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Chinese Religious Reform

The Christian Patriotic Education Campaign

ABSTRACT

The Chinese Christian Patriotic Education campaign demonstrates that the party-state has adapted itself to the religious politics among various public and private institutional actors, pivotally coordinated by the relatively liberal State Administration for Religious Affairs. Consequentially, religious freedom in China has made slow but significant progress in the past decade.

KEYWORDS: China, church, state, patriotism, adaptation

INTRODUCTION

Since 2002 China's Guojia Zongjiao Shiwuju (State Administration for Religious Affairs, SARA) has edited a series of textbooks on religious patriotism to be used in religious seminaries and by religious clergy of all five state-recognized religions: Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, and Daoism. The process started with the *Chinese Catholic Textbook of Independent, Autonomous, and Self-managed Churches* (CCT) published in 2002. Encouraged by the positive political and religious responses to this experiment, SARA in September 2005 published a master textbook, the *Textbook of Patriotism*, to be emulated by all other religious textbooks. The *Christian Textbook of Patriotism* (CTP) was published in June 2006, and the *Muslim Textbook of Patriotism* was published two months later.¹ After all, the Chinese

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1. Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association and Bishops' Conference of Catholic Church in China, eds., *Zhongguo Tianzhujiao Duli Zizhu Ziban Jiaohui Jiaoyu Jiaocai* [Chinese Catholic textbook of independent, autonomous and self-managed churches] (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua

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government regarded both Catholicism and Protestant Christianity as tools of Western imperialism and needing to be dealt with first. In late August 2010 when I interviewed the SARA architects of this religious patriotic education campaign, I was told that similar books on Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Daoism had been completed and were ready to be published in a year.²

I call the publication of these textbooks a campaign because SARA orders these published textbooks to be used in their respective religious seminaries as the required textbook in a core course for first-year students. No seminary students can graduate without passing this course. SARA further requires that at least one of the faculty members in the seminary be slated to teach this course. If the seminary does not have a teacher qualified to teach this course, SARA demands, "Hire one."³

In addition to textbook use in religious seminaries, SARA asks the respective peak religious patriotic associations, e.g., the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the National Committee of the TSPM of Protestant Churches, and the China Islamic Association, to distribute these textbooks to their priests, pastors, imams, and lay leaders. If they are short of money, SARA provides free copies. Once the groups receive copies of the textbook, they are required to organize a study session for the clergy and lay leaders in the religious facility, as they have done regularly with political study sessions.

To consolidate this religious patriotic campaign, SARA and peak religious associations conducted a variety of conferences to review its execution and results. Seminary teachers reported their innovative teaching techniques, and lay leaders shared their religious inspirations after participating in the study session. These conference proceedings were then studied by theologians, religious scholars, and lay leaders for further pedagogical improvements.

How do we interpret this new religious patriotic campaign? Critics of the state of religious freedom in China may dismiss these textbooks as *déjà vu* of

Chubanshe, 2002); SARA, ed., *Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaocheng* [Textbook of patriotism] (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2005); National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) of Protestant Churches in China and China Christian Council (CCC), eds., *Jidujiao Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaocheng* [Christian textbook of patriotism] (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2006); Islamic Association of China, ed., *Muslim Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaocheng* [Muslim textbook of patriotism] (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2006). I am grateful to Carsten Vala for informing me of the existence of the CTP and sharing his insightful comments on it.

2. Interviews with informants O7 and O10, Beijing, August 27, 2010 (for coding designations, see fn. 24).

3. Interviews with A1 and O7, Beijing, August 17 and 19, 2010; A3 and A4, Shanghai, May 20, 2011.

the totalitarian control of the Leninist state over society. Before the 2010 edition was released, the U.S. State Department's *International Religious Freedom Reports* reflected the belief that there was little religious freedom in communist China.⁴ These reports documented cases of violations of religious freedom and often concluded with the statement that there was a lack of improvement in religious freedom in China and, indeed, government repression in that regard had intensified in some areas. Some scholars specializing in Christianity and many senior Christians of family churches I interviewed concurred with the Leninist state argument⁵ that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) does not like Christianity, not only because it is a religion, indeed a foreign religion, antithetical to atheist communism, but also because it is imperialist, originally brought in backed by Western military force. Besides, the Chinese Communist regime has established many institutions to keep Christians on a tight leash: the United Front Department of the CCP (particularly the Second Bureau); the SARA of the State Council; the Police Department; the National Security Department; anti-terrorist task forces; and the two state-sponsored peak Christian associations: the National Committee of the TSPM of Protestant Churches and the CCC.⁶ The party-state has published numerous propaganda works. So why would these patriotic textbooks be different?

The central theoretical question behind the debate concerns the relationship between the state and society (including religion) during China's modernization process. Most of the literature deals with the role of the Chinese state in economic development. Susan Shirk argues that consensus

4. U.S. Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report—China* (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, Macau), various years, <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt/index.htm>>, accessed February 17, 2011.

5. The term "family churches" (or "house churches") refers to those Christian groups not associated with official Three-Self churches. They often hold their services and fellowships at home, instead of at church sites, and hence are popularly called "family churches." Richard Madsen, *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

6. For the roles of the Party, State Council, Public Security Bureau, National Affairs Committee, and other ministries involved in Chinese religious politics, see Chan Kim-kwong and Eric R. Carlson, *Religious Freedom in China: Policy, Administration, and Regulation: A Research Handbook* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Institute for the Study of American Religion, 2005). This paper will focus on the State Council's SARA and provide an alternative view to Chan and Carlson's argument (p. 3), shared by many China-watchers, that "eventually, the United Front Work Department (UFWD) was entrusted with formulating the Party's policy on religion . . . [it] also interprets religious policies." This paper will argue that the Party's dominant role in religious policies might have been misinterpreted.

decision-making and “reciprocal accountability” between party leaders and bureaucratic officials, among other institutional flexibilities, contribute to China’s impressive economic reform. Jean C. Oi attributes the success of Chinese economic development to the existence of “local state corporatism” in which local party cadres transformed themselves into entrepreneurs and led local economic development. David Shambaugh challenges the post-Leninist state view (to be discussed below) that argues that the CCP has been diminished in terms of size and political power during the process of successful economic modernization.⁷ Furthermore, the argument goes, successful economic modernization has been accompanied by the “fragmentation of the state.”⁸

Not quite so, Shambaugh argues. Although there is atrophy in some areas, overall, “[T]he CCP has been very proactive in instituting reforms within the party and in China as a whole. These reforms constitute the classic ‘adaptation’ by a long-term ruling party that needs to re-legitimize itself, strengthen its core capacities, expand its constituencies, and adjust its policies to new conditions.”⁹ Many experts on Chinese politics seem to favor this “adaptive state” view.¹⁰ In sum, these more-positive views of the Chinese party-state emphasize the adaptive capabilities of political leaders and party-state institutions to the ever-changing needs of economic development and political legitimacy.

In contrast to these more positive views of the Chinese party-state are the Leninist/Fragmented State views. China’s political and economic crises before and after the Tiananmen massacre in 1989 challenged the optimist

7. Susan L. Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Jean C. Oi, *Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); David Shambaugh, *China’s Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

8. Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform*, 2nd. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004).

9. Shambaugh, *China’s Communist Party*, p. 103.

10. Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007); Dali L. Yang, *Remaking the Chinese Leviathan: Market Transition and the Politics of Governance in China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005); Yongnian Zheng, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, Reproduction, and Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Cheng Li, *China’s Leaders* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001); André Laliberté and Marc Lanteigne, eds., *The Chinese Party-State in the 21st Century: Adaptation and the Reinvention of Legitimacy* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Andrew Nathan, “China’s Resilient Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 14:1 (January 2003), pp. 6–17; Bruce Dickson, *Democratization in China and Taiwan: The Adaptability of Leninist Parties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

view of the adaptive state. Gordon Chang exposed the rigidities of the party-state and predicted the “coming collapse of China.” Minxin Pei pointed out that China is “trapped in transition” because of the lack of genuine democratic reforms, in order to contain the widespread corruption of the party-state. Shirk recanted her earlier adaptive-state view and became skeptical of the “fragile superpower” because national leaders feared and were incapable of resolving implosive economic, social, and political problems. Kenneth Lieberthal observed that Chinese reformers had adopted measures to improve governance, such as democratic centralism, formal meeting systems, document systems, think tanks, and aggressive media outlets that expose official corruption. Nonetheless, the “fragmented authoritarianism” caused by “*tiao-kuai*” (literally, strips and lumps: vertical bureaucracies and horizontal coordinating agencies), decentralization, and departmentalism will likely slow down further reforms.¹¹ In sum, the ostensibly strong Leninist party-state is not as strong as it appears to be; its structural weaknesses could ultimately lead to total collapse of the regime.¹² But given China’s continued rapid economic development and its ability to successfully ride the global financial tsunami of the past decade, the strength of the “adaptive state” seems to have compensated for the weaknesses of the “fragmented state.”

This paper follows the “adaptive state” approach to the study of Chinese state-religion relations. It makes the following assumptions. First, because of its ideological and organizational interests, the Leninist state is hostile to the rapid growth of religions. The Leninist state continues to uphold Marxist atheism, despite the new slogan of the co-existence of socialism and religion in the socialist transitional period. Being an authoritarian state, the Chinese party-state has little tolerance for the emergence of large-scale religious organizations that might challenge its political legitimacy. Second, rapid economic development has promoted growing interest in religion among various social classes. The party-state finds it politically beneficial to coopt or cooperate with religious organizations as long as they do not hold a political agenda. Peasants become more interested in religion in order to seek comfort amid untamed weather conditions and fluctuating agricultural prices.

11. Gordon Chang, *The Coming Collapse of China* (New York: Random House, 2001); Minxin Pei, *China’s Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Lieberthal, *Governing China*, pp. 186–97.

12. This pessimistic view is shared by Shaoguang Wang, An Chen, and Qinglian He. See their articles in *Journal of Democracy* 14:1 (January 2003).

Workers, particularly migrant workers, find spiritual and material help in urban religious organizations. Entrepreneurs pray for windfall profits from business transactions. Even public officials look for spiritual guidance and blessings from religious leaders in order to gain a quick promotion, or to avoid getting caught for their corruption. When natural disasters hit, the CCP state finds it efficient to enlist religious organizations to assist in human and financial rescue.

Third, the party-state's capacity to adapt depends on the existence of political entrepreneurial and institutional capacity. A political entrepreneur has a strong commitment to pursue reforms and overcome coordination problems.¹³ Her ability to do so varies according to her political networks, administrative skills, and resources. Furthermore, this political entrepreneur cannot work alone. She needs the legal, human, and financial resources of her organization to back her up. Therefore, the legal status, quality of staff members, decision routines, and budget of the state organization can all affect her adaptive performance. In China, "consensus decision-making," "reciprocal accountability," and the aforementioned "democratic centralism, formal meeting systems, document systems, think tanks, and aggressive media," as well as the system of bureaucratic job rotation have enabled political entrepreneurs to initiate and implement pragmatic reforms, albeit at a slower pace than radical reformers' expectations.

Two opposite hypotheses can be derived from the above theoretical discussion concerning China's religious patriotic education campaign. First, the Leninist/Fragmented State view is correct because of the atrophy and/or fragmentation of the Chinese state machinery. The patriotic religious textbooks either could not have been published or, if published, could not have had any positive impact on religious freedom. The content of these textbooks should have reflected the atheist party-state's continued hostility toward, and tight controls over, religious organizations.

Second, the "adaptive state" view is also correct because the Chinese state has adapted to new internal and international conditions, and has successfully overcome problems of the fragmented state since 2000. Therefore, the

13. Yves Tiberghien's definition of "political entrepreneurs" in political economy is also applicable here: "Political entrepreneurs are individuals endowed with specific knowledge of and information about the golden bargain and a particular situation that makes them likely to have a role in gaining support from their audience." See Yves Tiberghien, *Entrepreneurial States: Reforming Corporate Governance in France, Japan, and Korea* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 20.

patriotic religious textbooks are in print and do have a significant impact on the legitimacy of the Leninist state and on enhancement of religious freedom in China. By analyzing the content and the decision-making process behind the CTP, this paper only partially supports the Leninist/Fragmented State arguments. The religious patriotic education campaign demonstrates that although the party-state remains powerful (the Leninist argument) and there are various institutions involved in the decision-making (the Fragmented State argument), the party-state is not as dictatorial as the Leninist argument describes, nor is it so fragmented that it cannot accomplish anything. Instead, the party-state has adapted itself and has effected a division of labor among the party, state bureaucracies, peak religious associations, and academic institutions. SARA acts as the pivotal coordinator, contributing to both state legitimacy and religious freedom.

THE CONTENT OF THE *CHRISTIAN TEXTBOOK OF PATRIOTISM*

In addition to its introduction and conclusion, the CTP contains nine chapters. Chapter One proposes that patriotism is consistent with the Bible and Christian traditions. It extensively cites verses from the Old Testament and the New Testament, as well as works of church fathers St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin, to substantiate the proposition. Chapter Two traces the advent of Christianity in China, exposing the evil behaviors of missionaries in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republican era, but it declares that not all Chinese Christians were bad. Chapter Three recognizes the contributions of Chinese Christians, including Sun Yat-sen, to the 1911 Revolution, the patriotic movement of the early Republican era, the anti-Japanese war, and establishment of the People's Republic of China. Chapters Four and Five elaborate the development of the TSPM over the past 50 years, presenting both religious/political dogmas and doctrines adapted to the emerging new environment. Chapter Six provides justifications of the existence of the all-encompassing hierarchy of the TSPM and the CCC. Chapters Seven and Eight pay tribute to 18 founders and exemplars of the TSPM. Chapter Nine discusses the more recent developments in church reforms led by Bishop Ding Guangshun. The final goal of these reforms is to realize the "Construction of the Socialist Harmonious Society" (Jian'gou Shehui Zhuyi Hexie Shehui), which Party Chairman Hu Jintao championed at his inauguration in 2002.

The content of the CTP has three characteristics: totalitarian state ideology, theological sophistication, and embryonic liberal ideas that are consistent with the adaptive state theory. Most parts of the CTP seem to validate the totalitarian state theory of state-society relations in China. From Chapter Two to the conclusion, both content and arguments are to a large extent summaries of previously published propaganda works such as *History Is the Teacher; The Biography of Wu Yaozong; Essays by Ding Guangxun; Selected Essays on the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement, 1950–1992*; and articles published by the state-sponsored *Tianfeng* (Heavenly Wind) magazine.¹⁴

However, the CTP is significantly different from the older propaganda works in terms of theological sophistication. Within the covers of one pioneering book, the CTP constructs an indigenous nationalist theology that is both comprehensive and consistent. It starts with the Bible and Christian theological traditions. Then, it reconstructs the origin and development of Christianity in China in order to transform the hitherto imperialist, exploitative Christianity into a native, patriotic Christianity. It justifies the existing Christian TSPM/CCC hierarchy and proffers 18 recent exemplars of Chinese patriotic Christians for common Christians to emulate. Older propaganda works might have dealt with these subjects separately, but they have not matched the breadth and consistency of the CTP.

Furthermore, old propaganda works did not cite extensively from the Bible to substantiate their arguments. Neither did they refer to important Western theological works based on liberal or conservative theology. Most of these propaganda works consisted of proclamations and reiterations of state religious policies, official stories of modern Chinese Christian history, news of international religious exchanges, and personal witness statements related to “insightful” and “correct” state religious policies. To avoid the political risk of innovative ideas, many propaganda works simply plagiarized ideas from existing publications and state proclamations.

14. Guan-zong Luo, ed., *Qianshi Buwang Hoshi Zhishi* [Things you don't forget are the teachers of things to come] (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2003); De-rong Shen, *Wuyaozong Xiaozhuan* [The biography of Wuyaozong] (Shanghai: National Committee of the TSPM of Protestant Churches in China, 1989); Guang-xun Ding, *Ding Guangxun Wenji* [Essays by Ding Guangxun] (Nanjing: Yilin Chubanshe, 1998); National Committee of the TSPM of Protestant Churches in China, *Zhongguo Jidujiao Sanzi Aiguo Yundong Wenxuan, 1950–1992* [Selected essays on the Chinese Christian three-self patriotic movement, 1950–1992] (Shanghai: National Committee of the TSPM of Protestant Churches in China, 1993).

Different from these propaganda works, the CTP cites extensively from the Bible and Western theological works to justify patriotism. Chapter One proposes that patriotism is consistent with the Bible and Christian traditions. It argues that the concept of a sacred nation originated in Genesis 12:1–2, in which Jehovah promised Abraham the establishment of a great nation. Since then, national sovereignty and territorial integrity became sacred. Moses, taking the burden of national independence and freedom, liberated Israelites and consolidated state-building through the Law of Moses. David established a strong state to protect religious freedom. Later, political fragmentation and decline of the state led to religious fragmentation and decline.¹⁵

The Books of Daniel and Esther reiterate the truth that “without state protection, there is no religious independence and freedom.” In the view of the CTP, Psalmists (e.g., Psalm 126) reveal a strong sense of patriotism. “Having a burning heart for patriotism is a requirement of all Jehovah prophets,” as witnessed by the examples of Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah. Does patriotism shed its importance in the New Testament? No, the authors of the CTP say.¹⁶ Jesus was a great patriot. The Great Commission is interpreted as Jesus’s love for his nation-state.¹⁷ And the New Heaven and Earth is a reconstruction of his “mother nation.” Jesus’s disciples were also patriots. They wanted to establish the Messiah kingdom based on Jewish idealism and patriotism.¹⁸

The authors of the CTP further cite from works of Christian church fathers St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin to substantiate the patriotic proposition. Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian, St. Justin Martyr, and St. Polycarp of Smyrna of the C.E. first to third centuries exhorted Christians to pray for the emperor and the state even when they were treated unjustly. These church fathers “sacrificed their lives in order to demonstrate to the world that Christianity was the most patriotic

15. National Committee of the TSPM of Protestant Churches in China/CCC, CTP, pp. 16, 17, 20.

16. The major authors of the CTP are Cheng Zuming, Zhou Lei, and Liu Qiuxiang, listed before the Table of Contents page of the CTP.

17. The Great Commission refers to Matthew 28:18–20, “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.’” (The Bible, revised standard version).

18. CTP, pp. 21, 23–24, 26, 28–32.

force in the state.”¹⁹ St. Augustine promoted citizen virtues and encouraged Christians to become the foundation of national harmony and stability and to defend the state. Thomas Aquinas urged Christians to obey both the law and officials. Martin Luther’s religious reform expelled the exploitative Holy See and contributed to national self-determination. John Calvin established national churches in Geneva free of Papal control.

In order to strengthen the credibility of these patriotic interpretations, CTP authors cite works written by liberal or neoconservative Western theologians/philosophers such as Jürgen Moltmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Leonard Trelawney Hobhouse. Most of these cited (translated) works were published after 1991, reflecting the increasing exposure of younger Chinese theologians to sophisticated theological thoughts that provide an alternative perspective to government propaganda works.

There is little doubt that CTP authors have deliberately interpreted or misinterpreted these Bible verses and Christian traditions in order to justify Chinese patriotism. Borrowing from Luke 5:37, one Christian scholar I interviewed commented: “It is new wine in the old propaganda bottle.” However, any in-depth discussion of Bible verses and Western Christian traditions to justify Chinese patriotism had been a rare event, before the CTP was published. Most older Chinese theologians did not have access to these translated works or lacked foreign language skills needed to read the original texts. Younger seminary students and Christians, particularly in urban family churches, think that (as reflected in the popular Chinese idiom) “foreign monks (priests) deliver better sermons.” The CTP authors must have felt it necessary to place this discussion right in Chapter One in order to strengthen their appeal to younger Christians. The side effect of this discussion is that it may open up a Pandora’s box of other “pernicious, politically incorrect” discussions of state-society relations. And it does.

The most interesting part of the CTP is its impressive emphasis on political prophetic roles of Chinese Christians, a topic hitherto taboo in Chinese theological seminaries and in Three-Self churches. Instead of patriotism alone, “patriotic but politically critical” seems to be the real theme of the textbook. The CTP authors present this in a very subtle way and place these critical messages in-between patriotic statements. For instance, the Law of Moses was patriotic but “its core was liturgy. . . . A nation cannot be strong

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 49, 52, 53, 57.

without a worship center.” Do the CTP authors want to convey a message of religious freedom to the readers? The Books of Psalms, Daniel, and Esther, as well as the prophets, praised patriotism. But the CTP authors spent almost 10 pages to explain that the decline of ancient Israel stemmed from government corruption and distributional injustice. Isaiah urged people not only to relinquish evil behaviors but also to behave justly, i.e., to advocate for disadvantaged people. Micah was a patriot but shared with Isaiah the abhorrence for official corruption. Jeremiah was a patriot but risked his life to criticize the Jewish rulers. Jesus was a patriot but he “showed true love by respecting human dignity.” By these comments, are the CTP authors talking about basic human rights? St. Augustine promoted patriotism as well as the “interdependent and reinforcing relationships between state and church.” He urged Christians to “reform the state in order to reinvigorate national unification and strength.” Thomas Aquinas asked Christians to obey the government but also to promote justice and social equality. Martin Luther pursued both national self-determination and citizen freedom and equality.²⁰

These prophetic messages are not limited to Chapter One alone, which focuses on the Bible and Western Christian traditions; they are spread sporadically through other chapters of the textbook. For instance, Chapter Three eulogizes those patriotic Christians who participated in liberation of the Chinese people from feudal forces and imperialist powers. This serves to justify Christian participation in political reforms. Chapter Four criticizes some anti-revolutionary Christians during the anti-Japanese War because they “promoted unconditional obedience to the (Japanese) government in the name of Christ.” Chapter Five provides justifications for the TSPM, but CTP authors periodically remind the readers of the importance of religious freedom and democratic legal institutions. Chapter Seven is devoted to introducing Wu Yaozong, the champion of the TSPM and a sincere follower of the liberal Social Gospel movement.²¹ Among his patriotic behaviors, Wu urged Christians to promote a more “equal and reasonable” socialism.²² At the end of each chapter, the authors encourage the readers to apply the gist of the chapter to current issues in China.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 26–34, 49–50, 52, 55.

21. “Social Gospel” is a Protestant Christian intellectual movement that emerged in the early 20th century. Among other differences from conservative theology, it urges Christians to care more about issues of social, economic, and political justice than personal salvation. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_gospel>, accessed November 17, 2011.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–84, 221, 252–53, 316–19.

In addition to what is theologically and politically innovative in the CTP, what is missing in it also deserves discussion. The minimal role of the ruling CCP in modern Chinese Christianity is one such issue. A typical nationalist theology usually would have some theological justification of the contemporary ruler and some elaboration of the political guardian to the religion. The CTP does not contain much information on these topics. When I pointed out this puzzle at a meeting with about 30 SARA researchers, they seemed stunned and could not explain it. They promised to add materials related to the CCP in the next edition of the CTP. Later, a senior SARA researcher, in private, offered an explanation for the CCP's minimal role. The textbook was written by a believer/theologian who knew that he should not theologically exaggerate the CCP's role, because of political considerations. Otherwise, the book would lose its legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary believers. The author intended to write a textbook that was acceptable to believers in both Three-Self churches and family churches. The fact that the same minimal role of the CCP can be observed in the *Muslim Textbook of Patriotism* also seems to indicate that this explanation is plausible.

THE ADAPTIVE POLITICS OF THE CHRISTIAN PATRIOTIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

The coexistence of both totalitarian and liberal elements in the CTP defies a simple explanation based on the Leninist state theory. Therefore, this section describes the production process of the CTP and reveals that the party-state has adapted itself by a division of labor among the Party, SARA, peak religious associations, and academic institutions, with SARA acting as a strong, adaptive coordinator. The following analysis adopts the “process-tracing method” of neo-institutionalism²³ and is based on about 50 interviews with party cadres of the United Front Department, officials of SARA, faculty members and students of Christian seminaries, pastors of Three-Self and

23. The “process-tracing method” is highly descriptive and suitable for researchers studying “adaptive politics.” Elizabeth Sanders, “Historical Institutionalism,” in R. A. W. Rhodes, Sarah A. Binder, and Bert A. Rockman, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 39–55; Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Yves Tiberghien, *Entrepreneurial States*; Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2004); Linda Weiss, *The Myth of the Powerless State* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998); Lawrence Christopher Reardon, *The Reluctant Dragon: Crisis Cycles in Chinese Foreign Economic Policy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

family churches, senior staff of TSPM/CCC in Shanghai, and religious scholars and foreign religious workers in Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing from August 2010 to May 2011.²⁴

My interviews use an open-ended questionnaire that includes “process-tracing method” questions about the interviewee’s personal data, as well as knowledge of and comment on the CTP; organizational attributes related to Chinese religious politics (formal and informal power, organizational mandates, and leadership); and interaction with other organizations (the Party, state bureaucracies, religious organizations, and academic institutions). All of these questions are constructed in order to answer theoretical questions about adaptive politics: who initiated the CTP project, and why? Where did the human, fiscal, and legal resources supporting the project come from? What were the quality and quantity of these resources? How did the project initiators overcome the “fragmented state” and coordinate among different institutional actors? How was the consensus among and within different institutional actors reached concerning the content and implementation of the project? And what was the consequence of the patriotic campaign?

I always presented a copy of the CTP during these interviews in order to verify the interviewee’s answers. Depending on the interviewee’s background, not all questions were addressed, but some were meticulously discussed. Most of the important questions were double-checked with other interviewees. Because of the political sensitivity of religious politics in China, most of the interviewees are kept anonymous in this paper. Also because of the political sensitivity, neither the Chinese officials I interviewed nor publicly available documents sufficed to provide me with all important information relevant to this paper. This includes the internal politics of the United Front Department and the military and public security agencies, data which could strengthen my arguments but would also endanger me and my interviewees.

24. To protect interviewees’ anonymity, O1-O24 represent SARA officials and United Front Department cadres; S1-S9 represent religious scholars of the Renmin University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing; C1-C7 are pastors, elders, or lay believers of Three-Self churches and family churches; A1-A7 are staff members of TSPM/CCC, faculty and students of Nanjing’s Jinling Theological Seminary, and of a local theological seminary near Beijing; and F1-F2 are foreign religious workers. As the chair of the Political Science Department at NCCU and president of the Taiwanese Political Science Association, I was able to establish initial contacts with public officials and scholars through the generous help of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council. My contacts with church members and foreign religious workers were established through my private Christian networks. After initial contacts, snowballing or networking techniques expanded the number of interviewees.

Therefore, the conclusion of this paper is constrained, in that most parts of it focus on SARA and its relations with other relevant institutional actors, without much detailed information about and confirmation from the latter.

It all started in a small office of SARA in late 2002. Mr. Lei (a pseudonym), a career researcher at SARA's Research Department, was brainstorming with his three colleagues about the next year's research projects.²⁵ He had just been promoted from a SARA branch in the remote countryside (under the job-rotation system) and was eager to impress his big boss, SARA Minister Ye Xiaowen. Mr. Lei and his colleagues decided to capitalize on the patriotic movement, which had been promoted since 1994 but had left few footprints in religious communities.²⁶ The trigger event was *not* the 9/11 terrorist attack in 2001, which was a "concern only to the American imperialists," some SARA officials and religious scholars sarcastically commented.²⁷ Nor did any major religious uprising occur in Tibet or Xinjiang Province in that particular year. Rather, the trigger was the deterioration of the official relationship between the Vatican and the Chinese government over appointments of new bishops in China around 2000. The fact that Archbishop Chen Rijun in Hong Kong made frequent political criticisms of the Chinese-appointed governor after the colony's 1997 retrocession to China did not help reduce the tension between the Vatican and China.

These controversies prompted the party leadership to strengthen patriotic education in the Catholic community. In a hasty response, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Chinese Catholic Bishop Conference declared their loyalty to the Chinese government by publishing the CCT. SARA Minister Ye approved the publication of the CCT but did not suggest replicating it for other religions. But Mr. Lei and his colleagues thought the CCT was working well to strengthen the loyalty of Chinese Catholics toward the government. They drafted a project proposal for Ye's consideration, with the intention to expand patriotic education to all other major religions, following the guidelines and contents of a master book on patriotic education. Coincidentally, the Central Propaganda Department of the CCP

25. The following paragraphs are mainly based on interviews with O1-O4, O7-O10, Beijing, August 18 and 27, 2010; A3-A4 interview; and A5-A7, Nanjing, May 21, 2011.

26. In 1994 the CCP issued the *Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaoyu Shishi Gangyao* [Guidelines for the implementation of patriotic education].

27. Interviews with O1-O4, O10, S6-10, Beijing, August 18 and 24, 2010.

was soliciting research projects to compete for the prestigious reward of “A Good Book.” Mr. Lei and his colleagues decided to write a series of high-quality books for the competition.

This was not a small matter in state-religion relations in China. If mismanaged, it could get worse before it got better, if ever. This project required a significant budget, high levels of religious expertise, and considerable political weight. Fortunately, Ye had all three. He allocated a big budget for the project, although later he jokingly complained that Mr. Lei had deliberately underestimated its real cost. Ye had been director of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau of the United Front Department from 1991 to 1995, and became SARA’s minister afterward. During his tenure as minister, he frequently traveled abroad in an effort to improve China’s image in terms of religious freedom. He regularly sent SARA researchers abroad to study the history and recent developments of religious laws in Western countries. He and his research staff also paid repeated visits to other Chinese societies in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan to learn about the diversity of state-religion relations in parallel cultural contexts. He was willing to learn from his research staff and foreign religious leaders.²⁸ Under his leadership, SARA officials became acquainted with modern religious policies and liberal theories of state-religion relations.

Most important, Ye had enviable political weight that his predecessors lacked. The totalitarian Leninist state theory said that the Party commanded the state. So Ye could not have initiated such an important project unilaterally. But he had previously been director of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau of the United Front Department, as mentioned. His successor at the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau was junior to him in age, religious expertise, and political clout. Ye felt no practical or political need to consult his successor there. Instead, he brought his opinions directly to the Politburo member in charge of religious affairs, Jia Qinglin, who had befriended Ye while serving as Beijing mayor, party secretary, and Politburo member from 1996 to 2002. Because their duties and geography overlapped, they had worked closely on local and national religious policies. “The Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau was often notified, as a courtesy, of major religious policies only after SARA had made decisions as *faits accomplis*,” a party cadre

28. Xiaowen Ye, *Zongjiao Qiritan* [Seven days’ talks on religious issues] (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2007).

at the United Front Department mildly complained to me in an interview.²⁹

Thus, “political entrepreneur” Mr. Lei found the right person to start his ambitious project of patriotic religious education. His back was fully covered. What was the next move? Mr. Lei and his colleagues first drafted writing guidelines for the master book, *Textbook of Patriotism*, and started to look for a religious scholar to finish the book. He first contacted the Ministry of Education and requested a list of qualified authors. This list contained famous religious scholars at prestigious research institutions. But Mr. Lei found out that these scholars were too busy to write a high-quality textbook as he demanded. So he turned to an old acquaintance, Professor Liu Jianjun at Renmin University in Beijing. Liu, who specialized in Marxism and Leninism, organized a writing team with his students. Mr. Lei negotiated with them over the guidelines. The speed and quality of the final product was satisfactory to Mr. Lei and his colleagues.

How about textbooks for all five major religions? Mr. Lei encountered new obstacles at this point. Although there were about 30 highly qualified researchers at SARA, they specialized in policy analysis and did not have time to write academic textbooks. Furthermore, even if these atheist researchers had the time to do so, the final products would not have as much legitimacy in the eyes of believers as those written by practitioners. SARA researchers knew all too well that Chinese believers would not take seriously government propaganda. If the religious patriotic campaign was to be successful, the authors of these textbooks had to come from the respective religious communities. So SARA contacted the peak religious associations for lists of potential authors and made further idiosyncratic revisions in the guidelines for writing each religious textbook.

This contact immediately generated internal political controversies within each peak religious association, to different degrees. Who would be the author representing which denomination? Christian and Islamic associations quickly resolved the disputes, while Buddhist and Daoist associations took much longer, which probably explains the difference in publication dates of these textbooks. But SARA still had a choice among the potential authors. In the Christian case, senior theologians at the Jinling Theological Seminary (JTS) in Nanjing, the foremost Christian seminary in China, were politically

29. Interview with O6, Beijing, August 24, 2010.

reliable but theologically weak. Younger theologians, educated by these senior teachers, were no better equipped to complete this project. SARA finally located a young JTS graduate, Chen Zuming, who was also a Ph.D. candidate in the History Department of Nanjing University, as a possible author. TSPM/CCC senior staff recommended to Mr. Lei this young scholar, who happened to hold an internship at TSPM/CCC at the time.³⁰ Following the guidelines of the master textbook, Chen, along with two research assistants at the History Department, incorporated both liberal and neo-conservative theologies into the textbook.³¹ The final book manuscript turned out to be of very high academic quality, and was highly politically correct as well.

Did this book manuscript go directly to print? No, not likely in a party-state environment. The manuscript went back to leaders and senior theologians of the peak Christian associations for comments, in order to make sure both historical facts and political correctness were heeded. Their review comments resulted in Chapters 7 and 8 being added to the CTP, to pay tribute to the 18 founding fathers or exemplars of the TSPM. Afterward, the revised manuscript was sent to prestigious Christian scholars at various theological seminaries and religion research institutions to double-check historical facts and political correctness. SARA research staff performed the final editorial and political screening before the book was published.

The religious patriotic education campaign did not stop with publication of the textbooks. SARA research staff generated numerous books, pamphlets, and religious journals every year, knowing well that most of them ended up in bookstore warehouses. They were less competitive than theological books translated from foreign languages or popular religious inspirational books published by private companies. Because the religious textbook of patriotism published by each national religious association was to be used in religious seminaries, SARA ordered all seminaries to establish a new required course and adopt the textbook. Before the textbook was adopted, religious patriotic education had been inserted at these seminaries in various courses such as Chinese religious history, the TSPM, and Chinese Marxism, etc. But the materials were poor in quality and quantity. Most instructors gave only lip service to these political materials and preferred to focus on more authentically religious topics

30. Interviews with O7-O9, Beijing, August 27, 2010; A3-A4 interview; A5-A6, Nanjing, May 21, 2011.

31. TSPM/CCC, CTP, p. 448.

that they specialized in. Very few, if any, theologians specialized in patriotic education, and their colleagues and students did not encourage them to do so for the sake of “religious purity or correctness.”³² Therefore, SARA further ordered that religious seminaries assign at least one teacher to teach this new political course using this new textbook. If existing faculty members were unwilling to teach it, the institutions were told: “Hire one.” SARA demanded that they abide by the principle of a “designated teacher for a designated textbook” (*dinggang dingbian*). In order to keep to a tight budget, most seminaries assigned an active faculty member to do the job, after receiving intensive training in courses provided by SARA. The first printings of the CTP were sent to seminary students for free; later printings required a fee.

In 2007, SARA sponsored several national conferences on the pedagogy of the textbooks. In January, at Huangshan, Anhui Province, SARA ran a Teaching Program on Patriotism for teachers from all Christian theological seminaries in the nation. The participants reviewed the contents and pedagogy of the CTP.³³ In August, the Teaching Program was held again in Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning Province, to share teaching experiences. Presidents of 18 Christian theological seminaries and more than 100 designated teachers of the CTP participated.³⁴

In addition to the religious seminaries, SARA also asked peak religious associations to purchase these textbooks for distribution to their members. Some local Christian associations complained to SARA that they did not receive the textbook, or were short on funds. Mr. Lei reported the complaint to Minister Ye and got additional funding to reprint the textbook. Five thousand copies of the Muslim textbook were printed, while 5,000 copies of the Christian textbook printed in June 2006 were followed by another 4,000 in October 2007.

What is the overall impact of this religious patriotic education campaign? The Christian textbook has been published for five years, and it is probably too early to reach a conclusive verdict. However, I interviewed separately a vice president and students of a local Christian seminary in northern China, as well as faculty members and students at JTS, about the textbook.³⁵ The

32. Interviews with A1, Beijing, August 19, 2010; A5-A7 interview.

33. Ji Jianhong, “To Strengthen Theological Seminaries Is a Patriotic Education,” *Tianfeng* 19 (October 2007), p. 18.

34. Xiao Wang, “Norms and Innovations: Urgent Problems of Chinese Theological Education,” *ibid.*, 17 (August 2007), p. 26.

35. A1 interview; A5-A6 interview.

vice president confirmed that such a course was being taught and the textbook was being used as demanded by SARA. It was nice, she said, to have a core course and a coherent textbook taught by one teacher so that other teachers were relieved of the duty of teaching political materials. Specialization separated political teaching from religious teaching and benefitted both curricula. Faculty members at JTS confirmed her observation. Seminary students in both seminaries had a lukewarm attitude toward this new course and textbook. “It is just like those political courses (e.g., Chinese Marxism, modern Chinese history, etc.) you have to take in regular colleges; you take it, memorize it, and forget about it,” said one student. “But you do recall these materials whenever the television reports a political dispute about national sovereignty between China and foreign countries, like the Yasukuni Shrine worship controversy,” added another student, insisting that “Japanese imperialism and American imperialism never die.”³⁶

I also interviewed a few pastors from different Three-Self churches. They recalled that they did receive the textbook and had used it for a few political study sessions with church elders, deacons, and co-workers. “When church members or family church members questioned the relationship between the state and the Three-Self church, the textbook was very handy to defend the church; it had all the answers there,” one pastor commented.³⁷ Afterward, the textbook was left somewhere on the bookshelves. They never used it in Sunday sermons. “Church members do not like this kind of subject in Sunday sermons,” they said.³⁸

For unknown reasons, the Christian academic community was kept in the dark during this patriotic education campaign. Except for the main author and the manuscript reviewers, very few scholars, including the author’s and reviewer’s colleagues, knew about the textbook’s existence. When I showed them a copy of the CTP, some of them immediately ridiculed it as more governmental propaganda unworthy of scholarly attention.³⁹ One scholar explained to me that SARA preferred to clandestinely contact individual scholars for research projects. These were usually lucrative projects, by academic standards. So, they would not let other colleagues know about them.⁴⁰

36. Interviews with A2 and A4, Beijing, August 19, 2010; A7 interview.

37. Interview with C7, Beijing, August 24, 2010.

38. Interviews with C1, Beijing, August 26, 2010; C7 interview.

39. Interviews with S1-S5, Beijing, August 16, 2010; S6-S10, Beijing, August 24, 2010.

40. S6 interview.

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

Based on the content of the CTP and the above description of the political process of creating it, SARA's institutional strength and insistence on keeping a delicate balance between political correctness and liberal religious policies serve to explain the slow but significant improvement in religious freedom in China over the past decade. "Political entrepreneur" Mr. Lei of SARA played the pivotal coordination role, taking full advantage of SARA's institutional powers and political connections, expertise in religious policies, and social networks. SARA initiated the patriotic religious education project and coordinated the resources from the United Front Department, peak religious associations, religious seminaries, and the scholarly community to complete and consolidate the campaign.

This is not to imply that the relatively liberal SARA can do whatever it wishes, much less become the locomotive of religious liberalization in China. China, after all, is still a Leninist state that sets ideological and political boundaries to religious reforms. Religious policies made in the Politburo tend to reflect the dynamic balance between the more liberal members representing the United Front Department, SARA, religious scholars, and religious communities on the one hand, and the more conservative members representing the police and national security interests, on the other. "Not even Chairman Hu Jintao knows in advance the direction a major religious policy debate would go in a Politburo meeting," said several senior SARA officials and religious scholars, sharing their insider information with me. "It depends on whether a consensus emerges at the end of extensive deliberations and debate."⁴¹

Furthermore, most SARA officials are CCP members; many senior officials have served in various party positions in their respective career paths. They all know clearly what the ideological and political boundaries are. What is interesting from the above analysis is their ability to adapt to the changing international and domestic religious-political environment, to navigate through the webs of various political and religious organizations, and to maintain a dynamic balance between political correctness and religious liberalization.

What are the prospects for Chinese church-state relations? A prudent optimism for more religious freedom is warranted, and is shared by recent

41. Interviews with O4 and O10, Beijing, August 18, 2010; S6 and S10 interviews.

scholarship.⁴² This optimism is based on not only SARA's "political entrepreneurship" but on its institutional characteristics. Minister Ye Xiaowen left SARA in 2009 and took up a post as first deputy dean at the Party school, the Central College of Socialism (Zhongyang Shehuizhuyi Xueyuan) in Beijing. As a key "political entrepreneur" he had overseen gradual, liberal religious reform in the past decade, including the transformed religious patriotic education campaign. He also built SARA into the coordination center of Chinese religious policies.

If we look into the background of the new SARA minister, Wang Zuoan, the above optimism is further strengthened. Born in 1958, Wang graduated from the Philosophy Department of Nanjing University, joined SARA in 1987 as a research staffer, and was later promoted to be chairman of the Research Department and deputy minister of SARA before taking the top job. His major publication, among others, is *Chinese Religious Problems and Religious Policies*,⁴³ which incidentally shares many similarities in content with the master volume of the *Textbook of Patriotism*. Being a career researcher at SARA, he probably has few matches in expertise in religious policies in the United Front Department (with the exception of Ye Xiaowen), SARA, and the Chinese academic community. Under Wang's leadership, it is likely that SARA's institutional heritage of insistence on both political correctness and liberal religious policies will continue in the near future.

At the same time, the Second Bureau of the United Front Department in charge of ethnic and religious affairs is very complacent about the division of labor between the Bureau and SARA. "We take care of big decisions like personnel in peak religious associations and the National Religious Conference held once every 10 years, and SARA takes care of small issues like the *Textbooks*. But our communication is flawless. We know what they are doing," one party cadre apologetically explained.⁴⁴ After all, the Second Bureau has only a handful of staff members. Its research and administrative capacities are dwarfed by SARA, whose Research Department alone employs more than 30 full-time research staffers.

42. Eriberto Lozada, Jr., *God Aboveground: Catholic Church, Postsocialist State, and Transnational Processes in a Chinese Village* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001); Nanlai Cao, *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010).

43. Wang Zuoan, *Zhongguode Zongjiao Wentih Zongjiao Zhengce* [Chinese religious problems and religious policies] (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2002).

44. O6 interview.

The more optimistic view is likely to face two critical tests in the near future. First, will SARA continue to publish more liberal and democratic research works like the religious textbooks of patriotism? In December 2010, SARA published the *Chinese Five Major Religions Comment on Harmony* (Zhongguo Wuda Zongjiao Lun Hexie), taking a political leap of faith from discussing prophetic roles of religions in the CTP to elaboration of contemporary religious values of democracy and rule of law, particularly in the Christian and Islamic chapters of the book. Will there be more similarly liberal books published by SARA?

Second, will SARA change the current registration system for all churches from the approval system to the report system? The approval system mandates strict political regulations over Christian family churches. They need to hire a pastor who graduated from a state-sponsored Christian seminary. They need to get approval from peak Christian associations and join these associations. And they need to follow all the restrictive religious policies of “three-fixes” (fixed place of worship, fixed time of worship, and fixed clergy for sermons).⁴⁵ Most family churches find these regulations unacceptable and refuse to apply for registration.

If the report system is adopted, which requires only filling out basic information about address, church charter, and church leaders, most family churches will be able to acquire legal protection for religious freedom with much less state intervention. Some scholars comment privately that SARA will make this change soon, for two reasons. First, it will increase the power of SARA while reducing its burden in governing family churches. Second, they argue, the change to the report system is equivalent to the declaration of the Edict of Milan (c.E. 313) in Western Christian history, by which the Roman Emperor Constantine formally freed Christians from the threat of state prosecution. Similarly, the switch to the report system will greatly improve China’s image in terms of religious freedom in the international community. And third, the religious legitimacy of Communist rule will be further strengthened. Even if the formal report system is not adopted, Beijing is considering an informal report system via the “Wenzhou model,” in which state officials simply turn a blind eye to the proliferation of family church facilities in the Zhejiang

45. Department of Policy and Regulations of State Administration for Religious Affairs, ed., *Quanguo Zongjiao Xingzheng Fagui Guizhang Huibian* [Compilation of national religious administrative rules and regulations] (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2000).

Province city of Wenzhou.⁴⁶ But a senior official at SARA dismissed this scholar's observation as simply the "wishful thinking of scholars." She added, "It is not as easy as these scholars think. We still have the police and national security people looking over our shoulders."⁴⁷ After all, SARA officials have successfully traversed the thin ice between liberal religious policies and political correctness. They have no intention of breaking the ice unless the political environment significantly changes.

46. Nanlai Cao, *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011).

47. Interview with O10, January 20, 2011.