on "whatever circumstances in which we find ourselves" (Hershock, 2000, p. 28). Every individual must have the right (and sufficient ability) to decide what is "right" for them, and the scope to decide when they want to change. Putting it strategically, Buddhism asks all authorities to "back off" and let people manage their own learning processes without attempting to impose *Dun-Wu* on them.

6.2.2 Tzu-Chi's Global Activism

In sum, modern Buddhism reveals three distinct tendencies toward inner-worldly activism: salvation through teaching, respecting otherness, and practicing human rights through preparing the path of *Dun-Wu*. How do these three principles affect the practice of Buddhist transnational activism? And, most importantly, how do these practices differ from those based on the conventional paradigm? Literature regarding Buddhist transnational activities is scarce, but an edited volume by Hiroko Kawanami and Geoffrey Samuel provides a collection of rich case studies of Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and Japanese Buddhist organizations that are active in global charity efforts, especially in Southeast Asia. The authors found that the participation of these organizations in relief efforts often creates positive impacts in transforming and sustaining local temples as communities that provide relief and refuge, which in essence helps to nourish the feeble civil society that characterizes societies in need (Kawanami & Samuel, 2013, pp. 192–199).

Among these transnational actors, Tzu-Chi, a Buddhist sect, is a good example of the practice of modern Buddhist transnationalism, because it is one of the few Buddhist organizations dedicated primarily to secular missions and one that has had obvious success. Founded by a group of nuns in Taiwan in 1966, Tzu-Chi does not hold to the traditional practice of organizing ceremonious and ritual services to attract believers and donations. Instead, it focuses on social charitable work, which later became the Four Major Missions (四大志業) of Tzu-Chi: Charity, Medicine,

Education, and Humanity (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2009). Today, Tzu-Chi has over 10 million members worldwide in 47 countries, a satellite television station, a cable news channel, hospitals, universities, and a global troop of volunteers who work on projects related to disaster relief, medical aid, marrow banks, poverty alleviation, recycling, vegetarian food, and many other forms of social activism (Wang, 2013, p. 122).

As a thriving organization originally from the rural countryside of Taiwan, Tzu-Chi is not content to be a well-respected ambassador of goodwill and good deeds on the island. What separates it from other popular Buddhist sects in wealthy East Asian countries is its transnational reach (Huang, 2009; Laliberté, 2013; Madsen, 2007). Tzu-Chi's international relief work has reached every corner of the globe. For instance, its relief teams helped refugees in Azerbaijan in 1996, have supplied food to Cambodia on several occasions, provided medical support in Ethiopia in 1997, offered support in New York in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and helped victims of Hurricane Isabelle in 2003, Hurricane Charlie in 2004, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Wang, 2013, p. 133). Also, Tzu-Chi differs from many religious charities that provide material and financial donations to big-name international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) or international organizations in response to humanitarian crises. Tzu-Chi's approach is more advocacy based: Cheng Yen insists that aid be delivered by hand and in person by its own members to disaster victims. This direct participation policy demands that Tzu-Chi's operational infrastructure be more like the Red Cross than the Salvation Army; its relief teams often arrive to the frontline as early as the first responders, station themselves in the area as long as needed to fulfill their duties, and leave after having established strong connections with locals.

Two personal observations demonstrate the advocacy-driven, well-connected, and well-organized nature of Tzu-Chi's operations. When I was a graduate student at American University, one of my Taiwanese friends was involved in a serious car accident and rushed to hospital. Before anyone from his school, the embassy, or his family or friends had heard about the accident, Tzu-Chi's Washington, DC headquarters had been alerted by one of its members working at the metropolitan police department, and a team of volunteers was dispatched to the hospital within an hour.

In 2010, I was in Sichuan investigating Christian activism with a small group of underground missionaries two years after the devastating 8.2 earthquake of May 12, 2008, which rocked the province and killed more

than 69,000 people. The Sichuan earthquake is considered by many to have ushered in "the First Year of Chinese Civil Society," because not only was there an unprecedented number of INGOs allowed to participate in the relief efforts, but numerous grassroots groups and individual volunteers were similarly inspired to take action from every corner of China (Yu & Zhou, 2012). Christians were not absent from this historic event and many Chinese Christians saw it as a great opportunity to expand their social space. However, just one month after the quake the government released a statement that advocacy efforts had grown beyond its control and began to bar these groups from the affected areas. One year later, all non-Sichuan persons were asked to leave the rebuilding and relocating regions (Interview No. 24). Yet almost every community leader, local NGO, local official, and even Christian leader I met mentioned Tzu-Chi and praised its "Buddhist way" and professionalism. Tzu-Chi was one of the few outside groups allowed to continue to participate in the relief and rebuilding projects.

Besides its dedication to secular transnational activism, Tzu-Chi's organization also has similarities with those of modern secular advocacy organizations. First, although Tzu-Chi was founded by nuns and Master Cheng Yen is worshiped by followers, the organization itself is led and run by lay practitioners rather than clergy. Its vast number of members and operations are governed by the Tzu-Chi Foundation, a charitable non-profit organization registered with the Department of Civil Affairs in Taiwan, with a board of directors whose members include business executives, financial and legal professionals, and university professors. Second, the doctrines of Tzu-Chi do not promote any specific interpretation of Buddhism, and its female founder, who was marginalized by the male-dominated Buddhist inner circle, wanted the organization to focus on professional humanitarian efforts and engage in community service rather than the spiritual development of individuals (O'Neill, 2010, pp. 3–5). For Cheng Yen and her believers, *Dun-Wu* and other spiritual development can be realized by participation in these compassionate activities along with meditation and prayer.

Tzu-Chi's success is also due to its development in China. As a Taiwanese non-profit organization, it resisted criticism from the Taiwanese government and launched its first humanitarian operation in China in 1991, when cross-Strait exchanges were limited and the object of tight scrutiny. Through years of engagement, Tzu-Chi became the first and remains the only foreign religious organization to obtain formal approval

and registration in China, a fact that raises many eyebrows among practitioners and scholars around the globe. According to Tzu-Chi member and scholar Pao-Ying Huang, this uneasy success arose from a "Five Rules" consensus by its leadership with Chinese authorities, with the help of the United Front Work Department (Huang, 2009, p. 79). In a nutshell, all Tzu-Chi's actions must adhere to the following: One Purpose—only for disaster relief and no other agenda; Two Principles—direct and concentrated effort in heavily affected locations; Three Nevers—never talk about politics, never bring back information about the suffering of victims to Taiwan for propaganda, and never propagate its religious faith; Four Kinds of Resources—provision to address needs related to food, health and sanitation, housing, and education of disaster victims; and Five Types of Assistance from the Chinese government—including mutual cooperation, personnel assistance, transportation, rostering of victims, and tools needed for relief (Huang, 2009, pp. 78–86).

With this political consensus, Tzu-Chi has successfully expanded its activity of engaged Buddhism to build 40 schools, 4100 homes, 158 nursing homes for the elderly, 13 day-care centers, and two hospital buildings, as well as having provided scholarships to more than 7000 students in China over the past two decades (O'Neill, 2010, p. 80). On August 20, 2010, with the presence and blessing of Chen Yunlin, Chairman of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS), and Qi Xiaofei, Deputy Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), Tzu-Chi opened the first local office as an overseas NGO in China (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2010). In 2011, it established its permanent China headquarters at a 13-acre compound in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, which includes a Four Major Missions building complex with a temple, school, medical examination center, and museum (Song, 2011). Although official publications never report the exact number, it is believed that Tzu-Chi has developed a large troop of "local volunteers" (it is not allowed to make religious converts), as it has also done in Taiwan.

6.3 Taoism and Yiguandao's Evasive Resistance

Similar to Buddhist reformers such as Tzu-Chi, Chinese Taoists have gradually revived their faith and developed new organizations that have some similarities with Christian evangelicalism. The old societies and sects favored operating charities as a means of obtaining legitimacy and social acceptance, whereas the new generation emphasizes organizational

development and, most importantly, propagation via mission work. The group that best demonstrates this kind of development is a sect known as Yiguandao (一貫道; I-Kuan Tao or Way of Pervading Unity), which was established in the 1930s by the grand master Zhang Tianran (張天然) in Jinan, Shandong province (The Republic of China I-Kuan Tao Association, 1988). After experiencing extraordinary growth in the 1930s–1940s, in 1947 Yiguandao registered itself as the Chinese Society for Morality and Charity (中華道德慈善會; Palmer, 2011, p. 24). After 1947, it spread from China to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and numerous overseas Chinese communities due to the civil war on the mainland. Having originated in China and propagated via migrant communities, Yiguandao has demonstrated impressive cultural adaptation as it has disseminated across cultural and ethnic lines. Today, it has grown into a world faith with a presence on five major continents and has regional headquarters in more than eighteen countries (Lee, 2014, p. 147).

In the case of South Korean propagation, Yiguandao quietly emerged, having received direct decrees from Zhang Tianran in 1947 to conduct its first wave of missionary trips from Tianjin to the newly independent South Korea (Lee, 2014, p. 149). The original approach to propagation adopted by Yiguandao was via an independent chapel (佛壇) and personal connections with three key pupils of Zhang Tianran. Later, Master Zhang decided to establish a more organized institution in Korea, which called for the unification of three chapels (三壇合一) and the creation of a social organization called the Moral Society (道德社). This more public and inclusive platform gave local Korean nationals the opportunity to be part of this new religion and some became *de facto* leaders in the movement. As the Yiguandao movement grew and strengthened in the post–Korean War society, Korean practitioners formed their own faction and Moral Foundation Society (道德基礎會) in 1952 (Lee, 2014, pp. 147–166). Although its Chinese leaders lost their monopoly of the Yiguandao hierarchy, the faith gained a foothold in the majority of Korean society. Today, the largest Korean Yiguandao organization is the International Moral Society (國際道德會), which has 160 locations, 300 master priests, and 1,200,000 members who operate its missions in the United States, France, Japan, and other countries hosting Korean immigrants (Lee, 2014, p. 159).

Because of its early connections to Chiang Kai-shek's political enemies, Yiguandao was considered to be a cult and was banned by the Kuomintang (KMT) government; the ban remained until martial law was

lifted in 1986. Yiguandao received even harsher treatment under the rule of the CCP and is still illegal under current law. In China after 1949, Yiguandao and other redemptive societies were labeled by the regime as "reactionary sects and secret societies" (反動會道門). A total of 13 million followers (around 2% of the total population) were counted and 820,000 sect leaders and activists were arrested or forced to turn themselves in to authorities during the anti-secret societies campaign (Palmer, 2011, pp. 25–26).

Yiguandao's method of propagation brought both political support and repression. The organization converted many social elites to the faith, especially politicians and those in the urban business class, who maintained a good foundation for charity, further propagation, and also suspicion from the authoritarian rulers. In Taiwan, Yiguandao had a complex relationship with the KMT regime. It was ridiculed as a "duck egg religion," with news articles fabricated about believers collecting duck eggs for dubious purposes, while some high-ranking KMT generals, officials, and judges secretly became members. Practitioners and those holding meetings faced constant harassment and persecution from the authorities, but Yiguandao practitioners were never as oppositional and confrontational as members of the Presbyterian Church, who enjoyed full legal status but were actively engaged in political movements during the 1970s and 1980s (Chang & Liu, 2015, p. 102).

Yiguandao's invasive, "re-purposing" resistance in Taiwan is similar to the behavior of Chinese Catholic faith-based organizations in China (McCarthy, 2013). On the one hand, believers behaved like perfect citizens by satisfying every need of the state, from poverty relief efforts to electoral mobilization on behalf of friendly KMT candidates. On the other hand, they refused to make any compromises regarding their faith or their organization. In their analysis of the content of Taiwan's official publications regarding Yiguandao and the Presbyterian Church, Jung-Chang Chang and Tsung-Wei Liu indicate that while both work to comfort people in need, they differ in their opinions about democratic values, political regimes, political parties, and Taiwan independence. Empirical evidence reveals that Yiguandao's political identity emphasizes kindness, individual sacrifice and perseverance, and hierarchy, whereas the Presbyterian Church's political approach favors justice, equality, democracy, and criticism of KMT-related parties (Chang & Liu, 2015, p. 91).

6.4 Revisiting the Transnational Advocacy Networks Paradigm

Through the examples of Tzu-Chi and Yiguandao, we see that modern Buddhist and Taoist advocates demonstrate different kinds of transnationalism, which can offer insights when revisiting the conventional wisdom of human rights advocates who promote religious freedom in the developing world. Although both Christian and Buddhist/Taoist transnational networks smuggle illegal aid and missions into China and try to expand their social space as much as possible, their methods differ significantly.

The key question is: "Who has the potential to win more local friends?" Buddhist *Dun-Wu* presents a more inclusive approach than its Christian counterpart in promoting local enlightened practitioners. Indeed, foreign-based Christian and Buddhist groups focus not only on spreading their faith, but also on broad community needs such as education, humanitarian relief, and cultural exchange. The priority of Christian transnational advocacy, however, is always the gospel. One of the most prominent Christian transnational advocacy networks (TANs) is Chinese Ministries International (CMI), which has permanent training facilities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, and whose focus is helping Chinese Christian churches and house church missionaries. The creator and former director of CMI, the late Reverend Chao Twa-In, had a long struggle with the state-sponsored Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). He and his colleagues worked to integrate Chinese underground and house churches until the late 1990s.[4] At the peak of his movement, there were reportedly more than 20 million members in the newly formed underground coalition. In 1998, the coalition made a declaration in two manifesto documents, "Statement of Faith of Chinese House Churches" and "Chinese House Churches' Attitudes about Government, Religion Policy, and TSPM," which make explicit their stance against the discrimination and calumniation from TSPM and the CCP (Shen, Zhang, Zheng, & Wang, 1998). These declarations drew significant international attention from overseas communities and spurred large donations and the infusion of energy into the movement during this period.

Taiwanese and Hong Kong evangelical communities are especially concerned about their counterparts in China. Partly because of their previous experience with authoritarian governments and partly because their theological teachings ask believers to be brave in protesting injustice,

confrontation between evangelical TANs and the state is inevitable. The Chinese state machine has chosen severe retaliation: CMI members have been forbidden entry to China, and several Hong Kong residents have been arrested for visiting the residences of CMI members. Missionaries have been expelled, harassed, or imprisoned. In response to the growing concerns about illegal arrests and imprisonment, in 2000 the Chinese government passed the Regulation of Religious Activities of Foreigners in the PRC.[5] Briefly, this Foreigner Regulation gave authorities a legal weapon that justified their ban on the participation of foreigners in local religious activity. It also made it illegal to carry religious texts or audio or video recordings into China. This and the old 1994 Religious Affairs Regulation were further strengthened by the 2004 Religious Affairs Regulation and a 2017 revision that goes into greater detail ("Religious," 2004).

In addition to hostile government responses, the failure of Christian TANs is also related to their exclusive approach. They only help house church congregations, who already suffer discrimination from legal churches and a suspicious general population. Buddhists carry out their humanitarian programs based on relatively "pure" motivation: they consider their charitable work to be an integral part of their faith, not an instrument of religious propagation. No Buddhist group works solely to help "Buddhist populations," and this non-discriminatory approach is more acceptable to the community. For example, multiple interviewees stated that in Sichuan there were Christian aid groups that asked the victims of the earthquake to convert before they could receive food services, and a few Christian leaders had labeled the disaster "a punishment for the sin of the Sichuan people" (Interview No. 31). In contrast, Tzu-Chi volunteers have followed a much more professional protocol and, as a result, their operations have been welcomed by both officials and locals.

In summary, there are three major distinctions between Christian and Buddhist/Taoist transnational activism:

- The local work of gospel networks focuses only on victims, whereas Buddhists/Taoists have much broader goals that target the whole local community.
- Buddhist/Taoist practitioners do not identify a specific sin or action, and do not use any conventional shaming strategy with respect to either the state or individuals. For them, states are all the same, but the development of human dignity can be pursued in various ways.

- The alliance of religious rights networks contains both repressed (underground) and status quo groups (legal temples/churches). Frontline activity is evolving from one that is against the state to one that focuses on transforming local communities.

The fundamental principles of the human rights movement, especially tactics based on the boomerang pattern or "spiral model," are very similar to the framework Christians use when organizing their TANs: those less fortunate must be "enlightened" via advocacy (missionary) and human rights (gospel) to be saved from repression (both physical and mental). Risse-Kappen, Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999) and contributors to their book *The Power of Human Rights* suggest that the boomerang pattern facilitates collaboration between domestic advocates and international networks by pushing for legal reforms, shaming human rights violators, and pressuring for greater recognition in both top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top directions (boomerang effect; Fig. 6.1). Therefore, the goal of "saving people" is necessarily accompanied by organized enlightenment activities on the ground. By this definition, the boomerang pattern is less effective in highly repressive nations like China, because organized enlightenment is absent due to the lack of local advocacy and the severing of transnational networks with the Western world. In a sense, the push for religion or other individual rights in many autocracies has faced a similar obstacle: the state forbids any direct connection between international and local advocates, and local religious practices are effectively marginalized or oppressed by establishments

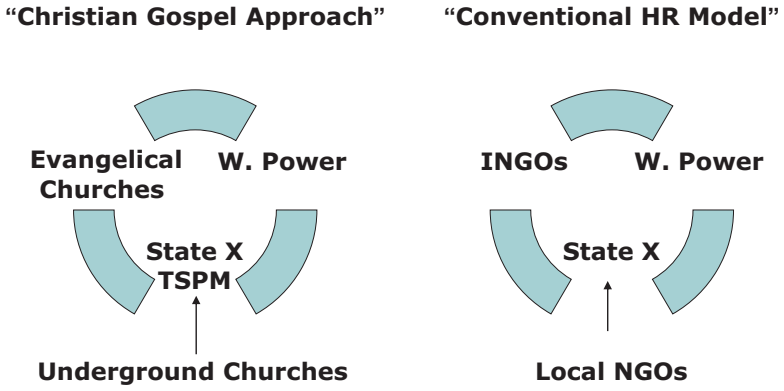

Fig. 6.1 Conventional transnational advocacy networks' boomerang patterns

controlled by the government. A logical solution is difficult to achieve, but is otherwise straightforward: try to build local opposition with the help of powerful transnational INGOs and Western governments. Based on the experiences of religious TANs in China, this approach is ineffective.

Using language from the literature, cross-border advocacy comprises the creation of a boomerang process that starts with local activists informing foreign advocates about their suffering and difficulties in defending their freedoms and rights, which in turn brings more resources and leverage with which to expand their influence beyond their hometowns via collaboration between the foreign countries and INGOs concerned. The reader is referred to the conventional human rights model shown on the right-hand side of Fig. 6.1. Conventional wisdom regarding this form of advocacy is that without INGOs' knowledge, dedication, and brave decision to take part in this dangerous journey, there is little chance that locals will fight against their repressive state. The long-standing Christian advocacy/missionary approach from the nineteenth century is similar—underground churches rely on evangelical and like-minded groups in the West to lobby their own governments in the name of the gospel or religious freedom, and to pressure the state (and its TSPM establishment in today's China) to loosen its religious regulations. See the Christian gospel approach shown on the left-hand side of Fig. 6.1. In contrast, the alternative boomerang pattern begins with local activists not only receiving assistance from but also empowering foreign advocates to survive in their complicated local setting, which in return expands the influence of both beyond their hometowns (Fig. 6.2; more discussion later). The lesson provided by the fieldwork of this study

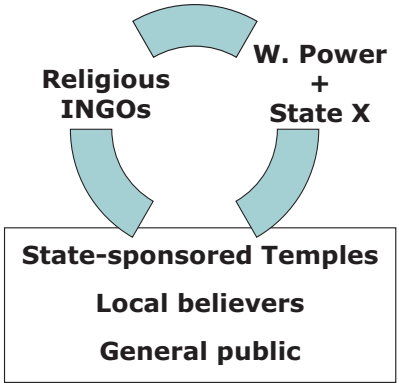

Fig. 6.2 Alternative Buddhist/Taoist boomerang

in City S and the experiences of Tzu-Chi and Yiguandao indicate that the role of locals is essential: without their knowledge, dedication, and bravery in breaking through the system established by the authorities, there is little chance that foreign money could flow in, nor any of their ideas become reality.

This lesson provides an alternative model to that described by Keck and Sikkink (1998) in their work on TANs. Their model assumes that locals have little capacity to oppose a repressive system and therefore require the empowerment from and the substantial and moral power of outside actors to jump-start their activism. However, the evidence obtained in this study suggests that activism begins with a local plan to invite outside help, and this rule-breaking behavior can have potentially dire consequences. The invitation from an officially sanctioned group is especially critical, because group members have veto power to disrupt any transnational collaboration as well as advantages in their ability to protect the transaction. Local clergy who are affiliated with the TSPM can help foreign advocacy groups gain access and temporary permission to operate in China. In return, foreigners can provide funding, training, and new ideas, which broaden their agenda and bring them into a cross-provincial network of religious activists, as is evident in City S, Tzu-Chi, and Yiguandao.

This transnational collaboration eventually serves to expand the participants' freedom of association because the old norms—that is, the use of self-reliance, self-governance, and self-propagation as tools for constraining the development of their organizational capacity—have essentially been broken. By leveraging key positions in the government-censored establishment and theological seminary, advocates can transfer resources to both sanctioned and unsanctioned groups. This process was discussed at length in Chap. 5 and is further supported here in the case of Tzu-Chi. While progress remains limited (there is no evidence that the Three Self doctrine will be lifted, even for Buddhist groups like Tzu-Chi), all foreign advocates, not just Christians, must work in private, and most transactions must remain out of the public eye. Nonetheless, the bonds established between locals and foreigners are groundbreaking.

Foreigners and locals share a common goal of promoting a larger space for the social and outreach activities of churches, and neither is afraid to challenge existing regulations if necessary. They both believe that religious freedom is not only about the right to worship within the boundaries established by the authorities. They make the case that believers should have the freedom to open their congregations to welcome non-believers, participate in community activities, and establish missions for charity work

and other needs. Local activists, in particular, no longer act as passive receivers of foreign advocacy who absorb ideas, methods, and reports regarding religious freedom from outside their own countries. Instead, they play a vital role in teaching foreigners how things work in their communities and protecting them from dangers that could trigger repression. Either intentionally or unintentionally facilitated by their environment, the relationship between foreigners and locals is much more equal and dramatically differs from the mindset of those who conducted missionary and Westernization campaigns from the nineteenth century to the 1950s, in which locals were mere lay workers of resourceful foreign agencies. Today, the direction of empowerment is from the bottom up.

Of course, the reality remains far from optimistic. In China, releasing information or statistics about non-state-sponsored religious practices to foreigners is treated as a violation of national security and as damaging to national dignity. Exiles or foreign journalists have persisted in revealing the abuses occurring in Tibet, the discrimination of underground Christian churches, and the torture of members of burgeoning new religions such as Falun Gong and Yiguandao, but the locals who dared to expose this information have been jailed or faced serious threats without the availability of help. Foreigners are powerless to help, because there are neither local collaborators nor sufficient will in Western governments to withstand condemnation.

6.4.1 A Boomerang Pattern Works in China

The lesson learned from the Chinese case studies is clear. First, for the boomerang effect to occur, international advocates must understand the diverse interests of local groups and the economic, organizational, psychological, and cultural conditions of local communities. They must continue to communicate with locals to gain their full confidence as well as sufficient information about the situation. Buddhism asks that activists comprehend the path of interdependence. Teaching state and other local groups to better understand this path requires that advocates first gain knowledge about and establish confidence among local communities.

Second, there is an overlooked strength deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy. The Buddhist *Dun-wu* asks believers to tolerate any heresy as well as any form of enlightenment; it rejects any appeal to fixed or universal definitions of human nature (Hershock, 2000, p. 18). As such, this religion allows for more flexible practices and participation. In contrast,

Christian churches inevitably generate various conflicts with the state and the TSPM regarding leadership and worship. The TSPM thus becomes a major obstacle of a TAN boomerang: these churches aggressively spy, report, and manipulate information in their favor and ultimately prevent any possibility of reconciliation. In return, TANs appeal to international communities for help, but this only fuels the flame, because the elites in Beijing are invulnerable to foreign pressure but are highly antagonized by naming and shaming.

The reason for this unfortunate organizational dilemma is easy to comprehend: the TSPM has monopolized the right to beliefs for decades, and it will not tolerate (even more so than the state) the loss of control of its faith-based communities. A similar dilemma can be seen in the case of Tibet. When Beijing was working hard to peacefully dampen the Tibetan uprising for the sake of the 2008 Olympic Games, Jampa Phuntsok, the chairman of the Self-Governance Government of Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in Lhasa, openly declared this uprising to be "a delicate international plot directed by the Dalai Lama." This hawkish attitude was apparently inconsistent with the official policy to characterize the incident as a local, isolated disturbance ("Jampa," 2008). Phuntsok governs mostly ethnic Tibetans whose desire for self-preservation creates a dilemma for Tibetans in exile, most of whom live in India with no right of citizenship. Phuntsok's government and its followers resemble the creations of Cadmus in Greek mythology; that is, any naming and shaming that occur in Beijing are viewed as naming and shaming them, so they react even more aggressively than Beijing toward outside criticism. The main gap is between the dominant population of Tibetans who enjoy the benefits of development provided by Beijing and the underground network of marginalized Tibetans who angrily resent this development, which threatens their identity and well-being. In essence, the TANs of evangelical Christians and Tibetans in exile face the same domestic challenge: their own people, divided by a resourceful authoritarian regime, refuse to accept their cause for reasons they cannot control.

Third, the old gospel model focuses on pressuring the state to stop denying its wrongful behavior. However, by pointing fingers at a nation, it also risks condemning everyone in that nation, including the victims, bystanders, and inflictors, solely to force them to admit to their "sins" and wrongful practices. This naming-and-shaming method can create an unanticipated social backlash, even though the people support the cause of advocacy (Hertel, 2006). In contrast, Buddhism does not amplify any

specific sin or action, and it does not use the conventional shaming strategy on either the state or individuals. As such, the resilience of locals to this form of advocacy is comparably lower. In the end, it might achieve better results in correcting denial by the state via the help of a more effective local coalition (bottom of Fig. 6.2). *Dun-wu* or Dharma demands only that outsiders perform acts of self-sacrifice to exemplify the path and thereby "enlighten" (點化) people who live within the cycle of karma without realizing they do so.

Most importantly, the boomerang effect can more easily occur when naming and shaming no longer target locals. Buddhism tends to see all secular regimes as basically the same: they work in the same repressive fashion, which serves to limit the possibility of individual self-liberation. By emphasizing cultural rights, as addressed in the previous discussion, Buddhist INGOs affect the general population as well as "victims" to realize a coalition of transformation.

Figure 6.2 shows the new boomerang pattern, which is more applicable to that operating in China. Contrary to the gospel model, Buddhist TANs focus on state-sponsored temples, local believers, and non-believers all together, and hope to establish a collective force that can "educate" secular governments. As already noted, the Tzu-Chi Foundation is the first foreign NGO with a religious affiliation that is legally registered in China. Since 1979, only 11 INGOs have won the right to set up permanent local offices in China, which is a surprising number given the amount of attention to Chinese human rights conditions. Only five of these INGOs are Western-based and four of those five address very technical issues such as the environment, heath, and disease.[6] Tzu-Chi broke through this barrier after 19 years of ongoing charity work, despite the two sides of the Taiwan Strait being on the edge of war in the mid-1990s. Tzu-Chi faced pressure from both sides of the Strait: the Taiwanese government questioned its loyalty and its residents queried why it was giving so many of its resources to China when there were also people in need in Taiwan. The mainland was suspicious about its "direct handover" strategy, given its Taiwanese background. Tzu-Chi insists on this method and continues to work in direct contact with local communities.

A notable feature of Tzu-Chi and most Buddhist organizations is that they do not refuse to work with state-sponsored organizations. Since their operational objectives are mainly cultural and humanitarian, cooperation can only increase their chances of success.[7] However, it is unfair to say that charity organizations deal only with crises and never broader human rights

issues. Although progress is gradual and slow, it merits serious attention. For example, natural disasters such as the 2008 earthquake have shown the weaknesses of the Chinese state system in addressing broader aspects of human need. The collaboration of local and foreign NGOs has taught the country a valuable lesson: that NGOs can be a necessary supplement to state capacity. The restricted level of openness enabled by the introduction of new legislation on INGOs in 2017 demonstrates that Beijing has begun to formalize its relationship with NGOs.[8]

Religious charity is a very new issue for authoritarian regimes. Facilitating the work of existing (and usually clumsy) social organizations alongside grassroots NGOs and INGOs is a challenging task. There are two sides to this story. On the one hand, since Hu Jintao's time, which openly highlighted the "People Foremost" concept, the CCP has been working to improve the efficiency of existing social organizations as part of its reform agenda. The central government has ordered local officials not to hold concurrent posts in state-run social organizations, which has been a very common practice and a major source of corruption (Ho & Edmonds, 2008, pp. 34–35). On the other hand, this new policy faces great obstacles. Key top positions in organizations such as the Chinese Human Rights Development Foundation and the Tibet Development and Aid Foundation are still occupied by high-ranking executive officials.[9] In this context, the breakthrough represented by Buddhist networking may provide a novel path for the government to "let go" in some areas. In other words, reformists need these types of successful cases to convince the CCP and status quo groups to cede privileges they have long enjoyed. If the Taiwanese Tzu-Chi can do such good charity work, why not cultivate a Chinese Tzu-Chi from the BAC?

By avoiding the sensitive "victim vs. saver" framework, which often incites an unnecessary anti-imperialist backlash in many developing nations (Mutua, 2001), Buddhist TANs offer the opportunity for a win–win result. The alliance of religious rights networks should include both opposition and status quo groups. In an authoritarian but economically stable country, the socialization of status quo groups is as critical as the amplification of the opposition movement underlined by the boomerang model. The importance of transforming status quo groups is apparent, but usually ignored by the human rights literature. Status quo people (local churches/temples) comprise the majority of local believers and have great influence on the political elites. Second, they are often the actual perpetrators or facilitators of harmful and discriminatory practices (spying, reporting, and

defining what constitutes heresy in underground church cases). It is practically unrealistic to empower a minority without changing the behavior of the majority. Most importantly, local believers are indispensable components in sustaining the legitimacy of current religious policies. Targeting them instead of government officials is an indirect but effective way to influence policies.

Buddhism does not distinguish the *powerful* from the *powerless*; each is part of the path. The powerful become harmful only when standing on the opposite side of Dharma. A dramatic way to avoid this situation, according to Hershock, is to view human rights as path-building, rather than as a power struggle over rights. For Christians, good and evil have distinct faces, and people are called to fight for their freedom by slaying that which is evil. The conflictual nature of the gospel discourse that emphasizes endless struggle and conquest over earthly authority and power is incompatible with Buddhist philosophy. The Asian way, at least according to Buddhism, sees authority and power as hurdles to self-improvement that simply need more cultural enlightenment, which is available through Buddhist teaching.

6.4.2 Building New Thinking on the Practice of Human Rights

There is no reason to believe that any Eastern philosophy or religion can provide a totally new, holistic, and self-reliant approach that replaces liberalism, legalism, and other dominant Western beliefs, but it is heartening to know that transnational groups of the same faith but distinct cultures can work together more effectively than national groups with similar cultures but slightly different faiths. Many points of comparison can be made with respect to religious rights in China. By simplifying Christian advocacy as a prototype boomerang network, the comparison of Christian and Mahayana Buddhist transnational networks reveals that faith can be a powerful tool in the promotion of human dignity, but the type of institutional and ideological culture of each network may contribute to the degree of breakthrough that can be achieved in an authoritarian environment.

How could this kind of effort be sustained over the long term? In terms of value-sharing and consensus-building, Buddhism and its followers have significant ideological and institutional advantages. These advantages include (1) salvation through teaching; (2) respecting otherness; (3) practicing human rights through preparing the path of *Dun-Wu*; (4) working with firsthand information and dedication to mutual under-

standing; (5) collaborating with locals without naming and shaming; and (6) tolerating status quo groups and focusing on long-term cultural change. Some other important issues require explanation.

First, why would "other-worldly" temple-goers become more active and devoted to secular engagements than theologically "inner-worldly" Christians? With respect to the amount of money and range of activities devoted to humanitarian efforts in China, those of evangelical churches are generally disproportionately greater than those of Buddhist temples. Carolyn Chen studied two local churches and temples in the Los Angeles area and concluded that the exclusivity of Christian salvation leads to personal evangelism, whereas Buddhist public charity encourages collective engagement (Chen, 2002). The results of this research point to a similar conclusion from a different perspective, but details of its mechanisms need further clarification.

Second, even though many scholars and the findings in this book laud inclusiveness and flexibility in adapting to local cultures and values, Buddhism is not free from controversy. Bernard Faure (2003) offered the criticism that Buddhism leaves very little room for the development of gender concepts. Thus, "women can find little in the Buddhist teaching that they might apply to normal life." Buddhism itself is misogynistic in its denial of the necessity of recognizing gender differences. This indifference brings concern about the nature of denial with respect to inclusiveness and flexibility. Since a Buddhist can befriend anyone, there is some risk that they cannot strongly criticize their repressors. Our findings indicate that the institutional benefits of Buddhist TANs can address the issue of denial better than evangelical groups due to their solid local coalitions, and we are optimistic about the potential of Buddhism in facilitating future Chinese civil society. However, in theory, Buddhism seems to be overfriendly with authority. The distinction between philosophy and practice needs further attention.

Third, the prospect of Buddhist advocacy is less "exciting" than the modern advocacy described in the books of Bob and Hertel, in which glamorous INGOs skillfully use new technology and media to create an advanced form of domestic insurgency. Although monks in Tibet and Myanmar have sustained an internationally notable insurgency, the future is less promising. Nevertheless, Bob and Hertel remind us that the actual significance of the insurgency or the severity of the abuse is less relevant in this "intranetwork competition." The point is that NGOs will do anything to get attention from the "gatekeepers" to empower themselves (Hertel,

2006, pp. 16–17). It is questionable whether "intranetwork competition" matters in Buddhist advocacy, since these groups usually have stable financial support and autonomous programs.

Most modern Buddhist organizations operate various revenue-generating enterprises. Tzu-Chi, for instance, owns a wealthy foundation, a chain of hospitals and medical centers, a half-commercial television station, and a satellite channel to support its mission in China and elsewhere. However, this problem does seem to matter for Christian networks due to the ongoing competition for parishes and donations. Many follow-up studies will be necessary. Is Buddhism a qualified "alternative" to the dominant Western human rights approach? Can Buddhist INGOs work well in countries that do not have significant Buddhist populations? Our understanding suggests that the answer is yes: the worldwide Buddhist charity networks SGI, BLIA, and Tzu-Chi all have branches in South America, Africa, and South Asia, but the analytic framework must be expanded to include issues other than religious freedom in China. Similarly, the continuing but politically forbidden relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism is a curious subject. Members of both are observed to attend meetings and religious ceremonies, but the nature of their political interaction remains unknown.

Last but not least, the theoretical scope of this review, which is similar to that of Hertel, focuses on clarifying the processes of delivery: the boomerang model assumes that the sender and receiver will work together automatically under certain reasonable conditions, but a middle path is never clear.[10] I hope that this book has illustrated a promising avenue for delivering human rights norms to a repressive nation. Although this way is not necessarily the only way, the analysis results indicate that Buddhism achieves better internalization results. The next question is: "Where are the norm emergence and tipping points?" It is impractical to assume that Buddhist TANs will use only Buddhist concepts and norms. There must be cross-network learning, multilevel networking, and related cascades among different TANs, which await discovery.

Notes

1. The Master Wei Chueh explains his decision to build a huge temple for the propagation of Buddhism and the idea of "directly becoming Buddha (Zhi-Liao-Cheng-fo)" (becoming Buddha by seeing an extraordinary example; Chung Tai Chan Monastery, 2009a).

2. The organizational structure of the Chung Tai Chan Monastery provides a typical example; other temples may have simpler or more complicated organizations, but the basic components are similar (Chung Tai Chan Monastery, 2009b).
3. Zen Buddhism emphasizes this concept the most. However, most sects agree that this is the goal of practicing Buddhism; the differences arise in the ways to do so.
4. For information about CMI's work and details about Zhao's ministry, the reader can refer to China Ministries International. (n.d.). About us. Retrieved December 19, 2018, from http://www.cmi.org.tw/about_us.
5. State Administration for Religious Affairs, cited in "The Regulation" (2000).
6. A list of legally registered foreign NGOs can be found on the website of the Chinese Bureau of Civil Affairs.
7. The official Buddhist organizations in China are members of the Chinese Buddhist Association. Buddhist TANs are typically cordial with each other, but maintain distant relationships.
8. In 2007, the Ministry of Civil Affairs published a new notification on foreign funds and personnel in China: "關於基金會、境外基金會代表機構辦理外國人就業和居留有關問題的通知" (MCA, No. 169). The message was encouraging: foreigners are permitted to work as representatives or staff of INGOs and to enjoy legal rights of residency. This notice has remained in effect, as per an MCA public announcement on December 4, 2017. However, according to multiple reports, it has become harder and harder for NGO workers to remain in China (Gan, 2017; "Announcement," 2017).
9. For example, the chairman of the Tibet Development and Aid Foundation is the current governor of Tibet, Jampa Phuntsok.
10. "Countermovement" is the term used by Clifford Bob to describe an alternative to a successful movement (Hertel, 2006, p. 15).

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CHAPTER 7

Go Beyond Religion and China

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. In short, a better record of religious freedom, which includes a wide range of transnational activities that cannot be completed in other places, is the result of a successful advocacy strategy adopted by some religious groups, including Protestants in City S, Tzu-Chi, and some Taoist groups over the past two decades.

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

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to aid local congregations, despite their religious or denominational background, since the Party's doctrines clearly forbid them from doing so.

However, the growth of transnational Protestant activism and some Buddhist and Taoist activism in the past few decades shows that this view is largely inaccurate. When certain conditions are met, activists can 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 against them. On many occasions, advocates can conduct prohibited activities as long as no one reports them to higher authorities, or they can prove to the authorities that they are too costly to be stopped. When a network to achieve this goal is formed, religious freedom is largely respected, at least for the people and groups in this network of religious freedom activists.

My direct observations in selected cities 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 limited cases of transnational networks explain variations of freedom in other regions within China? Can this theory be used in understanding other forms of activism outside religions in China? Although more studies need to be done in the future, this chapter provides some preliminary answers to these questions through examining the data on religious and secular political prisoners and a comparison between the church–state relations in China and Vietnam.

7.1 Religious Affiliations of Chinese Political Prisoners

Statistics about political prisoners in China help to evaluate the overall status of religious freedom in that country and how well this alternative version of religious freedom that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has asserted has been implemented, as has been argued in economic, political participation, human rights, and other issue areas. Has its policy changed over time, as many of its policies on other issues have improved? Scholars and experts do agree that it has changed from demanding total submergence during Mao's rule to recognizing nominal subordination and tolerating certain advocacy and entrepreneurship today. However,

international critics believe that religious freedom remains highly repressed, while supporters see significant tolerance and harmony between the religious population and the state.[1]

To some degree they are both correct, because repression and progress happened in different stages of development and against selected targets. After the 1950s, the united front work system sponsored a series of patriotic religious organizations, and these establishments have become a buffer zone between religious communities and the state, which helps to ease the tension and lower the burden of direct repression on religious communities. Most of the time, frontline officials did "look away" when they were convinced that there were loyalists watching over the local protestors and foreign advocates for them (i.e., religious harmony), while in fact some loyalists took this as an opportunity to work with foreigners and sometimes even disobedient protestors. Over time, frontline officials knew the changes, but it became too costly to shut down such groups, so they pretended nothing was happening until higher-ranked officials found out and ordered a crackdown. Then key figures (sometimes even including those frontline officials) were punished, lost their positions, or had to go to jail to pay for the "crimes" they had committed.

This cycle of harmony and confrontation can be explained well by what political economist Jim Leitzel called "a law of motion of socialism." Harsh repression and rigid policy do not necessarily increase the efficiency of government regulations, but could rather create a "balloon effect" (Andreas, 1994) and eventually "cascades of disobedience" in practice (Leitzel, 2003, pp. 123–124). Like squeezing a balloon full of air, rule-breakers do 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.[2] Because of the rigidity and despotic nature of the socialist system, massive disobedience and evasion are inevitable. The all-pervasive and over-regulatory system cannot relocate resources and innovate in response to new challenges as efficiently as it promised, and therefore enduring corruption and rule-breaking become the norm (Leitzel, 2003, pp. 123–124).

My review of Chinese religions supports this argument. On the one hand, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) of Protestant Christians was state driven and one of the longest political movements in China, and its core values, total subordination to Party leadership and obedience to the needs of the state, have not changed significantly. On the other, the lives of the clergy and lay workers experienced a dramatic transformation,

from being government affiliates with full benefits to employees of self-reliant social organizations with little to no financial support. As millions of workers of the state and collective enterprises were released by economic reform, sanctioned organizations could no longer rely on the support of the government. While economic reform has gone deeper and wider, the economics and management of established and unregistered churches have become complex, like any private enterprise. Now properties, licensing, hiring, accounting, and other administrative issues are the common disputes between them and the government. The registration system is the center of these disputes: it decides which religious organizations can receive official recognition and can use it to bargain with the government on these logistical issues and, most importantly, use it as protection to deal with unexpected political disturbances and policy shifts on religious affairs.

Aggregate studies of Chinese religions fail to recognize this delicate and constant change of religious management and its various impacts on interaction among and between religious opportunists, advocates, and protestors. For most coders of religious freedom indicators, the Chinese religious situation has only slightly improved in the post-Mao period and has stayed almost unchanged over the past 30 years. For example, the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) estimates religions in China as highly repressed, highly regulated, and showing above-average state favoritism to some religious groups.[3] Marshall (2007) and Grim and Finke (2011) code China as having the worst kind of religious freedom, 6 out of a 7-point religious freedom scale and 8.3 out of a 10-point government restriction scale (1 being the freest). Cingranelli-Richards' (CIRI) Human Rights Data project claims that China is constantly among the worst performing (score 0 on a 0–2 scale) of 195 countries between 1981 and 2009 (it only scored 1 in 1986). For these researchers, the continued appearance of religious persecutions and restrictions indicates that the core policy of the regime has not shifted. However, even though persecution and harassment have not disappeared, the content of the Chinese religious freedom policy has changed (Leung, 2005).

In the Congressional-Executive Commission on China's (CECC) Political Prisoner Database (PPD), arrested members of Protestant churches occupy 5.27% of total political prisoners (8% if one includes "cult" groups and unrecognized Christian groups). That is much smaller than Falun Gong (20.7%) and Tibetan Buddhist groups (66%). Among Protestant political prisoners, 90% of cases occurred before 2000.[4] Fewer

Table 7.1 Religious affiliations of Chinese political prisoners

	Freq.	*%*
Buddhist (Mahayana)	11	0.20
Guanyin Famin	8	0.14
Catholic (registered)	8	0.14
Catholic (unregistered)	74	1.34
Catholic (unspecific)	8	0.14
Christian (unspecific)	12	0.22
Protestant (registered)	1	0.02
Protestant (unregistered)	*278*	*5.03*
Protestant (unspecific)	*107*	*1.94*
Eastern Lightning	1	0.02
Shouters	8	0.14
South China Church	1	0.02
Tibetan Buddhist	*1883*	*34.06*
Tibetan Buddhist (Gelug)	*1210*	*21.88*
Tibetan Buddhist (Nyingma)	75	1.36
Tibetan Buddhist (Sakya)	87	1.57
Falun Gong	*1279*	*23.13*
Muslim	83	1.50
Yi Guan Dao (Daoism)	45	0.81
Unknown	50	0.90
Total	5229	100%

Source: Congressional—Executive Commission on China Political Prisoner Database: https://www.cecc.gov/resources/political-prisoner-database; retrieved in September 2018

dissidents were arrested after 2000; the decline is especially evident for Protestant groups. The restraint could be even more prevailing if we consider the fact that the size of the Protestant Christian communities continues to grow. The increasing variation between religious groups is evident (Table 7.1).

7.2 Social Activism in Nine Provincial Regions

In order to test my theory in a broader context, I designed a cross-province phone survey targeting Protestant leaders in 41 randomly selected prefecture areas in nine provincial regions in the more industrial Eastern side of China, which has a 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 with foreign organizations,

other churches, and the authorities. The goal was to seek stronger evidence of the correlation between the two key mechanisms proposed by my theory and religious freedom conditions. 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 (Fallows, 2011). Most religious leaders refused to answer the questions because they believed the timing was too sensitive to talk about their foreign connections and relationships to the establishment. Although the survey is not complete, the limited responses reveal important information regarding the general status of religious freedom.

First, they did accept personal visits and casual conversations 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 *not* to be the reason for rejection, as the interviewers were Chinese Christians who obtained the leaders' phone numbers from personal networks of friends, colleagues, and relatives. The agency I worked with is a grassroots non-governmental organization (NGO) that has operations across China and has a good reputation among Christians. Interviewees could trust the interviewers, but were still afraid to release critical information about their organizational relations. Their fear and worry indicate that their religious freedom—not as an individual, but as an organization—is under great restraint.

One example is a church leader from Anhui. He knew the interviewer personally through working together with a Christian publisher a few years before 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 to religious freedom comes not only from government policy, but also from the complex relationships within the Christian community. During my in-person investigation, the importance of personal references 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 was more likely to be granted. In contrast, in front of registered church leaders, a person with a house church background would be shut down almost instantly or politely asked to leave. 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 defines the line between foes and friends. Nonetheless, interviewers with strong references were still being rejected.

One possible reason is the issue of transparency of church operations. 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, DC, 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 (China Aid Association, 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. It was the financial dispute that triggered the government intervention, with Christians in the 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 that leaders of the TSPM settle the debt. TSPM clergy and religious affairs officials tried to seize 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 transnational activity such as a foreign missionary in town…but if someone calls us, we have to do something."

7.2.1 The Positive Impact of Registered Social Groups?

With no luck completing the national survey, I moved my attention to the opposite side of religious activism: the registered social groups that are

meant to be the tools for containing and weakening social activism. My theory and cases have pointed out the essentiality of foreign advocacy groups allying with registered religious groups (backdoor listing); it has 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" other registered social groups nationwide are. Can they provide shelter and protection for advocates as registered Protestant groups do, or are they merely thugs hired 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 Chap. 1, Moises Naim (2007), Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, called these government-operated non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) "Democracy's Dangerous Impostors." 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 evidence here suggests that GONGOs in China are growing and prosperous in areas with less confrontational social activism.[5]

Figure 7.1 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 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 of 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.[6] There is no way to establish a causal relationship from such a small number of cases, but the trend questions the popular contemptuous view of registered groups and indicates that more academic attention to them is necessary.

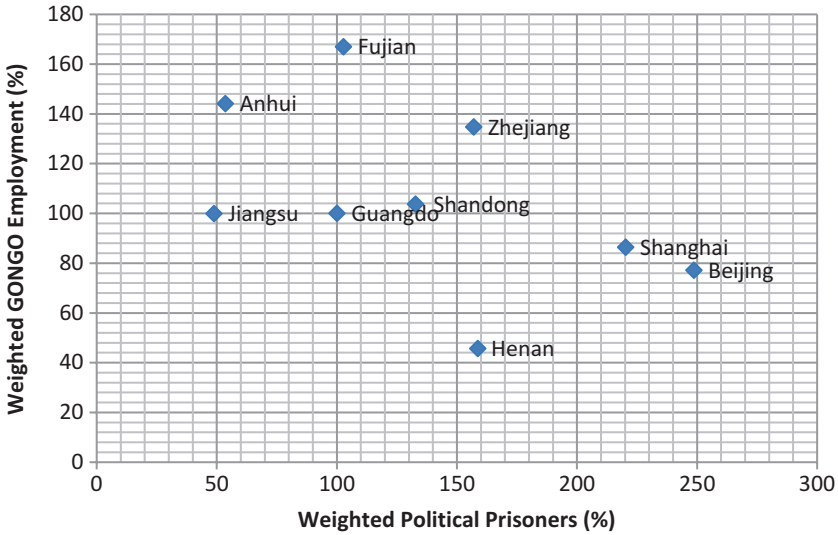

Fig. 7.1 Political prisoners and GONGOs. Note: The nine areas are sorted by the weighted number of political prisoners. The numbers are weighted by the figures of Guangdong Province, which has the largest population (set as 100). Political prisoner numbers are from the PPD, retrieved on September 27, 2011. Shanghai and Beijing are provincial-level cities that enjoy the same administrative power and privilege as provinces but not their population, so weighting them by Guangdong makes the comparison more realistic. GONGO employment is number of people employed by social organizations (the Chinese term for NGOs), non-enterprise units run by NGOs (non-profit), 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/

This spatial variation is consistent with my qualitative observation of Protestant activism. The most Christian-populated areas (Henan and Anhui have the most Protestant Christians) are 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 in competition with each for resources and believers. It is reasonable to expect that there is a higher level of religious repression in both places.

7.2.2 God's Faithful Servant or Dancing with the Devil?

Why the negative correlation between the capacity of registered social groups and radical religious activism? Why does the increase in opportunists lower the number of protestors? In other words, why does the TSPM curb radical Protestant opposition? There are two opposite explanations: there were fewer Christians to protest aggressively because they sold out their brothers and sisters to the authorities (e.g., by monitoring and intimidating), as many accused; or their existence actually helps more believers to settle their grievances with the authorities peacefully (e.g., information sharing, pressure forming, and lobbying). More research is needed to discover the roles and impacts of these registered social groups, but we do get a sense from Fig. 7.1 (and also the stories in City S) that if they are selling out their brothers and sisters, we would expect to see more people in jail when more GONGO-like groups exist in that province. The preliminary evidence says otherwise.

The notion of shining a brighter light on the TSPM or this kind of GONGO will attract criticism. I know many of my friends in the field would be unhappy about this view, and I am not alone in this debate. American Southern Baptist missionary and Mission Board director Britt Towery (2000) has been criticized for his positive attitude and reports regarding the TSPM. In his book *Christianity in Today's China: Taking Root Downward, Bearing Fruit Upward*, he described his direct encounter with the TSPM and concluded:

> The Three-Self Movement is not a church. The organization attempts to help the government authorities understand the advantages of the Christian faith to China's development. Such efforts are hindered if the local Three-Self official himself does not know these things. Ultra-leftist in the church structure can be more damaging than those who run the government. The Christian workers of China have to deal with both. (Towery, 2000, p. 64)

Religious studies experts and rights advocates have debated how to define the role and impact of the TSPM. From Britt Towery and my observations, it is not a Party front or a Chinese-style denomination, but a struggling social organization with a heavy government burden. Although my theory of an internal spiral emphasizes its role as a vital collaborator of successful activism, I do not try to defend the organization or other government-sanctioned social groups in any way. They and other sanctioned social groups do show their Janus faces toward the Party and other practitioners. However, 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, as I discussed in Chap. 5. The reasons for these TSPM leaders showing their forward-looking faces need to be elaborated here.

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 clergy's performances are evaluated by their clientele rather than their supervisors. After talking to many local TSPM clergy, I was surprised to find that the national TSPM has very little power over them and the real power lies below the provincial level. Money is the key reason for this dispersal of power. Except for the big-city TSPM, which owns property 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 United Bible Societies (UBS) and other foreign religious NGOs, mainly based in the United Kingdom and the United States.

The Chinese government claims that the TSPM is the model of self-reliance in Chinese religion; however, since limited 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, has become the key financial source. For each bible sold, the local office can get 5 RMB, equal to US$0.73 (Interview No. 22). This is a regular and reliable amount of income for a church that has little other funding. The printing operation is carried out 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 to sell bibles. Copies from other organizations or foreign publishers are treated as illicit and are confiscated by police or religious affairs officials if found.

Nevertheless, the bible-selling revenue, 5 RMB per copy or 100,000 RMB per year in a 20,000-member parish—while not trivial—is only enough to support administrative functions, a registered church with a handful of staff in the regional headquarters. Others must rely on other sources. Take the career path of junior clergy, for example. After a theology student graduates from a state-sponsored seminar, the provincial/prefectural TSPM office may pay him 100–400 RMB (US$15–60) 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 recent graduate 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 church-goers, which means more attention is paid to people's needs than the Party's policy.[7] The choice between "government running dog" and "God's faithful servant" is obvious. This environment gives the student or low-ranking clergy an incentive to work with well-intended foreign advocacy groups, especially those who are introduced by trusted friends and teachers in provincial/prefectural offices.

7.3 Comparing Christian Transnationalism in China and Vietnam

Because little national data can be found to support my point here, I will borrow some international data to show readers that siding with government-sponsored groups is not always a negative determinant of transnational activism, because these groups also have strong incentives to put their members' interests at heart, as their underground counterparts. Clientele-regarding clergy are interested in institutional autonomy—that is, collecting donations and converts as hard as they can—as Max Weber in his famous work called the propensity to create voluntary associations of non-elite people, or the Protestant ethic (Berger, 2010). This interest is the vital motivation behind those open-minded and forward-looking TSPM opportunists. We can see that both Chinese and Vietnamese Protestant groups are doing that, disregarding their different relationships with their governments.

In China, Protestantism has encouraged tens of thousands of believers to organize underground house churches not only to promote discipline, asceticism, and volunteerism, but also to shelter dissidents, human rights lawyers, and social activists. The mass network of Protestant churches

(58,040,000 followers and more than 37,000 churches) is connected to the global evangelical movement and secular human rights advocacy through various means and channels. Their size and resistance to government censorship have created a visible, yet discreet, form of activism that emphasizes "quiet confrontation," not open protest (Wang, 2013). In response to this growing transnational resistance, the Chinese state has created the TSPM for Protestants, and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA) for Catholics (9,000,000 followers and 5000 churches), to contain the growth of Christian activism. Over the last decade, registration procedures have been growing more complicated and control mechanisms have been greatly enhanced. The Party uses this elaborate system to closely control organized Christian activities without having to constantly interfere or resort to direct micromanagement (Vala, 2009, 2017).

In Vietnam, a strong interest in autonomous institutions has also created much tension between the Communist regime and religious minorities, yet curiously there is only limited religious repression and activism. This could be related to the much smaller size of the Protestant population compared with China; only 1,410,000, or 0.2% of the total population. In contrast, Vietnam has the fourth largest Roman Catholic population in Asia (after the Philippines, India, and China), whose relationship with the regime has never been good, although it has been stable. Despite the rocky history between the Catholic Church and the Vietnamese Communist Party before unification in 1975, some 26 dioceses with 2228 parishes have remained operational and the Catholic population has grown steadily to 5,590,000, or around 7% of the total population.[8] Protestant communities, on the other hand, are heavily concentrated in the south of the country; global evangelicalism is only visible in rural minority regions (Marseken, Surhone, & Timpledon, 2010, p. 60). Institutionally, the Vietnamese Catholic Church is still under the control of the Vatican, while being closely monitored and strictly regulated by the government. Comparatively, there is only one legally registered Protestant organization in the North (the Evangelical Church of Vietnam) and one in the South (the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam; Marseken et al., 2010, p. 61). See Table 7.2 for basic statistics on Protestants and Catholics in the two countries.

The difference between China and Vietnam in this regard is astonishing. What triggers religious repression of Christian minorities? Conventional wisdom would blame the authoritarian or atheist nature of the ruling Com-

Table 7.2 Religious demographics in China and Vietnam[a]

	China[b]	*Vietnam*
Non-religious/atheists	61%	27.9%
Christians (both Catholics and Protestants)	2% (5%) (Catholics: 0.3%)	7%[c] (Catholics: 6.8%)
Buddhists	6% (18%)	13.6% (16.3%) (including Hoa Hao)
Taoists and Confucians	26%	50.1% (including Caodaism and other folk religions)
Folk religion believers	2%	n/a
Muslims	2%	0.7%
Total population	1,341,340,000	87,850,000

[a]"Religious Demographics in China," and "Religious Beliefs in Vietnam" *World Atlas*, last updated on April 25, 2017. http://www.worldatlas.com

[b]China's numbers are queried by many; in particular, it is believed the government purposefully underestimates the number of Protestants. In 2011, the Pew Research Center reported there were 58,040,000 Protestants, 4.3% of the total population, and 9,000,000 Catholics. That year, there were 67,070,000 Christians globally. Pew also estimated the number of Chinese Buddhists at around 244,110,000 in 2010, 18% of the total population. Vietnam's number of Buddhists was adjusted to 16.3% according to the same report. http://www.pewforum.org

[c]The numbers of Protestant Christians and Muslims in Vietnam are very small and are adjusted based on additional information from "The changing trend of religions in Vietnam today," *Human Rights Watch*, November 23, 2015 http://humannationalityvn.blogspot.hk/

munist Parties for surging repression and persecution. However, it is evident that relations between governments and Christian communities are much better in general in countries in Southeast Asian than in China. This is puzzling, because all of these societies over the course of their turbulent past have viewed Christian missions as a threat to their sovereignty or cultural integrity. Vietnam and China, in particular, share many similarities: both are governed by a single-party system, they both hold a doctrinarian Communist ideology, and they have both experienced rapid economic growth arising from state policy changes in the 1980s. However, they have very different church–state relations.

Furthermore, what really contributes to the different levels of repression and the very different forms of activism between Protestants and Catholics? The Vatican and Vietnamese Catholics are much more vocal about their issues with the authorities, while their Chinese counterparts tend to rely more on behind-the-door negotiations and unspoken resistance. In 2001, the Vatican selected 121 Chinese martyrs from the mid-

seventeenth century to 1930, and Pope John Paul II openly apologized to China for the Roman Catholic Church's "errors" during this period (Henneberger, 2001). However, the canonization of 117 Vietnamese martyrs was chaired by Monsignor Tran Van Hoai, a Vietnamese exile who lived in Italy and the United States and was a vocal activist against Communist rule and human rights atrocities in Vietnam and abroad. The classic model of transnational activism (local activists and foreign advocates joining forces to pressure the authorities) is more valid when applied to Vietnamese Catholics than to Vietnamese Protestants or Chinese Christians.

7.3.1 Unlocking the Puzzle Box

Table 7.3 summarizes this striking difference between Vietnam and China and between Catholics and Protestants. While Weber's theory of the Protestant ethic predicts a stronger tendency toward promoting activism and/or volunteerism, this is only visible in Chinese Protestants and Vietnamese Catholics. This is likely because of another important difference between the two countries in how the ruling parties treat Catholics and Protestants. In Vietnam in the 1990s and early 2000s, Protestants faced more episodes of church demolition, discrimination, harassment, and jail time than did Catholics. Like the situation for Catholics in China, their treatment was often affected by foreign relations. In September 2004, the United States put Vietnam on its list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) and began negotiations on granting Hanoi permanent normal trade relations (PNTR), normalizing their diplomatic relations and those on human rights issues. As a form of goodwill, Hanoi released its "Ordinance on Beliefs and Religion" and a series of official guidelines in 2004 and 2005, which guaranteed freedom to worship and promised to relax its control over Protestant communities. With the help of interna-

Table 7.3 The puzzle box: Christianity in China and Vietnam

		Protestant ethic	
		Strong activism	*Weak activism*
State repression	*Strong*	Chinese Protestants	Vietnamese Protestants
	Weak	Vietnamese Catholics	Chinese Catholics

Source: The author's observation and summary

tional faith-based NGOs and Vietnamese overseas advocates, a "carrot and stick" method was used to pressure and encourage the Vietnamese government to improve its religious policy (Thames, Seiple, & Rowe, 2009). By 2006, there were at least 300 Protestants in jail, but this number decreased significantly afterward, although individual cases of harassment and persecution still happen from time to time.[9]

The policy shift paved the way for the first international conference on Southeast Asian religions and the rule of law in Hanoi in September 2006; President Bush's visit to Hanoi in November 2006; removing Vietnam from the CPC list; and its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in January 2007 (Thames et al., 2009, pp. 140–141). The "carrot and stick" approach of American advocates also helped the Vatican and the overseas Catholic network work on its relations with Vietnam. Although the Vatican and Hanoi have not yet normalized relations, official meetings and visits between the two sides are frequent. Vietnam's former Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung visited the Vatican and met Pope Benedict XVI on January 25, 2007, and the Pope met with former President Nguyễn Minh Triết on December 11, 2009 ("Relations progress," 2009). Vatican delegates have also been able to visit some dioceses and negotiate on returning church property (Thames et al., 2009, p. 55).

Although it could be argued that the treatment of Catholics and Protestants in China is equally harsh, there are significant differences. As in Vietnam, Beijing's foreign relations affect the treatment of Chinese Catholics, but there are two interconnected factors that hamper any improvement in Holy See–China relations: the issue of Taiwan and the CPCA's self-preservation drive. In the 1950s, the CCP established two fundamental principles that have been respected by the leadership since then: united front work and national unification. The united front work principle set up the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CCPCC), where patriotic social organizations and associations are invited to serve "consultative democracy" and thus protect the hegemony of single-party rule (Groot, 2004). This long-term practice has had unexpected consequences: the CPCA and the TSPM council have become weak yet permanent apparatuses in the atheistic state establishment, and this is not seen in the Vietnamese case. The Vietnamese Fatherland Front (Mặt Trận Tổ Quốc Việt Nam) was not established until 1977; it is in many ways a replica of the CCPCC, yet its political status and social influence have never been as great as its Chinese counterpart.

One of the reasons is that Vietnamese religious groups, particularly Mahayana Buddhists and Catholics, have been engaging in political activism since the early struggle with French occupation and enjoyed much stronger support from society, thus they had much more autonomy (Khong, 2007; Chi, Tho, & Thu, 2008; Topmiller, 2002). From 1990, the Vietnamese government agreed to give the Vatican the right to appoint bishops provided the list of candidates is reviewed and approved by both sides. This was 20 years before the Beijing–Vatican negotiations in the late 2000s (Meng, 2012, p. 128). Hanoi also relaxed controls on Mahayana Buddhists (e.g., the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, UBCV) and in 2005 it welcomed exiled master Thích Nhất Hạnh to come and teach in Vietnam again, two years before the United States–led, WTO-motivated "carrot and stick" human rights campaign. Vietnamese church–state relations improved much earlier and faster than in China, but little is known about why.

One possible complication is Taiwan. In 1922, the Vatican and the Republic of China established diplomatic relations. As Taipei loses its diplomatic battle to Beijing, its last remaining diplomatic relationship in Europe is with the Vatican. Thus, the Vatican's friendship is critical to both Taipei and Beijing (Leung, 1992, pp. 42–44). The issue is a dilemma for the Chinese Catholic establishment and the Party: if Beijing decides to recognize the Vatican's authority over Chinese Catholics, it may need to make further concessions to the Vatican's demands and grant more space for it to be involved in the Church's affairs. It would signal an end to the CPCA's monopoly on Catholicism in China and thus represents a threat to the careers of many loyalists inside the CPCA, who, since the 1950s, have sworn and dedicated their life to fight "foreign influence." It is only logical that they would try everything in their power to delay official Sino-Vatican relations.

Many believe that the decision to restore Sino-Vatican ties has already been made and the CPCA has no say on the matter (Jennings, 2017). It is quite true that the CPCA is a weak apparatus; Chinese Catholics have constantly criticized, distrusted, and disobeyed it since the very beginning. However, it is unclear how much power it may wield in Sino-Vatican relations. CPCA loyalists will not be able to directly sabotage negotiations, but they could feed the decision-makers with negative information on the Vatican's intentions and magnify incidents of resistance by underground Catholics, something that the Party could not tolerate or trade for, even if it meant gaining a big win over Taiwan.

One example of this concerns Guo Jincai (郭金才) and occurred in 2010. There was no significant local resistance, except a rumor that seven bishops were forced by police to attend a ceremony. The Chinese government decided to ordain Mr. Guo, a 42-year-old Chinese bishop and the vice chairperson of the CPCA. This decision broke an unspoken agreement between the Vatican and Beijing that every ordination would be held only after both sides agreed 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" (Thavis, 2014).

7.3.2 Why Does Repression Vary?

Why are authoritarian regimes hostile to Christian minorities? A Weberian argument suggests that the answer could be the institutional and/or behavioral patterns they promote, which then create incentives for the repression. However, the actual trigger mechanism for repression and persecution is never obvious. The original Weberian argument focused on capitalism, individualism, entrepreneurship, and volunteerism, accompanied by an element of religious culture, that spurred the building of the foundations of modern capitalism. A second popularly held mechanism was its connection to democratic promotion. Robert D. Woodberry provided historical and statistical evidence that Protestant missions contributed a great deal to the rise and spread of stable democracies through the means of mass education, mass printing, and the building of civil society around the world; the effects remain significant even though his model has more than 50 control variables (Woodberry, 2012, pp. 244–274).

Third, it could be connected to the special relation between religion and civil society.[10] For all social entities, including religious groups, the strongest argument that helps to explain their power comes from the social capital thesis: the intensity or diversity of social participation or connections may introduce a better quality of politics (Putnam, 1994). Nevertheless, there is little reason to exclude religious components from other social groups; evidence shows that they may both be inseparable parts of politics. Tsai points out in her study of social provision in villages that religious as well as kinship organizations supplement the missing checks-and-balances function in Chinese grassroots politics (Tsai, 2007b).

Fourth, the repression of Christianity may be the result of the human rights diplomacy of Western powers (Osofsky, 1998; Wachman, 2001).

The human rights diplomacy thesis stresses the role of Western powers' foreign policy instruments and international legal bodies in restraining how authoritarian governments treat opposition in society. The historical origins of this are the efforts powerful states made to try to protect religious and ethnic minorities such as Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Muslims in Europe (Mullerson, 1997, pp. 2, 16–17). This is the reason why authoritarian regimes often ignore international pressure on religious freedom: they can easily mobilize citizens behind their back through nationalism, which forces religious dissidents and local advocates there to avoid or at least distance themselves from foreign interference.

China's and Vietnam's "puzzle box" provides some clues to re-evaluate these theses. It rules out human rights diplomacy, because if that were true then it should have a stronger effect on China, since the United States, the champion of human rights diplomacy since the 1990s, has cared more about, and moved earlier on, China. The puzzle box also reveals little connection to the mechanisms of civil society or capitalism, because if they played a part, Vietnam should perform worse than China, since China's middle class, social capital, and any other relevant indicators are all more highly developed. The religious ethic alone is also insufficient, since Protestants are clearly treated differently in the two countries.

The puzzle box further indicates that the answer could concern an interactive factor exogenous to the characteristics of the religious group and the will of the state. In his work comparing Russia and China, Christopher Marsh offered an intuitive idea that may help unlock this puzzle box. The political development of modern Communist countries is not only the result of their respective socioeconomic problems or foreign competition; rather, these regimes collapse or transform because they learn from each other's mistakes. In other words, they are interdependent (Marsh, 2005, p. 3).

The existing literature may have put too much emphasis on efforts by democracies to influence authoritarian countries, on how activists and dissidents are empowered by transnational cooperation, and on how the collapse of these regimes is inevitable in the long run. Marsh calls this the "theological fallacy" and suggests that *lesson-drawing* may have a greater impact than previously thought (Marsh, 2005, p. 4). In terms of church–state relations, Communist leaders are not blind to incidents and developments in other nations, especially those that take place in similar societies.

Modern authoritarian leaders share much of the same secular ideology as their democratic counterparts, but they are often more pragmatic when it

comes to embracing certain religious components in the political discourse or in institutions. Leaders may not be willing to share their power with religious groups, but they do realize the benefits of using religion to maintain social stability and to mobilize, as well as the dangers of having discontented religious populations. It is possible for a country to be politically repressed but religiously open. This applies more to Vietnam than to China.[11]

Furthermore, the puzzle box shows us that the size, existing sociopolitical influence, or physical strength of a religious group may not always lead to political tolerance; the authorities might fear it, repress it, and try to co-opt it at the same time. Globally, governments in countries with larger religious populations that constitute a larger share of civil society are more restrained because religious groups are "harder to repress than other bodies" (Marshall, 2007, p. 353). Consequently, contention between a religious group and the state could be eased if the authoritarian leader co-opted that group or its interests so that some key religious figures begin to work *within* the political system. Vietnam could be seen to be like Cuba in this regard. For example, well-respected religious figures have negotiated with the authorities to release political prisoners in Cuba.[12] In short, externally their activism is dependent on the level of political repression, and internally its organizational strength; the greater the repression and the greater its physical strength, the more visible and vibrant that activism might become.

A religious group's growth (or how the state perceives its growth) is another possible factor in the presence of political repression and then in triggering activism. Scholars of religious fundamentalism have argued that radicalization is often not created by a specific theology, but rather the radical turn happens when states prevent religious groups from expressing their beliefs, raising funds, and recruiting followers, especially during times of growth (Abadie, 2004; Almond, Appleby, & Sivan, 2003; Philpott, 2007). In other words, a fast-growing religious group is more likely to become politically active if it experiences exclusion and attempts to repress its growth. Catholics in Vietnam and Protestants in China (both about 5–6% of the total population) are obvious examples of this.

7.3.3 Transnationality as a Possible Factor

Nonetheless, international factors are still relevant here. The Roman Catholic Church in China is subject to greater repression than other Christian denominations, yet its activism is more about government-to-government negotiations, not grassroots resistance.[13] Scholars have noted

that Catholicism in China has experienced both internal and external conflicts because of the diplomatic tussle between Taiwan, China, and the Vatican. Catholic activism is a "peculiar mix of antagonism and cooperation with the government" (Madsen, 2003, p. 468). Studies of Catholic activism demonstrate that external factors, not domestic conditions or ideological standpoints, matter most.

Such studies also provide insights into the direction and internal characteristics of transnational religious advocacy. They help to explain why foreign missions and local followers are attracted to each other despite restrictions and obstacles. They suggest that the power disparity between different geographic locations drives transnational movements. Catholic groups demonstrate distinct transnationality when they face environments in which Catholicism is dominant (e.g., Latin America) or subordinate (e.g., Asia). Don Baker points out that Western-imported religious communities in East Asia exhibit more autonomy and influence than native religious communities. This is because imported religious communities enjoy international support that helps in defending their autonomy, while homegrown religious groups face greater challenges from rising nationalism (Baker, 1997, p. 145).

Minority/subordinate environments seem to cause greater religious transnationality. The harsher the local environment, the more salient the outward, uncensored, and "foreign" the religion may become. Ken R. Dark examined religious changes in the Asia-Pacific region and found Christianity rising at an unprecedented rate, with China being a major contributor to that growth. Christianity's rapid growth is likely connected to its persecution and suppression, something that is not unusual throughout history (Dark, 2000, pp. 202–203). One reported incident is the large-scale arrest of "clandestine" Catholic clergy in Hebei Province in 2011. In sum, the literature suggests that differences between religions or denominations are less important. Historically, Catholics have been subjected to greater political pressure than Protestants; nevertheless, a difference in Christian labels cannot explain the variation between how they have been treated.

7.3.4 Transnational Christian Networks in Vietnam

Vietnam has many similarities with China. Although Vietnam is seen as a "softer" authoritarian state than China (Wells-Dang, 2012, pp. 1911–1918), its political constraints on society, especially its policy toward transnational

religious groups, is like China's; both impose strict legal restrictions on the organization of the six legally recognized religions. Protestants and Catholics have staged visible opposition, with their strong foreign connections, ethnic concentration, and unique organizational development (Wells-Dang, 2013).[14]

Vietnam's Christians have been little studied, but interest has been growing since the country became open to the outside world (spurred by the glasnost-like policy called *Doi Moi*, Renovation) and the normalization of Vietnam–US diplomatic relations. This process has similar features to China's "Reform and Opening," which began just under a decade earlier (Lewis, 2002, pp. 355–372, 2004, pp. 195–212).[15] Attention has been focused on ethnic minority groups in rural areas, where evangelical missions and Protestant churches have a significant presence. Accounts of Vietnamese Protestants have relied on reports from evangelical missionaries who work in the region. It is estimated that ethnic minorities make up three-fourths of all of Vietnam's Protestants.

In the 1970s, the US government recruited people from the Hmong ethnic group to fight 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 the Communist victories in Lao and Vietnam in 1975, the Hmong people became the target of retaliation and many fled the region. Just as Chinese Protestant refugees from China's civil war who fled to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia were quickly evangelized and then became a critical connection to those left under Communist rule, Hmong refugees who fled to Cold War alliance countries such as France, Thailand, and the United States were also swiftly evangelized and became the critical connections to those left behind. The largest Hmong diaspora is in the United States, at around 260,000 people in 2010 (Moua, 2010).

The Hmong's close relationship to Protestantism is related to how American evangelical missions and US national interests in Southeast Asia have grown since the twentieth century. Vietnam got its first taste of Protestantism as early as 1911, when Pastor Robert Jaffray started a mission there. Yet missionary attempts over the following 100 years accomplished very little until the rapid conversion of minorities occurred in the 1990s. In the 1950s, there were only a few hundred Protestants in the North. In 1989, there were just a few Christian families among Vietnam's Hmong communities, but by 2000 that number had jumped to between 150,000 and 250,000, with 36% of the Hmong population living in four provinces (Lewis, 2002, pp. 79–112). The Vietnamese govern-

ment and many observers suspect that the United States, with its generous aid projects and the accompanying missionary work, was behind this success. However, Vietnamese anthropologist Tam Ngo, who documented the process, concluded that a series of transnational collaborations between marginalized minority communities, consistent American Asian radio missions, and returning Hmong American missionaries with unique cultural expertise have been behind the rapid growth of evangelical Protestantism since the end of the 1980s (Ngo, 2011). This series of collaborations has similar features to Chinese Protestant activism.

7.3.5 Vietnam's Legal Churches and House Churches

Transnational collaborations began when the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), a US evangelical radio ministry based in the Philippines from the 1950s, started airing radio broadcasts targeting "unreachable" populations living in Southeast Asia and Southern China. These radio missionaries skillfully gave the Western version of the gospel a Hmong context. One popular story featured in the broadcasts was about a being called Vaj Tswv or Vàng Chứ, who would "come to save the Hmong from their suffering, and bring happiness, wealth, prosperity, and eventually a righteous Kingdom for the Hmong."[16] In the Hmong language, Vaj Tswv carries the meaning of a messianic "king" and it also contains an ethnicity-central message of "Miêu Vọɹơng Xuất Thế" (the Hmong's king is coming, or "Miao Wang Chu Shi" in Chinese)—in ancient folklore, a Hmong king would come to defeat the Chinese Han oppressors and restore the old kingdom.[17] The Vaj Tswv story resonated with the Hmong and acted as a powerful bonding agent for their identity, which had been threatened for centuries by the majority Han Chinese and Vietnamese. They had also suffered political persecution from the Vietnamese government, who despised Hmong Christians and believed them to be "rice converts" who took in a foreign faith for material benefits and who fell for the American peaceful evolution plot (Ngo, 2011, p. 4, 9). When letters and other positive responses from listeners from Hmong and other minority regions arrived at missionary agencies and donor communities, transnational advocacy groups began to advertise and promote Vietnam missions, and more funding and resources become available for these areas.[18] Reports on poverty and human rights abuses of mistreated minorities also increased the sense of urgency for advocacy.

For example, almost every American denomination I contacted said they had missionaries or had sponsored missionaries in Vietnamese minority regions. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is one of the most active advocates of Protestantism in Vietnam. It has around 90 congregations, most of which are legacies of pre-1975 missionary work, in a dozen cities across the country, but there is no formal organizational connection among them. In 2008, a Baptist national confederation was formed in Ho Chi Minh City and legally registered under the state Religious Affairs Committee (Rivers, 2009). The collaboration and mutual understanding between government officials and the SBC are unambiguous: government officials attended the opening ceremony of the Vietnamese Baptist Convention, held in one of the oldest Baptist churches in the country, and congratulated the achievement of their American guests. In return, American evangelists praised their socialist hosts for their wisdom and for making the right choices. SBC's International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin said at the celebration, "We're here to recognize and celebrate the progress of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. We commend the government leadership of your country" ("Vietnam congregation," 2008). Two kinds of Protestant churches have emerged in Vietnam. The first is composed of a small number of government-sanctioned, legal churches in cities that mainly serve expatriates, Vietnamese American missionaries and returnees, and urban white-collar workers (the Baptist Church has only 5000 members nationwide). They often have little trouble obtaining government recognition. The second is a larger number of "illegal" congregations concentrated in rural, minority regions; they receive no formal recognition and are mistrusted and persecuted, a common experience in Hmong, Montagnard, and other minority regions.

In the late 1990s, the Vietnamese government began adopting a series of measures to control unsanctioned, illegal transnational collaborations in the North. They launched anti-Christian campaigns in minority communities to force followers to give up their faith. It was reported that the government had forced newly converted Hmong Christians to watch their own homes being destroyed to intimidate them. They also made villagers attend re-education seminars to "reduce the number of villages, families, and individuals who follow Christianity illegally."[19] The Vietnamese government refused to recognize the Christian faith of the minority peoples and house church congregations as a part of the legally allowed Christian religion under the Constitution, despite the fact that the government-sanctioned Evangelical Church of Vietnam had issued acceptance certifi-

cates to 981 minority congregations before 2005 (Center for Religious Freedom, 2005). A secret policy bulletin, later called Plan 184 by human rights watch groups, revealed a systematic plan to force minorities to abandon Christianity.[20] The direct result of this was almost constant reports of large-scale human rights abuses of minorities in the Hmong and Montagnard highlands (Center for Religious Freedom, 2005, pp. 2–3).

After years of lobbying by Hmong and Montagnard Americans, religious freedom advocates, and human rights watch groups, the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union (EU) began to pressure the Vietnamese government.[21] To avoid criticism, the Vietnamese government turned to more cautious procedures and legal restrictions to accomplish the same goal.[22] It released an Ordinance on Belief and Religion in 2004 as the basic guideline on managing religions, and promised to protect the legal rights of Christians in administrative orders.[23] Similar to China's Regulation of Religious Affairs, also released in 2004, the discourse on religious freedom retained the essence of corporatism and anti-imperialism. The Vietnamese document labeled Protestantism as part of the peaceful evolution plot of "the American Empire and unnamed allies, the goal of which is to fight against the Revolution." Although the new doctrine appeared to tolerate belief in Christianity in principle, the government said that in practice minorities must be "mobilized and persuaded to return to their traditional beliefs" (Ngo, 2011, p. 12).

Since 2006, the Vietnamese government has been funding research teams, backed up by police and officials from the central and district governments, to conduct door-to-door investigations to identify minority Christians. It is believed that their purpose is to make a complete and comprehensive database of minority Christians so that they can use a person-based registration system to turn house churches into registered congregations. Only those people registered will be able to attend church gatherings. Essentially, the government controls who can and cannot be registered, and therefore it controls who can and cannot join the church. It claims the rationale for this control is to protect non-believers and people under 14 from being converted (Ngo, 2011, p. 12).

7.3.6 Internal Spiral in Vietnam?

Overall, Vietnamese Christians, like their Chinese counterparts, have no freedom to start new churches, to preach publicly, or to distribute religious literature, and all organizational activities first require government

approval. However, most members of established, registered congregations do not necessarily disagree with these restrictions. Andrew Wells-Dang, an American scholar and long-term NGO practitioner in Vietnam, noted 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" (Wells-Dang, 2007, p. 441).

The largest established Christian group is the Vietnamese Catholic Church. Catholics in Vietnam are treated relatively better and are generally content with the status quo, because they have been a major presence in the country since the seventeenth century. Catholicism is now the second largest religion in Vietnam (Denney, 1990). Observers have also found that the religious policy toward the Catholic Church is greatly influenced not by local conditions, but rather by international relations, especially Vietnam's relationship with China. For example, many suspect that the decision not to allow a visit by Pope John Paul II in 2004 was because China had not resolved its sovereignty dispute with the Vatican and "Vietnam has to be second" when receiving a visit from the Pope.[24] It is no surprise that the political discourse and religious policy in Vietnam so closely resemble those of China.

Even so, the Vietnamese Communist Party does not penetrate and control churches as thoroughly as in China. Disobedience is common even at the higher levels of leadership in registered churches. Their relative autonomy provides the social space necessary for a "spiral model" of human rights to emerge. For example, Father Nguyen Van Ly, leader of a registered Catholic Church, wrote to a US government official, EU officials, and the international media about religious freedom violations, for which he was punished with a 15-year prison sentence. Rev. Phung Quang Huyen and Rev. Au Quang Vinh, president and general secretary of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, respectively, wrote open letters to the Vietnamese Prime Minister, foreign governments, and the media on behalf of Hmong Christians to demand respect for religious freedom (Compass Direct, 2005).

Moreover, international NGOs can go into local communities and gather information without much interference, which they cannot do in China; for example, a Human Rights Watch investigation team went into the Vietnamese highlands, interviewed 100 victims, and published a comprehensive report in 2002 (Lewis, 2004, p. 6). Their images of armed soldiers and police breaking up Christian prayers and burning churches

became powerful "naming and shaming" weapons for various international advocacy campaigns.

Vietnam's religious policy and practices demonstrate very similar patterns to China's; their distinctive features are related to international power status and domestic ethnic lines. Repression of Christian minorities reveals the same corporatist and anti-imperialist overtones that have dominated national politics since the revolution. Yet Vietnam's weak international status is an advantage for many Christians, because they are in a better position to confront the authorities since overseas advocates can enter and more effectively drive international pressure. 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. The biggest violation of religious freedom is in minority regions, yet registered churches and temples in urban areas have still become vital sources of activism to express support for victims of religious repression and provide activists with a base for a broader social agenda.

Besides the harsh repression of Christian minorities, it is apparent that Vietnamese Christians enjoy a much higher level of religious freedom than Chinese Christians in terms of engaging with foreign advocacy groups. They have adopted a more conventional approach to activism, one that has been summarized by Keck and Sikkink (1998) as a spiral model: locals deliver their grievances to international NGOs, who then put pressure on norm-violating governments through "naming and shaming" campaigns. Backed up by powerful state governments and international organizations, "naming and shaming" can result in signing, ratification, and adoption of international norms of freedom, and this can eventually improve conditions for the locals who originally started the whole process (Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999). It can also be a "boomerang" process of transnational activism, which starts with local activists, is amplified by foreigners, and ends back with the target local community.

How far can this relatively quiet, bottom-up, and apparently transnational activism go? Why do Vietnamese activists enjoy a larger space than their Chinese counterparts? Why do these states react to Catholics and Protestants so differently? Many interesting questions have emerged from a comparison of church–state relations in Asia, but this chapter can only provide an initial exploration of these questions and the intriguing "puzzle box" of Christianity in Vietnam and China.

Notes

1. Different from the Western concept of religious freedom focusing on protection of believers' legal rights, the 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 Work Department and an influential theorist of the Chinese Communist Party, the goal of a religious freedom policy is "keeping non-believers from zealous believers" (Leung, 2005, p. 899).
2. Andreas (1994) talks about immigration policy and use the term "balloon effect" to describe the control over illegal immigration.
3. 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, its Government Regulation Index (GRI) is 8.7, and its Government Favoritism of Religion Index (GFI) is 5.2 (the Eastern Asian average is 2.9). The GRI, GFI, and Social Regulation of Religion Index (SRI) values reported on the national profiles are averages from the 2003, 2005, and 2008 International Religious Freedom reports, while the RPI is an average from the 2005 and 2008 reports. All other measures are derived from the International Religious Freedom reports (Association of Religion Data Archives, 2008).
4. There were 74 out of 686 arrests after 2000, including mainstream Protestants and cult groups like the Shouters, the South China Church, and unidentified Protestant groups.
5. For more information on Chinese NGOs and their recent growth, see Katherine Morton (2005).
6. Only 9 of 21 provincial areas were chosen because they have a significant number of Christians and more ethnic homogeneity.
7. In addition to money, the most powerful tool of the TSPM is ordination. In practice, a license co-signed by the provincial Administration of Religious Affairs and the TSPM is an effective protective amulet to deter police and other harassment. But popular clergy can operate congregations effectively without this piece of paper. So my interviewees have contradicting opinions about its importance. As legalism is becoming the trend everywhere in Chinese society, it is reasonable to believe the licensing issue will become more critical in the future.
8. The Catholic population declined in the North after the end of the French occupation and the country's division in 1955, when 650,000 Catholics fled to the South because they feared religious persecution. President Ngo Dinh Diem in the South also promoted Catholicism and granted extra privileges to the Catholic Church in order to strengthen support for his regime against the North (Marseken et al., 2010, p. 44).

9. There is no official number for those arrested and released, but reports from Release International, a Protestant human rights advocacy NGO based in the United Kingdom, has the best records to date. http://www.releaseinternational.org/, last accessed December 25, 2017.
10. For the business sector and its influence, see Tsai (2007a, pp. 72–104); for NGOs see Lu (2009, pp. 108–135); and for political dissidents see Goldman (2005).
11. Marshall (2007) identifies two groups of nations where religious freedom scores are surprisingly higher than their performance 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, Singapore, Brazil, and Zimbabwe (countries that are regularly on human rights watch lists).
12. Cardinal Jaime Ortega is well respected by the regime and the Church was allowed to negotiate for the release or better treatment of 52 political prisoners in 2010 (Miroff, 2010).
13. Over the past 60 years, the Vatican has acted aggressively to pressure the Chinese government to remove controls over Catholicism. However, the "movement" is limited to government-to-government negotiations. Unlike Protestantism, Catholic congregations as a whole remain more passive and compliant with Beijing and the Vatican (Ashiwa & Wank, 2009, p. 1; Breslin, 1980; Madsen, 2003, pp. 468–487).
14. Dr. Wells-Dang is a Vietnam expert, a visiting scholar at the department of Southeast Asian Studies, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (Washington, DC), and an NGO practitioner as Team Leader, Advocacy Coalition Support Program, Oxfam (Hanoi, Vietnam). The portion of this discussion is based on my interview with him.
15. For an account of the early history of Protestant groups in Vietnam, see Phu (1972).
16. Ngo is a Western-trained scholar who gained a college degree in Vietnam. Her family worked in the Hmong community for a foreign aid agency for decades. Her close observations of the conflicted interests and biases of religious advocates, human rights watch groups, charities, and multiple governments involved in the Hmong issue are very insightful (Ngo, 2011, pp. 6–9).
17. Tapp was the first scholar to identify the millenarian beliefs of the Hmong's transnational mission (Tapp, 1989, pp. 70–95).
18. According to my interview with staff at FEBC's Taipei headquarters, the three main means by which they evaluate how effective their broadcasts have been are listeners' letters, missionary reports, and direct investigation. Since many Hmong are illiterate, missionary reports and occasional direct visits are the major ways of connecting with their Vietnamese audience.

19. Party and government documents, the so-called Plan 184, were leaked to the public in 2001. They documented anti-Christian campaigns in Bảo Thắng and Bắc Hà districts in Lao Cai Province (Ngo, 2011, pp. 9–10).
20. Freedom House was the first to reveal the Plan 184 policy to the West, and a similar document leak in 2005 also confirmed the existence of such a policy (Center for Religious Freedom, 2005).
21. For example, a report by the Montagnard advocacy group, Montagnard Foundation Inc., to the EU in 2008 accused the Vietnamese government of "ethnic cleansing" minorities in the highlands ("Vietnam's blueprint for ethnic cleansing," 2008).
22. Key to government control was its use of legislative enactments and decrees such as Decree 69 and the 1985 Criminal Code. For the Vietnamese legal framework on religion, see Wells-Dang (2007, pp. 399–444).
23. This includes Decree 22, issued by the National Government on March 1, 2005, and Instruction 1 from the Prime Minister on February 4, 2005. Both of these specifically mention that authorities at all levels must implement the ordinance on managing Protestantism (Ngo, 2011, p. 10).
24. According to Chu's interviews with priests in Vietnam, "Because of the close relations between China and Vietnam, China will always be first and Vietnam second. Vietnam is never first" (Chu, 2008).

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CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

8.1 Empowerment from the Bottom Up

There have been two lines of development in the past 60 years in China: religious affairs institutions based on the 1950s Three Self doctrine, which provided the political foundation for loyal religious "opportunists" to engage the state, and the transnational activism that is occupied by various local "protestors" and foreign "advocates": underground churches, illegal missionaries, human rights lawyers, religious activists, and charity volunteers operating in the gray area. Chinese religious affairs policy is based on the core agenda of prioritizing the freedom of government-sanctioned groups and oppressing unsanctioned groups. The legal status of local groups has become the key standard for local religious affairs officials to manage the business of international engagement. Consequently, accepting foreign donations and services is a battleground between the state and participants, a place of quiet confrontation resulting from strategic interactions between participants. When all local participants, both registered and unregistered, can recognize the benefits of evading government restriction and decide to work together, the chance of advancing their freedom—that is, breaking the law—becomes higher.

Chinese society has changed dramatically in the past 40 years, even though the central authority has remained largely unchanged. Protestant Christians as well as other religious groups have become vital social forces that cannot be easily ignored. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) refuses to recognize unregistered congregations and follows old practices

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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. This is especially true for clergy in registered groups: the existing religious affairs policy is unfair, because they cannot accept foreign aid and services, while unregistered churches are almost always "free" to do so. Therefore, they quietly accept foreign donations and services and openly violate state policy, while local officials are fully aware of this development. This increasing disobedience from registered churches and the bold violations of unregistered congregations are two major sources of growing transnational religious 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 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, the government was forced to appear tolerant. Even though Xi Jinping has invested a great amount of resources in containing religious minorities and we do see a rising number of religious repression cases, the effectiveness of this approach remains to be seen.

Based on my observations of Chinese Christians, Buddhists, and Taoists, the power or structural thesis does not adequately explain the variation of their success in different locations. Repression sometimes happens in locations with large religious communities, while progress is made possible in places with a relatively small religious population. The strategic choices of the groups involved are critical to explain the variation. Departing from conventional criticism made by human rights lawyers and religious freedom activists, this book shows that the major predicament of religious freedom is not the government's failure to meet its constitutional duties. On the contrary, the CCP 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 directly and cuts off international engagement with ease. The Constitution was created by the CCP with no opposition—administrative

decrees and regulations were made to reflect and strengthen the ideological and political viewpoints of the Party's doctrines. The rigid interpretation and despotic political structure mean 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 this structure aggravates confrontations between the state and believers.

Nevertheless, fully executing these decrees and regulations is virtually impossible under the current circumstances. Unregistered Protestant congregations have become three times larger than registered churches; traditional religions not only produce unprecedented "reverse missions" (from East Asian societies back to China), they also create even stronger breakthroughs on education and charity work than Christians. Due to their social presence, frontline officials have to show flexibility and be 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 the Chinese Constitution and the Three Self doctrine) and satisfying the minimum legal requirements (register or facilitate with registered organizations). Once they acquire these tools, they can begin to advocate and facilitate transnational activism that would have been unimaginable before.

This quiet, evasive, "rightful" resistance between religious practitioners and the state, in private and in public, deserves attention. The center of the struggle is the fight to gain more space for independent social organizations rejected by the Party's old habit, poisoned by anti-imperialism. Social organizations in China all face tough restrictions for a similar reason: outside engagement is defined as threatening by the state and Christianity especially has been the cultural front of Western imperialism; therefore, officials often act in a hostile manner to any cross-border operations or exchanges between locals and foreigners. Cases of successful religious activism illuminate how transformation of the imperialism-sensitive discourse can become possible, and how the institutions set up by that discourse can be used to protect foreign involvement, if the right strategy is chosen. The confrontations and collaborations between various actors provide insights into why so many illegal missions were tolerated in the past, and why churches have grown so fast and become one of the most important social forces in China today. The Buddhist Tzu-Chi and Taoist Yiguandao also demonstrate similar traits of activism in their cross-border operations. The importance of the internal spiral is tested by domestic comparison between Chinese religions, and international comparison

between China and Vietnam. The future of this alternative form of transnational advocacy deserves further attention from students of human rights, transnational social movements, and global civil society.

I hope that by introducing such a methodologically driven comparison and in-depth case review, readers can see why some religious groups are treated better than others, and also how the same religion is treated differently across regions of the country. Counterintuitively, this relates to the development and performance of patriotic religious establishments, which were designed to restrain rather than encourage the freedom of religious populations, in each religion and in each location. The level of success of these patriotic establishments in each religion and location cause the loyalists, opportunists, and protestors to react to each other differently, and that fosters the varying fashions of transnational activism we observe today. Despite differences in faiths and issues, all successful cases reveal a bottom-up, advocacy-based, and resilient form of "localized" transnational activism.

I also hope that this vigorous research design can help to persuade readers that our transnational empowerment paradigm needs improvement: the literature provides many encouraging cases in that international society and its international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) are critical to promote boomerang progress, while informed authoritarian leaders have learned and are trying everything to stop this from happening. The case of China provides good insights and may provide certain solutions to this deficit. Unexpected success did happen and seemingly powerless social actors were able to expand their freedom and space under specific circumstances. Two overlooked mechanisms, backdoor listing and minority–majority alliances, help to pinpoint the exact process from the field of transnational activism that can happen under such a strong authoritarian environment. This new knowledge is backed by the case comparison of Protestant networks and further supported by the review of Buddhist Taoist activism, and also Christianity in China and Vietnam.

8.2 Perspectives for the Future

It is still too early to tell if this more rooted, bottom-up religious transnationalism can facilitate positive human rights improvements in China, and news of developments like concentration camps in Xinjiang in recent years is discouraging. The most successful work thus far has been on education, culture, charity, emergency relief, and pushing for policy or legal reform for NGO activities. It is more reasonable to believe that most are comple-

mentary roles of facilitators rather than human rights fighters. Global Buddhist and Taoist advocates are especially playing the "soft INGO" role and only complementing but never questioning the repressive state. Yet evidence shows positive signs. "Soft INGOs" have their special strengths. If Chinese authoritarianism continues, they might be the only groups that can penetrate the political barriers and deliver alternatives in Chinese society. Besides, Buddhism has played critical roles in protecting civil liberties and promoting democratization in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan with the help of other transnational networks, including Christian ones, in the past 50 years. Why can this not happen in China? I believe that by understanding these religious alternatives, researchers of human rights may find some inspiration to cross the unnecessary theoretical boundaries of cultural relativism and secularism.

Contrary to most people's impressions, Buddhists in East Asia are not passive and individually oriented. Based on the concepts of "dramatic intervention" and salvation through teaching, Mahayana Buddhism demonstrates some evangelical and Protestant tendencies in overseas development (Prothero, 1995). Most importantly, due to Buddhists' institutional and ideological characteristics, they have more potential to overcome the supra-stability system constructed by governments and old social establishments. It is by no means perfect or better, but there is an available alternative here.

The uneven development and treatment of religious groups created many seemingly unstoppable "setbacks" and surprising "progress" in some locations for some groups. This dynamic phenomenon brings interesting questions to our attention and this book is just a start in exploring them. The complex relations between local churches, foreign advocacy groups, and the government represent a challenge to social science. 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 part of a broader agenda concerning political reform (civil and political rights)? Religious freedom, conventionally defined as the freedom to express one's culturally based values, is quite inadequate to capture the situation in a post-colonial and pre-democratic society.

This work also contributes to the theory of the spiral model, which is prominent in the human rights literature (Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999). The spiral model indicates that transnational advocacy networks facilitate rights-related progress, and further specifies the impacts of local collabora-

tion on 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 hold a press conference in a safe place in Washington, DC, but activists in Beijing may have to pay the price and face their repressors in their daily lives.

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.

While I do not ignore the abuses, grievances, and injustices that have happened in history, the positive impacts of these registered groups are overlooked and demand 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: benign outside-in assistance can fail to matter where it is needed most (Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui, 2007). 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 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 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 egalitarian, self-constrained, and less biased foreign advocacy groups. They have to aid the otherwise feeble registered groups with resources and therefore prevent foreign assistance from becoming the excuse for a central government crackdown.

In short, the kernel of this alternative approach to the right of association is to work from the inside of repressive political institutions: the regime's weakest spot is in its newly absorbed component, the registered churches. The literature on 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 detest state-sponsored groups and have blind favor toward underground organizations, while the reality is far more complex than "Caesar vs. God." Understanding how the Chinese government deals with religious advocacy groups presents a new concept of advancing human rights in similar political settings. It may be an alternative solution to the human rights dilemma. After all, when the fire starts in 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 the 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 the finger at foreign conspiracy is an effective weapon for the government to quieten these dissidents. Effective transnational religious activism can only be achieved when participants are aware of this unique challenge and skillfully ally with groups that already have the legitimacy to overcome legal and anti-colonial challenges.

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