

ABSTRACT

Explaining Christianity in China: Why a Foreign Religion has Taken Root in Unfertile Ground

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Chinese Christians are growing rapidly, yet their exact number remains controversial. Christian growth is somewhat surprising given that China is inhospitable to Christianity. First, the state closely regulates religious activity, making it difficult for religious groups to recruit members. Second, Chinese religious history is dominated by traditional religions venerating ancestors, only to be replaced by state-sponsored atheism; it is unclear how Christianity would find cultural inroads here. This paper seeks to establish the probable range of Christians and their growing trajectory. Additionally, I identify the regions where Christianity is most popular and test some hypotheses about why these areas are more conducive to a Western monotheism. I conclude that huge labor emigration, along with lower commitment to ancestral worship, have created a cultural space for Christianity in China. In particular, Christianity grows among a network of women who have lost their ritual ties to the past and the patriarchal hierarchies.

Explaining Christianity in China:
Why a Foreign Religion has Taken Root in Unfertile Ground

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Sociology

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

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May 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people and institution have contributed greatly to the formation of this paper. First and foremost, my debt to Professor Fengtian Zheng and Rongping Ruan at Renmin University of China is most obvious. Were it not for their strict training and well-intentioned guidance, I would never have paid attention to the spiritual and religious life of Chinese society. Indeed, they provided me with great opportunities to do field work across China and with their data on religion in China.

I am also extremely grateful to Dr. Rodney Stark for his wonderful guidance and support during my stay at Baylor University. While researching in Christianity rise in China under his guidance, I not only learned academic knowledge and methodology from him, but also saw his great passion for research, his insightful way of raising good questions and talent in organizing the materials. Moreover, his generous support in both material and emotion helped me go through the darkest period of my life. I have no way to pay for all these debts but to go further in my research.

I am also deeply appreciative of the help and guidance from Dr. Paul. Froese. As my supervisor, Paul listened to my ideas carefully, forced me to think further by challenging me with great questions, discussed every detail of this paper over and over again with me, and finally revised my bad writing for me. Without the work from Paul, I would never make it a good paper.

Finally I want to acknowledge the helpful comments from Professor Fenggang Yang. Based on his expertise on Religion in China, he pointed out several potential

mistakes I made while writing. I also feel thankful to Lindsay Wilkinson. As my thesis committee member, she offered me great comments on the thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Christianity is growing in China with a marked increase in the past 20 to 30 years. This development is unexpected for reasons which span opposing theoretical perspectives. The facts that levels of Christianity were rudimentary in China 100 years ago and that China has undergone dramatic stages of modernization in the intervening years should predict a complete lack of interest in Christianity, from both normative and demand-side theoretical perspectives. Supply-side expectations should predict a similar outcome, given that the Communist state actively limits religious freedom and supports traditional and atheist alternatives to Christianity. In sum, Christianity is expanding in a society where it theoretically should not.

Yet both demand-side and supply-side perspectives offer potential reasons why Chinese Christian growth belies initial expectations based on the huge social change in China. To begin with, the activities of early Christian missionaries laid the seeds for subsequent growth. The Chinese Revolution diminished these early gains only to open up larger cultural space for Christian growth as the government modernized China. This is the great irony of my analysis; namely, a state bent on modernizing and secularizing its population produced both the demand for modern religion and the social networks to supply this demand.

This is not to say that China's religious regulation and modernization policies have not tempered religious growth in the country as a whole. But in certain regions these

policies have created unintended and unexpected consequences. Specifically, regions where labor emigration of males is high have offered new roles for women, one of which is the autonomy to make religious choices. This combined with a decline in ancestor worship, due to increases in modernization, has led many women to investigate Christian spirituality. In turn, these women convert their families and communities.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The rise of Christianity in China is complex and has developed over many stages. In order to comprehend the multiple factors which have contributed to Christian growth, we must draw from a variety of theoretical sources. The simplest way to categorize these sources is to break them down into demand-side and supply-side perspectives.

The supply-side perspective encourages us to focus on three important factors to explain religious growth. First and most obviously, religious entrepreneurs are the engine of growth; without missionary efforts new religious ideas and practices would remain unknown to potential converts (Finke and Stark, 2005; Green, 2003; Stark and Finke 2000; Woodberry, 2012). While missionary history created a potential background for religious growth, I will show how early Christian proselytizers made only small gains in early 20th Century China. Second, state regulation and favoritism is central to the supply-side perspective (Chaves et al., 1994; Grim and Finke, 2006, 2007; Iannaccone, 1991; Stark and Iannaccone, 1994). In the case of China, the Communist policy is key to understanding contemporary religious developments. Today, the religious market of China is complex and has been described as having three tiers—a red market supported by the government, a black market banned by the government, and a grey market of an ambiguous status (Yang, 2006, 2011). Christianity in China grows mainly within this grey market. Third, religious capital should play a role in any religious change; specifically, supply-side theorists expect religious conversions to occur incrementally not

cataclysmically, because “Religious capital—familiarity with a religion’s doctrines, rituals, traditions and members—enhances the satisfaction one receives from participation in that religion and so increases the likelihood and probable level of one’s religious participation” (Iannaccone, 1990). For this reason, a historically non-theistic culture would not necessarily be open to theistic proselytizing. Yet in the case of China, a decline in all religious capital may have opened up space for new religious movements.

Demand-side explanations tend to focus on the secularizing effects of modernization. The rationalization of modern industrial society encourages a global secularization process thus challenges the role of religions as a provider of the sacred canopy and plausibility structure. Consequently secularization has resulted “in a widespread collapse of the plausibility of traditional religious definitions of reality” (Berger, 2011). Specifically, modernization is thought to undermine the religious feeling and influence by establishing the authority of science, the rationalization of bureaucracy, and the independence from the nature and the custom (Douglas, 1982). With the decline of religious influence in public affairs, it is thought that individual religiosity will also decline (Bruce, 2002). Moreover, as people enjoy the advantages of technology, medical care, education, and transportation in modern society, their need for existential security in the form of religion will diminish (Norris and Inglehart, 2011).

Yet as Eisenstadt noted, there is no singular path to modernity and we need to think in terms of “multiple” modernities; this suggests that modernization can have both secularizing and de-secularizing effects depending on the cultural and historical circumstances (Eisenstadt, 2000). Empirical studies based on World Values Survey also showed that cultural values and norms will change in relation to economic development,

but cultural traditions and religions can also be persistent and enduring despite modernization (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). The modernization process experienced by a rapidly developing society, such as China, is more complex, selective and multi-dimensional. “It (modernization) is not an overall process achieved by the breakdown of the antecedent traditional structure. It is, rather, a process composed of newly adopted patterns, which go hand in hand with some of the so-call traditional elements.”(AL-Haj, 1995). On one level, Chinese economic modernization seems to have undermined traditional ritual practices, leading Chinese citizens to move away from ancestor worship and ancient folk religions. But this “secularizing” effect has not so much eliminated the demand for religion but rather has loosened the cultural dominance of traditional religion in certain regions. Consequently, modernization may have opened up the demand for more modern and globalized forms of spirituality, especially those associated with the modern and post-industrial West (Stark and Wang, 2015)

For these reasons, I investigate both supply-side and demand-side perspectives to look more deeply at the potential causes for Christian growth in particular regions of China.

CHAPTER THREE

Supply-side Dynamics: 1918 to 2007

Relatively little Christianity activity occurred in China for most of its long history. The small shifts that have occurred in the early to mid-20th Century correspond directly to supply-side factors. Specifically, two distinct eras of change lie on either side of the 1949 Chinese Revolution; the first is a *missionary stage* which marks the initial seeds of Christianity to China and the second is the *persecution stage*, in which the Communist government initially banned all religion. Finally, a third *revival stage* comes partially in response to greater religious freedom beginning in 1978; this instigated the most dramatic increase of Christians in Chinese history.

Christian missions in China are recorded as early as 635 BCE; however, the rate of conversion was meager before the 19th Century. Robert Morrison was one of the most active and prominent Christian missionaries of the 19th Century, but when he died in 1834 he and his colleagues only converted ten people over 25 years (Xi, 2010). Still, missionary activities continued and appeared to have made some slight inroads by the early 20th Century.

In *The Christian Occupation of China*, Stauffer Milton offered very specific numbers of Chinese Christians circa 1919 (Stauffer et al., 1922). Using his data, Fuk-tsang Ying (2009) estimated the proportion of Chinese Protestants.. Stark and Wang (2015) used Milton's numbers to estimate the proportion of all Christians and conclude that approximately 0.48 % of Chinese were Christian by 1919 (specifically, 607,113 Protestants and 1,512,882 Catholics).

By compiling other estimates made by various scholars, I can create a picture of Christian missionizing up to 1949. Daniel Bates estimated that by 1936, the total number of Chinese Protestants numbered 712,000 (Harr and Latourette, 1962). With the addition of approximately 2,934,175 Catholics, Chinese Christians made up 0.79% of the entire population (China., 1950). Between 1919 and 1936, Christianity nearly doubled. It continued to grow and by 1950 Ying (2009) estimates the total number of Protestants to be 1,005,699 based on the official report of BRA (Ying, 2009). Adding in the 3,274,740 Catholics reported by the Vatican, the total number of Christians by 1949 was 4,280,439 (College, 1956). On the eve of the Chinese Revolution, Christians made up nearly 1% of the entire Chinese population. The average growth rate was 3% from 1919 to 1936 and 1% from 1937 to 1949. Moreover, Christian converters were highly concentrated in regions where missionary work was more active.

The Chinese Revolution upended this steady growth with new religious regulations which sought to abolish religion altogether (Yang, 2011). Not only did these policies restrict missionary activity, they also suppressed the collection of religion data so that between 1949 and 1978 little information on Christian activity in China is available. In fact, immediately following the Culture Revolution, the number of officially registered Christians was zero. Miraculously, four million Christians disappeared from the state record books overnight.

The Mao period from 1956 to 1978 can be accurately labeled the *persecution stage*. While official records are scarce and untrustworthy, the number of Christians declined if we consider estimates before and after this very repressive era. By 1983, the official data presented by the Chinese Three-self Church indicates that there were

approximately six million Christians in China (evenly split between Protestant and Catholics). This estimate puts the percentage of Christians at 0.59%. In contrast, some non-official agencies, especially some based in the West, exaggerate the number with estimates between 25 million and 50 million Christians (Lambert, 2003). Taking the large number of underground churches in China into account, the number of Christians was probably much higher than 6 million but far less than 25 million. Nonetheless, we will use the official number of Christians as the most conservative estimate in 1983. This makes the average growth rate from 1950 to 1982 based on the data available is -1%.

This trend changes significantly after the initiation of Economic Reform in 1978 (Naughton, 2007). With the relief of religious regulation and social transition, the percentage of Christians in China climbed dramatically from less than 1% in 1983 to approximately 2% in 2000 to more than 4% in 2007. The average net growth rate from 1982 to 2000 was 7% and continues to increase to 11% after 2000 based on official data. This constitutes the beginning of major Christian growth. Before investigating multiple potential causes for this change, we must spend a little time justifying these controversial and difficult estimates.

By analyzing the figures provided by different resources published between 1995 and 2002 and including data reported by local TSPM/CCC, Lambert (2003) concluded that there were about 17,856,600 Protestant Christians in China. With the addition of 10 to 12 million Catholics estimated by Madisen (2003), the total Christian in China around 2000 was most likely near 28 million. Though the data Madisen used were based on research conducted in 1992, the total Catholics in 2000 may be much higher than

10,000,000. Still, these numbers indicate that the percentage of Christians in China was at least 2.2% by 2000.

Luckily, there are a number of survey estimates of Christians in the early 21st Century. I have compiled estimates from seven different surveys (see Table 1). At the low end, the China Christian Household Survey conducted by the China Social Science Academy estimates that Christians made up only 2.1% of the whole population by 2008. This number is confirmed by the 2009 wave of China General Social Survey. These results indicate no growth in the first decade of the 21st Century.

Yet a collection of other surveys belie this finding. At the high end, Jianrong Yu's national survey of 2007-2008 estimates that Chinese Christians make up approximately 5.3% of the population; his focus on underground churches and unregistered Christians explains why his calculations are so high (Yu, 2008,2010). It is confirmed by Fenggang Yang's 2010 estimate using data from Pew Research Center; he also concluded that Chinese Christians were around 5% of the population.

Three surveys (The Chinese Spirit Life Survey, the Contemporary Spiritual Life Survey, and the World Values Survey) all estimate the proportion of Christians to be between 3% or 4%. Yet these surveys may still report the number of Christians lower than it actually is because Chinese citizens, especially Communist Party members, often avoid reporting their true beliefs due to the sensitivity of Christianity in China. By adjustment, Stark et al. (2011) estimate the overall Christians in China to be about 59 million.

Table 1

Number of Christian in China—Survey and Estimation

Total Number	Percentage	Year	Source	Organizer
28,550,000	2.1%	2008-2009	Blue Book of Religion,2010, P190-P212	State Administration for Religious Affairs ^a
	2.24%	2009	China General Social Survey 2010 ^b	Hong Kong University, Renmin University of China
35,300,000	3.1%	2007	Chinese Spirit Life Survey	Baylor University
40,000,000	3.06%	2005	Contemporary Chinese Spiritual Life Survey	East China Normal University
46,266,500	3.5%	2007	2005-2009,World Value Survey	
58,900,000	4.4%	2007	Estimation and Adjustment	Stark
67,000,000	5%	2010	Estimation and Adjustment	Fenggang Yang ^e
70,000,000	5.3%	2007-2008	Chinese Underground Church Survey	Jianrong Yu,2010 ^f

Note. ^a This number is exact the same with the official statement in the government website. <http://www.sara.gov.cn/zwgk/17839.htm>, access on 2014-08-28. Based on the survey, there are 23,050,000 Protestants in China. When 5500000 Catholics are added, the overall Christians in China is 28,550,000, taking 2.1% of the whole population.

^b This survey was conducted in 31 provinces: Firstly 321 county units were sampled from all the counties in China. Secondly 8 to 10 villages/communities were chosen as the secondary sample units. Thirdly 20 households were chosen from these villages or communities. In all, this survey covered 321 county units, 2718 villages/ community and 54360 household. This survey finally got 63680 samples and has a 100% response rate using face to face interview. However, for the detailed religious information, they only concentrated on Protestants. Catholics and orthodox were excluded.

^c This survey was conducted by the largest local consultant company in China Horizon.

^e <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/74529.html>, access in 2014-08-27.

^f http://phtv.ifeng.com/program/shnjd/detail_2010_07/16/1783447_0.shtml, access in 2014-08-27. Yu is a famous Chinese scholar researching into underground church in China. His estimation on Christianity in China was based on a national survey across China, which takes into huge number of un-registered church members into consideration.

Considering the large number of underground churches in China and the concern of interviewees about reporting their religious identities, we agree that the official Chinese estimates are far too low. Consequently, we think that Stark et al.'s estimate is most likely the best and fits qualitative and anecdotal studies of Christian activity in

contemporary China. In such a complex and controversial religious context, one fact noticed and agreed by all observers is that Christianity has been and is rising remarkably in China (Bays, 2003; Yang, 2005).

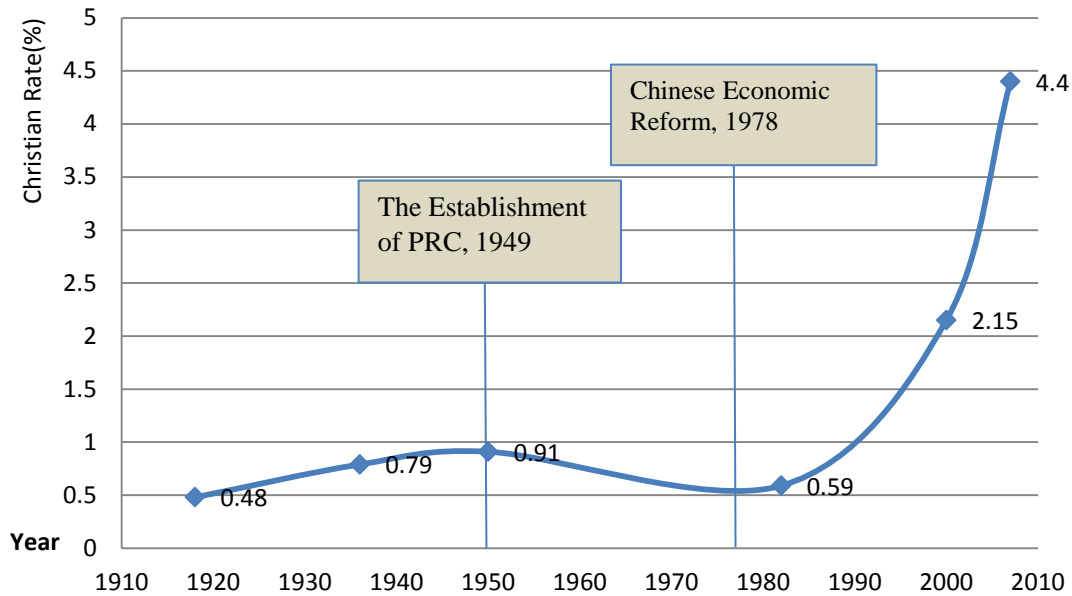


Figure 1. Longitudinal Percentage of Christians in China

Putting together all of these estimates from 1918, 1936, 1949, 1980, 1999, and 2007, a clearer picture of Christian growth and decline emerges (see Figure 1). Early 20th Century missionary work attracted a small but growing number of converts; the increase was small but steady, up until the 1949 Revolution. Communist repression of all religious activity reversed these early gains so that by 1980 the proportion of Chinese Christians resembled that of 1919. The softening of religious restrictions along with economic and social changes led to a Christian boom. From 1980 to 2007 our best estimates indicate that the proportion of Christians grew from less than 1% of the population to over 4%. This suggests that there are around 50 million more Chinese Christians today than there were 40 years ago.

CHAPTER FOUR

Chinese Christianity by Province

To better understand the current expansion of Christianity in China, we need to know where Christianity is spreading and to whom. The larger trends appear explicable with supply-side factors. Put simply, the lifting of state religious regulation opened China up to Christianity. Yet this does not answer the more complex question of why Chinese citizens are attracted to Christianity and in what contexts Christianity grows.

Little data on the percentage of Christians at provincial level is available. Luckily, data provided by Stauffer et.al (1922), then amassed by Stark and Wang (2014), estimate the percentage of Christians (Protestants and Catholics) in most of the provinces in 1918. Also, the *Atlas societatis verbi divini: Statist.-geograph* published in 1953 provides provincial data and estimates of Chinese Catholics in China in 1947 (St. Gabriel, 1952). With provincial data of Protestants in 1949 gathered by Fuk-tsang Ying, we can calculate the approximate number of Christians within each region around 1949 (Hsüeh et al., 1993; Ying, 2009). Based on the data provided by Lambert, official estimates of Christians were compiled for each province in 1999.

For the provincial percentage of Christians in 2004, Fuk-tsang Ying based estimates on the data from the Amity Foundation. The China General Social Survey and State Statistical Yearbook 2009 also report the provincial percentage of Christians. Even though China General Social Survey covered all the provinces in China, it can't always capture the exact number of Christians in each province as they are highly

disproportionally concentrated in certain areas and villagers(Madsen, 2003). Therefore, I also searched every official website of Province Ethnic and Religion Bureau for relevant data of Christians in each province to confirm with the survey. Even so, provincial data on Guangdong, Gansu, Ningxia and Qinghai is still not available. However, piecing together these disparate sources, we have a sense of various levels of and changes in Christianity in each province (see Table 2).

Before 1949, Christians were mainly concentrated in areas where missionary activity was most vibrant (Stauffer et al., 1922). In 1918, the top six provinces with most Christians were Fujian (0.87%), Jiangsu (0.77%), Shanxi (0.72%), Shaanxi (0.67%), Shandong (0.66%) and Guangdong (0.51%), four of which were in east coastal region. Similarly, in 1949, the top six provinces with highest Christians were Shandong (1.89%), Zhejiang (1.41%), Fujian (1.62%), Shanxi (1.29%), Jiangsu (1.16%) and Shaanxi (0.96%). Of these four provinces lie in the east coastal region, where the missionary works started earlier and preachers were more active (Stauffer et al., 1922). The higher Christian proportion in Shanxi and Shaanxi Provinces stood out more because of their lower population instead of their large number of Christians (Compared with Sichuan and Zhejiang, Christians were much fewer in these two provinces).

While after 1978, Christians increase disproportionally across provinces and regions even though the rate of Christians in each province has been keeping going up. Based on data in 1999, the top six provinces with highest Christian rate were Henan (5.48%), Anhui (4.85%), Zhejiang (2.92%), Northeast region (1.93%), Fujian (1.91%) and Jiangsu (1.39%). Even though east coastal regions were still high in Christian percentage such as Zhejiang, Fujian and Jiangsu, Christian percentage in some provinces

such as Guangdong (0.91%) and Shandong (0.28%) remained low and even lower than that in 1949. Christian rate were climbing up in middle and west part of China, such as Henan, Anhui and Yunnan Province. Three Provinces in Northeast China also have a notable growth of Christian population. Such conclusion is once again confirmed by data in 2004. In 2004 the top six provinces of Christian rate in China were Henan (5.4%), Anhui (5.01%), Zhejiang (3.92%), Yunnan (2.75%), Fujian (3.4%) and Jiangsu (2.11%).

By tracing these trends I find a clear pattern to the data (see Figure 2). Specifically, while all regions have experienced a remarkable growth of Christian proportion, the Middle-North region (Anhui, Henan and Hebei Province) became the most Christian region in China with a regional rate of 5.59% despite their relatively low Christian rate before 1949. The percentage of Christian rate in this area is seven time higher than that in 1918. There is also a significant growth of Christianity in Northeast China that the rate of Christians in 2009 is 4.6 times higher than that in 1918. The Christian percentage in Northwest China also increases significantly. Surprisingly, Christian proportion increases relatively slowly even though they have a very noticeable Christian population in east coastal provinces. Middle-south and southwest regions as well have got a lower Christian growth rate. Increase of Christian rate in East China is trivial compared with the other region even though it had the highest Christian proportion in history.

Table 2

Percentage of Christianity in Province, 1918 to 2009

Province	1918	1949	1999	2004	2009	Marketing index-05	Emigration	Ancestor worship ^a	Culture Isolation
Fujian	0.87	1.62	1.91	3.4	3.50	8.33	0	31.31	90%
Jiangsu	0.77	1.16	1.39	2.11	2.64	8.63	0	16.67	30%
Shanxi	0.72	1.29	0.63	0.61	2.17	5.13	0	15.61	80%
Shaanxi	0.67	0.96	0.97	1.27	1.57	4.46	0	7.58	36%
Shandong	0.66	1.89	0.91	1.30	1.21	7.52	0	25.28	45%
Guangdong	0.51	0.78	0.28	0.3	.	10.06	0	43.71	72.8%
Guizhou	0.49	0.36	0.98	1.13	0.99	9.36	1	31.18	92.5%
Zhejiang	0.46	1.41	2.92	3.92	2.62	9.77	0	23.02	70.4%
Jiangxi	0.39	0.76	0.71	0.97	2.31	5.76	1	24.05	70%
Sichuan	0.29	0.36	0.47	0.63	0.68	6.38	1	10.6	90%
Hebei	0.23	0.89	0.45	0.59	3.05	6.05	1	5.52	48.1%
Hunan	0.18	0.28	0.31	0.47	0.77	6.11	1	20.19	70.2%
Gansu	0.16	0.29	0.27	1.02	.	3.95	0	3.51	40.8%
Henan	0.16	0.7	5.38	5.4	9.33	5.64	1	7.94	44.3%
Guangxi	0.1	0.15	0.19	0.25	0.26	5.42	0	40.48	70.8%
Anhui	0.09	0.62	4.85	5.01	5.30	5.99	1	4.64	60.7%
Northeast ^b	0.38	0.43	1.13	1.44	2.15	5.97	0	7.73	60%
Yunnan	0.49	0.87	1.93	2.75	.	481	1	32.22	84%
Inner Mongolia	. ^c	0.77	0.64	0.72	2.0	5.12	0	2.36	20.9%
beijing	.	0.19	0.16	0.28	0.78	8.19	.	.	62%
Tianjin	.	0.17	0.16	0.20	1.51	7.86	.	.	7%
Hainan	.	.	0.49	0.50	0.48	5.41	0	.	25%
Chongqing	.	.	0.65	0.97	1.05	7.20	1	26.63	97.6%
Hubei	0.49	.	0.25	0.83	0.58	6.11	1	6.5	55.5%
Xinjiang	.	0.015	0.23	0.68	1.00	4.76	0	.	.
Ningxia	.	.	0.18	1.17	.	4.56	0	.	61.4%
Qinghai	.	.	0.59	0.76	.	3.10	0	.	69.9%
Shanghai	.	.	0.95	1.12	1.95	9.81	.	.	0
Tibet	1.55	.	.	.

Note. ^a The percentage of believing in ancestor came from the data of China Spiritual Life Survey conducted by Horizon Company in 2007. Based on the question “Do you believe in the existence of ancestor spirit?”, the percentage of respondents answering yes was calculated by province, which was used as a variable measuring the strength of ancestor worship tradition. The higher the percentage of this variable, the more solid traditional culture embedded in this province or region.

^b Northeast region includes Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces. In 1921, it was called Manchuria. Because their similarity in history, natural and social demographical factors, I merge them together in the table.

^c . no data available

What is it about the Middle-North region of China which makes it so conducive for Christian growth? To investigate this further we look at the effects of differences between regions in terms of a) their history of missionizing (the focus of the supply-side perspective), b) effects of modernization (the focus of demand-side theories), and c) specific cultural and population aspects of each province.

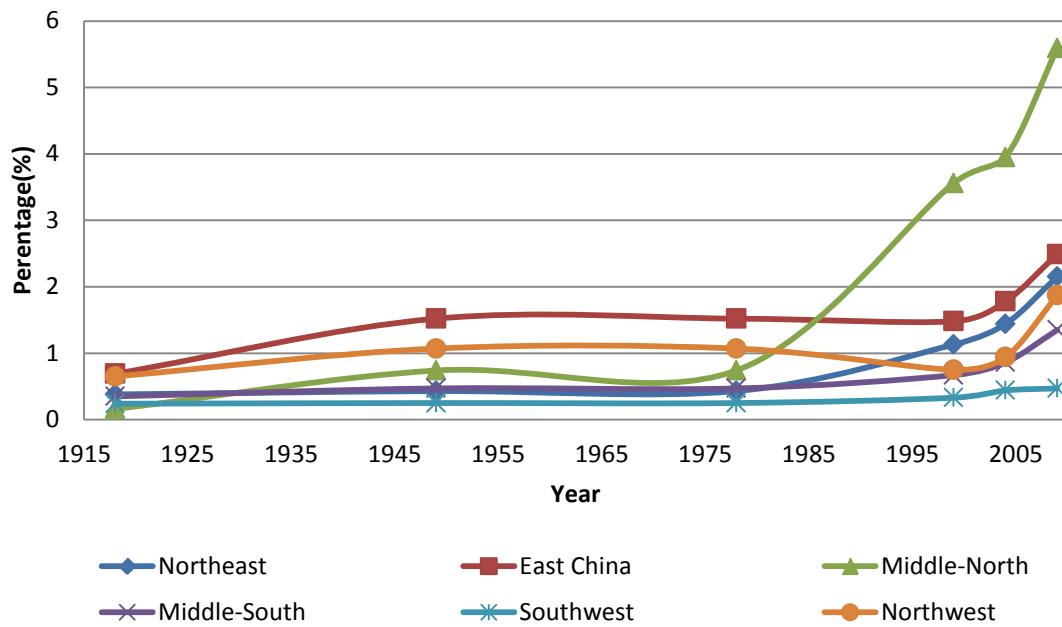


Figure 2. Provincial Christian Rate Sorted By Region

CHAPTER FIVE

Multiple Modernities: The Unintended Consequences of Chinese Modernization

At the most basic level, we should expect missionizing activities and rates of economic development to have some effect on the spread of Christianity. There is a significant correlation (.52; n=22) between the percent of Christians in a province in 1949 and the percent in 2004. This is one indication that initial missionizing efforts took hold and were passed down at the individual and family even during the Cultural Revolution. Madsen (2003) argues that Catholics merged with Chinese folk religions and became a strong communal identity during Mao period in North China. Christianity was localized and became a strong part of a preexisting pluralistic, local religions in Fujian Province in the late imperial period (Menegon, 2009).

The effect of modernization on Christian growth is unclear. The correlation between levels of economic development and Christianity within each province is non-significant. Wang and Fan (2007), created the marketing index I used to measure the economic development within each province; the index is based on five components: 1. the relationship between government and market; 2. the development of non-governmental economy; 3. the development of product market; 4. the development of factor market; 5. the institution of market agents and legal system. This measurement has adequately taken the uneven economic growth into consideration due to the different resource endowment, geographical location and political supports (Cai et al., 2002; Chen and Fleisher, 1996; Démurger, 2001; Fleisher et al., 2010).

The fact that economic development is not linearly related with Christian growth or decline indicates that religious markets were influenced differently by modernization in different regions. In some cases, modernization combined with religious regulation to suppress both the demand and supply of new religion. Perhaps, as Norris and Inglehart (2011) argue, economic development reduced the existential insecurity of some Chinese citizens, especially following the violent period of revolution. Throughout China, modernization and globalization brought the development of capital markets and economic growth, a modern secular education system, and a substantial welfare system. In addition, the regulation of religion along with the establishment of religious alternatives in the form of Marxist ideology undermined Christian efforts to missionize, similar to the effects of Soviet communism (see Froese, 2008). Consequently, modern China should have weakened the demand for religion (Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Lee and Dawes, 2005; Peng, 2004). Still, Christianity grew in some regions, such as Wenzhou “China’s Jerusalem,” even as economic development and religious regulation took effect (Cao, 2007, 2008).

In sum, the effects of modernization on religion in China have no singular religious outcome. While religious regulation certainly explains declines in religiosity during the Maoist period, other factors combine to produce more vibrant Christian markets within particular regions. With limited data to explore potential factors, I look to three basic provincial differences to determine their potential relationship to Christian growth.

First, the strength of traditional folk religions and ancestor worship should indicate levels of “religious capital” or familiarity with religious traditions in the specific

context of China (Li, 2000; Shahar and Weller, 1996; Yang, 1961). Especially, areas in which ancestor worship is popular should be less accommodating to Christian ideas, which appear very foreign to the local religious culture (Gernet, 1985). However, from a multiple modernities perspective, the relationship between ancestor worship and modernization should be reconsidered. For instance, some empirical evidence indicates that traditional religions and ancestor worship have revived significantly in certain regions after the modernization (Harry Lai and Lai, 2005; Hillman, 2004; Yang and Hu, 2012). Therefore under the expectation that Christianity is more possible to thrive in the culture spaces where traditional religions have been upended by modernization, we should also be aware of the interaction between traditional religions and modernization.

To measure the persistence of ancestor worship, I clustered the worship behavior from the data of Chinese Spiritual Life. By dichotomizing the answers “Do you believe in ancestral spirits” (1=Yes; 0=No) and clustering them at provincial level, we hence got the percentage of people believing in ancestral spirits in province. Modernization not only affected the economic development and ancestral influence of each region but also dramatically influenced the inter-provincial mobility of labors throughout China (Fan, 2005; Kanbur and Zhang, 1999). Grace Davie (2007: 213) argues that the “forms of religious life that will emerge and take root in the new century [throughout China] are still uncertain, but one thing is sure; they will be closely related to the movement of people.” She intimates that religious and cultural systems travel with people and so that the spread or decline of Christianity might correspond with population shifts. To explore this possibility, we look at each province’s level of labor emigration, which mainly accounts for the loss and gain of working-age males. Perhaps higher levels of labor

emigration will erode the traditional religious identities at the local area and at the same time create opportunities to adopt new identity (Shubin, 2012).

Using data from the China Labor Yearbook 2000 and 2005, I dichotomize provinces with large labor emigration from those without any. Provinces with substantial emigration include Anhui, Sichuan, Hunan, Hubei, Henan, Guizhou, Jiangxi and Yunan (China Labor Yearbook 2005)¹. Among those emigrants, male take absolutely the larger proportion even though the number of female emigrants continues to grow (Li, 2011; Zheng, 2013). I hypothesize that labor emigration due to modernization has altered the gender and kinship make-up of a province changing the networks over which conversion and diffusion of religious ideas occur.

Another factor, which is measureable, is the geographic isolation of each region. The process of Christian conversion should be easier simply based on the access others have to region. The provinces which are more mountainous are simply less accessible, with far less transit in and out. New religions, like Christianity, should rise more easily where most people are exposed regularly to new religious ideas (Stark and Iannaccone, 1997). Put simply, provinces in mountainous regions will be more difficult to reach by Christian missionaries, information, media, and religious networks. Moreover, geographic isolation should increase ethno-linguistic fragmentation, namely the division of ethnicities, languages, and local religions (Alesina et al., 2003; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005).

Because modernization may have various effects on the spread of Christianity for these different reasons, I perform a regression analysis. In particular, I am interested in

¹ Also referenced from People's Tribune, 2013, Vol 11, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmlt/html/2013-04/11/content_1234514.htm, access on 01/31/2015

how 1) the history of missionizing, 2) levels of modernization, 3) geographic isolation, 4) levels of labor emigration, and 5) the persistence of ancestral worship predict the percent of Christians in each region. In Column 1 (see Table 3), missionary history and labor emigration are significant predictors for Christianity percentage in 2009. When other variables controlled, the Christianity growth in 2009 is highly correlated with the missionary history in 1949. Also provinces with huge labor emigration experience the higher level of Christian growth controlling for the missionary history. The Christian percentage in provinces with labor emigration is 16.82% higher controlling for modernization, ancestor worship, missionizing, and geographic isolation.

Table 3

Regression of Christian Rate in 2009

Variables	(1)b	(2)b
Christianity1949	1.53***	1.30***
Marketization index(A)	1.82	1.22
Labor emigration(B)	16.82**	-25.43
Ancestor worship(C)	0.04	-0.89**
Culture Isolation	0.02	0.09
A×B		3.74*
B×C		1.33**
_cons	-4.97593	-16.58
R-sq	0.477	0.79
N	19	19

Note. ***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.1

However, as I have argued, economic development, labor emigration and the ancestor worship are intertwined together through the modernization process in China, controlling their interaction terms with each other would better predict the Christianity rate in China. According to Column 2 in Table 3, the interaction between economic development and ancestor worship, as well as the interaction of labor emigration and

ancestor worship are significant. The interaction of economic development and labor emigration is not significant.

Overall, the missionary history is still a highly significant predictor for the Christianity rise. Controlling the economic development, labor emigration, ancestor worship and culture isolation, provinces with 1% higher of Christianity rate in 1949 would predict 1.3% higher in Christianity rate in 2009.

Second, both interactions of labor emigration and economic development, labor emigration and ancestor worship are significant predictors of Christianity rate. In the places without labor emigration, the Christianity growth is related positively with missionary history and negatively correlated with ancestor worship $[(Y | X_{\text{labor emigration}}=0) = 1.3X_{\text{Christianity rate in 1949}} + 0.89X_{\text{ancestor worship}}]$. That is, in the provinces without labor emigration, 1% higher in ancestor worship will decrease 0.89% Christianity rate when the missionary history is controlled. However, with labor emigration, the situation becomes complex. With labor emigration, Christianity growth rate is depended not only on the missionary history, but also on the ancestor worship and economic growth $[(Y | X_{\text{labor emigration}}=1) = 1.3X_{\text{Christianity rate in 1949}} - 0.41X_{\text{ancestor worship}} + 3.74X_{\text{marketilization index}}]$. Controlling for missionary history, Christianity growth in the provinces with labor emigration is negatively correlated with ancestor worship and at the same time positively correlative with economic development. Specifically, Christianity rate will decline 0.41% if the ancestor worship rate is 1% higher when the economic growth and Christianity rate in 1949 are constant. At the same time one unit increase in the marketing index will increase 3.74% of Christianity rate while the Christianity rate in 1949 and the ancestor worship hold.

These preliminary results demonstrate the importance of missionary history, economic development, labor emigration and ancestor worship to the spread of Christianity in China. Economic growth, labor emigration and persistence of ancestor worship affect one another to determine the religious market structure and culture of each region. More details are needed to understand how conversion happens at the local level. Therefore, I analyze two datasets from China's most Christian provinces—Anhui and Henan—to indicate how the lack of ancestor worship and the lack of working-age men has generated a rise of Christianity through a network of women.

CHAPTER SIX

Local Processes: Anhui and Henan Provinces

Who are the Christians in the provinces with the highest Christian growth? How has the conversion happened in these areas? The following arguments were based on datasets from the most Christian provinces in China - Anhui and Henan. Both Anhui and Henan are large agriculture provinces located in the center of mainland China. Compared with most of the other provinces in China, Anhui and Henan are distinct for their enormous plains. They are also the most populated regions in China. The total population of Henan in 2008 is 93.6 million, ranking the second largest province in China; the total population in Anhui in 2008 is 61.18 million, ranking the 8th largest populated province in China. However, both provinces are relatively rural (urbanization rates in Henan and Anhui are respectively 34.34% and 38.7%, much lower than the east coastal provinces). Uneven economic development across regions in China stimulates large labor emigration in these two provinces due to low urbanization and huge population. Since 1980s huge number of laborers have emigrated out to the east coastal provinces and Beijing, most of whom are young males (Cai et al., 2002; Fan, 2005). Moreover, both ancestral worship in both provinces are weaker compared with the other provinces based on China Spiritual Life Survey (Percentages of worshipping ancestor in Henan and Anhui are only 7.9% and 4.64% each). Such social-geographic characters fit into our previous models for regional growth of Christianity.

The first dataset comes from a field survey conducted in Funan County of Anhui Provinces by Fengtian Zheng and Rongping Ruan in 2012 (Ruan and Wang, 2015)¹. The sample comes from seven townships which were selected at random.. Eight to twenty households were then randomly chosen, depending on the size of the village. The interviews were conducted on the first week of Spring Festival, when all the emigrants came back to celebrate with their families. Interviews were conducted by graduate students from Renmin University of China, each of whom had considerable prior experience in interviewing rural residents. Finally, interviews were completed with 454 rural Chinese adults.

Another data is a random survey conducted in Luoyang County in Henan Province in the summer of 2008, also led by Fengtian Zheng and Rongping Ruan (Zheng and Ruan, 2010). Henan Province is also well-known of large number of Christians. This survey was conducted by well-trained graduate student from Renmin University of China, which lasted for twenty days. Using stratified random sampling method, surveyors randomly chose six towns from sixteen towns in Luoyang County. Then based on the list of towns, six to eight sampling villages were chosen from each town. Finally according in each village, two to five Christians were chosen as our interviewees according to the name list of registered Christians provided by local religious bureau. Then for each Christian chosen, three other rural households were chosen randomly in the same village. The final ratio of Christian and non-Christian villagers interviewed was 1:3. Finally they got forty sampling villages and 340 samples.

¹ The survey was funded by the National Major Social Science Projects of China (code No. 08&ZD032) and the National Nature Science of China (code No. 71103132)

Both datasets are ideal resources to begin an investigation into the conversion process of Christians in China. Based on the data of Ying, the number of Christians in Henan and Anhui Province ranks the highest among all the provinces in China in 2004 (Ying, 2009 see Chart1 for detail). According to the field work of Jianrong Yu, Funan, Songxian and Kaifeng Counties are right in “Christian Belt” of China (Yu, 2008). Both two datasets provide us with the most systematic information about respondents’ and their families’ religiosity, conversion process, congregation, church, social network, health, subject well-being, welfare system, public goods, political attitudes, voting, birth, and emigration experiences.

The dependent variables in the following binary regressions are five measurements of Christian believing and belonging. Of 452 respondents in Anhui, 138 indicated that they were Christian, making up 30.5% of the sample. In Henan, 238 (38.9%) respondents identified as Christian after weight adjusted.

Four questions ask about the religious behaviors; “Have you ever sing Christian hymns?”, “Have you ever read bible?”, “Have you ever pray to God/Jesus on weekdays?”, and “Have you ever pray to God in the church on weekends?”. People who answered “yes” in these questions are assigned as 1, 0 otherwise. Based on the data, a large number of local people live in a Christian life. Twenty eight percent of respondents reported that they have sung Christian hymns over the past years, while 39% reported so in Henan. Moreover, 23% people reported that they have read Bible or other Christian media over the past year in Anhui while 34% people did the same thing in Henan survey. As high as 31% respondents reported that they prayed to God on weekdays in Anhui while in Henan

survey the rate is 37%. Also 24% people reported that they went to church on weekends in Anhui meanwhile 39% Henan interviewees had also attend church over the past year.

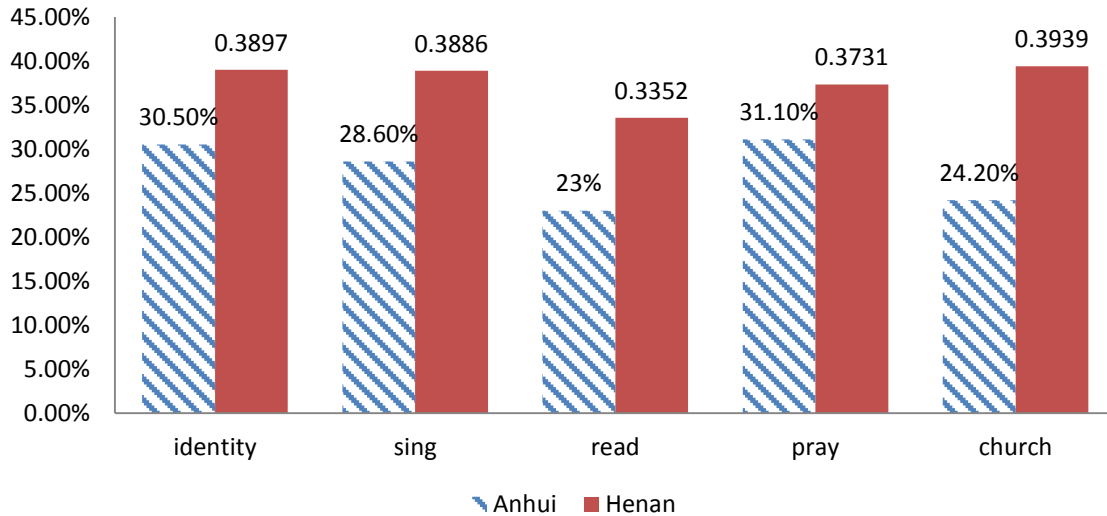


Figure 3. Christianity Rate in Anhui and Henan Province

The ancestor worship behavior is used as a key explanatory variable in the regression. People who answered “Yes” in the question “Over the past year, have you ever worshipped your ancestor” are assigned 1, and 0 otherwise. Then six social-demographic variables namely gender, age, income, education, political identity and marital status are controlled. In both datasets, female are assigned as 1 and male 0. In Anhui data, the average age of the sample is 51.3 and 50.3 in Henan data. Education is a five-category variables (1=never go to school, 2=primary school, 3=middle school, 4=high school//junior technology school. 5=senior technology school/college/graduate school or above). Income is the self-rated percentile of the family income in the respondents’ community (1=20% and below, 2=20%-40%, 3=41%-60%, 4=61%-80%, 5= 81%-100%). Political identity is another important controlled variable in my models

for communist party members are not allowed to have any religious beliefs. Then *communist party members are assigned 1 and 0 otherwise.*

Table 4

Logistic Regression on Christian Beliefs and Behaviors (Anhui Data)

Variables	<i>Christian</i>	<i>Singing</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Church</i>
female	1.491***	1.232***	1.109***	1.248***	0.883***
worship	-2.438***	-2.408***	-2.3916***	-2.351***	-1.852***
age2	-0.002	-0.002	-0.006	-0.008	0.004
education1	-0.230	-0.246	-0.077	-0.355*	-0.121
rincome	-0.083	-0.024	-0.072	-0.089	-0.041
poli	-0.453	-0.414	-0.214	-0.093	-0.464
married	-0.047	0.036	-0.024	0.122	0.017
_cons	0.071	-0.188	-0.344	0.706	-0.887
N	353	344	345	349	346
Pseudo R ²	0.2126	0.1871	0.1593	0.1971	0.1184

Note. ***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05

In both Anhui and Henan provinces, women who do not practice ancestor worship are the most likely convert to Christianity. In Henan, we also find that being single and not a member of the Communist Party are also significant predictors of Christian practices. These results provide an initial picture of how Chinese Christian growth is occurring.

Table 5

Logistic Regression on Christian Belief and Behaviors (Henan Data)

Variables	Christian	Singing	reading	prayer	church
female	0.901***	0.715**	0.984***	0.544*	0.741***
worship	-2.007***	-2.039***	-1.743***	-1.885***	-1.989***
age2	0.039***	0.022	0.022	0.0208	0.039***
education1	-0.024	-0.022	0.226	0.010	-0.022***
rincome	0.100	0.251	0.145	0.092	0.131
poli	-1.66**	-1.980***	-1.657	-1.644**	-1.739*
married	-1.180	-1.078**	-0.480	-0.862	-1.492**
_cons	-0.269	0.185	-1.312	0.361	0.029
N	339	338	339	338	336

Note. ***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05

First, Christianity appears to growth where traditional culture such as ancestor worship is in decline. This fits with expectations concerning the appeal of new religious movements – they require a population which is not strongly tied to traditional religious practices (Bender, 2012; Cadge and Davidman, 2006; Stark and Finke, 2000). As Snow and Machalek (1984: 170) argue, “concerns not only a change in values, beliefs and identities, but more fundamentally and significantly it entails the displacement of one universe of discourse by another or the ascendance of a formerly peripheral universe of discourse to the status of a primary authority.” Therefore, the stability of traditional culture would constrain individuals from exploring new religions. In turn, the instability of traditional culture provides opportunity for Christian missionizing and exploration. .

Interestingly, part of this process appears to be enhanced by the emigration of working-age males. The loss of men in traditional kinship communities opens the door for women to serve a more active role in leadership and decision-making. And I find that many of these women are attracted to Christianity. Still, I ponder the allure of Christian identity within a larger culture which stigmatizes religious membership and promotes a Communist ethic. Women, at least in Henan, also tend to eschew Communist

Party membership and perhaps have found a new source of identity, purpose, and empowerment in Christianity. In many ways, this mimics the early rise of Christianity in Western Europe, which took root among women looking for ways to establish their autonomy in a culture which systematically diminished their power (Stark, 1996).

Moreover, the large emigration of labor and the declining ancestor worship are weakening the functions of traditional kinship structure, hence creating an opportunity for Christianity rise, an alternative organized religions with the same functions. Traditional religions and lineage in China have always been the providers of local public goods (schools, roads, and water) (Tsai, 2002, 2007a, 2007b). Also traditional religions provide moral communities and social integration (Geyer and Baumeister, 2005). Along with the rapid social transformation and male labor emigration, traditional religions are not able to provide such public or social goods anymore (Yan, 2003). Christianity grows within this special context to replace the functionary role of traditional religions. As more data and research come out of China, it will be interesting to note the role of women and their friendship networks in spreading Christianity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Christianity is growing in China, which theoretically is an unfertile ground for new religious movements. On one hand, strict national regulation undermines the religious supply and on the other hand massive cultural changes are resulted from rapid modernization. Ironically, modernization and religious regulation have opened up cultural space for Christianity growth in particular regions China. With economic and social reform, the east coastal provinces became modernized quickly based on their natural and cultural resources. Consequently large number of labors, mostly males, have emigrated from the less developed inland areas to the east. This processes diminished the practice of ancestor worship hence provided a cultural space for the growth of new religion.

With huge labor emigration trend and the collapse of traditional ancestor worship, women are finding themselves in the position to make new religious choices. In the context of China, Christianity provides female an alternative spiritual orientation which may be preferable to patriarchal spiritual traditions and Communist atheistic alternatives.

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